Queerkadeh, an Alternative Community-based Archives on Instagram:

an Autoethnographic Case Study Leveraging Queer/ed Archival Methodology

by

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Abstract

Through this work I examine the potential of queer/ed archival methodology, also known as Q/M, developed by Jamie A. Lee, in creating intersectional and dynamic archival spaces. I attempt this inquiry by examining the decisions that led to developing and maintaining a digital archival space for storytelling on Instagram in Farsi, @queerkadeh, for queer people of Iranian and Afghan descent, as well as anyone who has access to Farsi and self identifies as queer. As a co-creator of @queerkadeh, I have closely examined the decisions that gave life to @queerkadeh, as well as the rationale behind them. I have analyzed these decisions and my processes of sense-making through the framework of the Q/M. Thinking through the seven areas of focus outlined in the Q/M framework, as well as engaging with critical archival theory, I shine a light on the process of creating a digital archival space on Instagram that is grounded in theory and examine the flexibility of the queer/ed archival methodology approach and its potential contribution to creating spaces that serve and represent diverse intersectional communities. In this thesis, I demonstrate the flexibility of the Q/M approach and the opportunities that Instagram provide for an intersectional community such as mine whose very existence is constantly questioned, ignored, and overlooked. It is my hope that by continuing this line of questioning, archival scholars and practitioners can continue imagining alternative archival spaces that are "attentive to bodies in motion, archival and otherwise, and nomadic subjectivities—those meandering ways of knowing and being."[1]

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[1] Jamie Lee, "A Queer/ed Archival Methodology: Archival Bodies as Nomadic Subjects." *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017): 5.

Lay Summary

Archives are established for safekeeping of our important cultural, social, and personal materials. Deciding what is important, and should be at an archives is usually determined by the entity that establishes that archives. Researchers who specifically look at the ways archives function, or should function, often belong to a discipline called archival studies. Some archival researchers have realized that the most powerful communities, culturally and financially, have used archives to keep what is important to them and exclude other materials that might be important to communities who are pushed to the margins by racism, colonialism, sexism, and ableism, among other things. My research is about a digital space on Instagram that wants to keep and share materials that are important to one of these communities. This community identifies as queer and either lives in or has strong ties to the areas of the Middle East where Farsi is spoken.

Preface

 "I" (Sadaf Ahmadbeigi) am the sole author of the prologue and all five chapters of this original and unpublished work. My contribution to all chapters includes conceptualization, research design, data collection, data analysis, and writing.

This thesis was approved by UBC Research Ethics Board certificate # H21-03420

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List of Abbreviations

IRI – Islamic Republic of Iran

Q/M – Queer/ed Archival Methodology

SFX – sound effects

SHEKAR – shadi q(k)ueer ruzaneh (daily dose of queer happiness)

Glossary

Queer – this study uses queer as an umbrella term for the members of the LGBTQAI+ community.

Queer Hami – a gathering of queer people in Farsi

Queerkadeh – the land of queer people in Farsi

QueerNavaa – the voices of queer people in Farsi

QueerParty – the gatherings of queer people

Acknowledgements

Dedication

To all queer bodies lost to bigotry,

You will never be forgotten.

Chapter 1: Introduction

It was my last semester at the University of Texas at Austin. Between teaching swim lessons to little kids, attending to my studies, and developing multimedia instructional materials, worksheets, videos, and audio for the Persian Language program, I worked sixty hours per week. Perhaps it was because of my exhaustion from all that work that my controlling, traumatized, and horrified brain could no longer hide my sexual orientation from me. In the middle of discussing *No One Knows About Persian Cats,*[2] with my Middle Eastern Cinema instructor, I said playfully, that if I were one of those kids in Tehran, I would want to start an underground all-girl metal band. "How come?" he asked. "Well," I said without a second thought, "I like girls!" "I didn't realize" he said. "I had never told anybody" I responded, gaining enough control over my body to stop myself from saying, "not even to myself."

I felt completely bewildered as my mind was trying to catch up with what I had just said. I felt lonely. I had never seen anyone who looked like me identify as a lesbian. I knew of course that lesbians existed but the people I remember seeing in Pride Parades looked so different than me. Being me was already hard enough: a brown, lonely Middle Eastern girl who spoke English with an accent that no one could place. Now I had to find a way to fit in as a lesbian too.

I attended that year's Pride Parade in Austin.

I felt uneasy marching on the streets of Austin. I thought about Tehran, the city that raised me. I never had the chance to march on the streets of Tehran and think about pride and queerness, and whether these two concepts could in any way be related. I suddenly felt very nervous about facing my city. What would Tehran think of me if it knew I was a lesbian? Would it reject me? That possibility almost broke my heart; nevertheless, I needed to find out. I absolutely needed to know how it would feel to walk on the streets of Tehran knowing I'm queer. I had to face one of the most important aspects of my identity as a

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[2] Bahman Ghobadi, dir., *No One Knows About Persian Cats*, (Tehran: Mij Film, 2009), DVD.

Tehrani girl. I needed to see whether the beautiful sycamore lined streets of Tehran, which gave me so much comfort and love as I was growing up, could still recognize and accept me. I also wanted to know about others who looked like me and were queer. Where would I find them? How do I contact them? Were they "out"? Were their families accepting? I couldn't find the answers to any of these questions for months. I couldn't just google or search Facebook or Instagram for people whose names and handles I did not know.

A year later, through sheer luck, I found an Iranian queer person on a dating app. Just like magic, out of nowhere, a profile I had never seen popped up. There they were, a twenty-year-old queer person from Tehran, wearing a rainbow-colored bowtie around their neck, and a confident and almost smug smirk on their face. When I asked if there were any support systems for them in Iran, they shared that they were establishing a digital underground queer support group to offer solidarity, acceptance, and love, as well as educational resources to their friends. I volunteered to help. I was never alone after that.

I did, however, still remember how lonely and disoriented I felt when I didn't know any other queer person with a similar background to mine. I wondered how I might have felt if there was a way for me to at least learn about the lived experience and life stories of my community: to know how they live, what they do for fun, and how they educate their parents in an environment in which the official and dominant narrative about queerness is at best about how our "sexual deviancy" can be "cured," and at worst, normalizes news about members of our community dying either at the hand of the government or of their own families. After months of research, I still couldn't find a resource, a repository, a library, or an archives of our lived stories. Would it be possible, I wondered, for me to collect stories of the diverse and dynamic lives of my community? It could help me, and my community remember that not only have we always existed, but we also live vibrant and diverse lives. I decided to do everything in my power to learn about the most dynamic way in which a diverse archives of our queer lived stories could be created in Farsi to alleviate the feelings of isolation and unbelonging within my community.

1.1   Positioning

In *Archive and Aspiration*[3], challenging the modernist description of archives, Arjun Appadurai criticizes the function of archives "in humanist imagination" as a "neutral" and "ethically benign" tool that offers to protect documents that have "accidentally" survived. Of course, we know now that archives and archivists are not neutral. Appadurai's description of how dominant cultures conceptualize archives gave me a possible insight into the minds of those who have been shocked by hearing that I was planning on helping my community build a queer archives in Farsi for any self-identified queer who can understand the language. They often immediately ask something resembling, "how come this didn't already exist, though?" I wonder how they would react if I told them that unfortunately, until now, no "graphic trace" of our existence accidentally survived, and as a result, there are no "neutral" and "ethically benign"[4] archives out there to protect our records.

In the same article, Appadurai offers an alternative definition of archives' function in society as "a product of the anticipation of collective memory." Based on his perspective, the aggregation of documents, which he believes are a form of intervention, into archives can be "a part of everyday life."[5] He further posits,

> The personal diary, the family photo album, the community museum, the libraries of individuals are all examples of popular archives and, of course, oral archives have been repositories of intentional remembering for most of human history… In the age of the electronic archive, with the capability of interactive users to more easily enter and edit the archive, and for the archive itself to be expanded by the nature and distribution of its users (the logic of the 'hit' so beloved of website promoters), the active, interventionist and open-ended collective building of archives is a growing reality. Through personal websites, digital archives for all sorts of collectivities (both paid and free), storage sites in cyberspace for large data sets, and the possibility of sending

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[3] Arjun Appadurai, "Archive and Aspiration." Information Is Alive: Art and Theory on Archiving and Retrieving Data, ed. Joke Brouwer and Arien Mulder, NAI Publishers, 2003.

[4] Appadurai, "Archive and Aspiration," 15.

[5] Appadurai, 16.

pictures, sounds and text to multiple users with high speed and large amounts of high quality information, the archive is gradually freed of the orbit of the state and its official networks.[6]

It is in this light that I position my work and this current inquiry. As the writer of this thesis, I understand my positionality as a person who, with the help of her partner and the rest of her queer community, has undertaken a "deliberate project" by identifying the gap in the representation of her community. In recognition that "all documentation is a form of intervention" my spouse, Mida, and I decided it was time for us to help document our existence by intervening and disrupting our silence and isolation.[7] I should also acknowledge my privileged position as an independent queer woman of colour living outside the boundaries of queerphobic laws and without fear of persecution. This, Mida and I owe to the generosity of the Musqueam people as we live, love, work, learn, and play on their traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory. While many members of my community are forced into anonymity fearing for their lives and the lives of their loved ones, this privilege has allowed me to work publicly.

1.2   Thesis Objectives

1.2.1   Introduction

To outline the objectives of this study, I offer a brief introduction to @queerkadeh, the online archives Mida and I founded, and to Jamie A. Lee's Queer/ed archival methodology[8] also known as the Q/M in the following sections of this chapter. After outlining the goals of this thesis and the questions that guide this inquiry, I offer an overview of my community's sociopolitical history to familiarize readers with our systemic erasure from history, brought on by European modernity, to better understand the

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[6] Appadurai, 16.

[7] Appadurai, "Archive and Aspiration."

[8] Jamie Ann Lee, "A Queer/Ed Archival Methodology: Theorizing Practice Through Radical Interrogations of The Archival Body" (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2015).

contemporary conditions of the everyday life of queer people who grow up in the multi-national state of Iran. This chapter then offers a literature review of critical archival scholarship that has shaped my conception of archives and empowered me to imagine a world in which archives have the power to disrupt normativity rather than being tools for imposing oppression. This chapter concludes with an outline of the remaining chapters.

Throughout this thesis, out of an abundance of caution for the safety of queer people living in hostile environments, I use they/them pronouns when referring to members of my community to limit the identifiable information shared here. I, however, use the preferred pronouns of those whom my community has lost recently due to bigotry when I refer to them. I use the pronouns "we" and "us," if not mentioned otherwise, to refer to Mida and I as the co-creators of @queerkadeh.

As is discussed in more detail in this chapter, the land we call Iran is the topic of heated arguments amongst scholars and lay people alike.[9] In this thesis, in order to be sensitive to and respectful of all who call Iran their home, regardless of how borders are drawn, all whose national identities are different than Iranian but are forced to identify as such, and anyone whose definition of nationality is different than the dominant discourse, I use terms such as states, neighboring states, land, and nation-states to be inclusive.

1.2.2   Queer/ed Archival Methodology (Q/M)

The queer/ed archival methodology, also known as the Q/M was developed by archival scholar Jamie Lee in 2015. This framework, which engages with critical studies, queer studies and critical archival studies, calls for a diversity of voices in creating and processing records. Q/M is situated within a postmodern and a post-human framework. Through a postmodern framework, Q/M supports "multiple

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[9] For further discussion about this issue, see Eppel, *A People without a State*, and Soleimani, *Can Non-Persians Speak?*

voices and multiple truths,"[10] and through a post-human framework, upholds "the multiplicities of human and nonhuman bodies" and the way in which bodies of records and knowledge, in addition to human and non-human bodies are connected "to the processes, politics, and productions of archives, archival collections, and archival records."[11]

Just as archival theories and practices shifted from a modern to a postmodern framework,[12] the Q/M framework "argues for and instantiates an archival shift into the posthuman, as bodies, stories, and practices that are simultaneously becoming and unbecoming within multiply-situated locations, identities, and timescapes."[13] In Lee's Q/M, and subsequently in this thesis which applies the Q/M to the specific case study of @queerkadeh, post-human refers to a conception of the body as both the producer and the product of "technologies of race, class, gender, and sexuality as they intersect and at times collide with social, cultural, economic, and political structures."[14] This approach, which supports "shifting positionalities"[15] of archival records as well as archival users, Lee argues, is uniquely appropriate in oral history interviews in which "there are many participants—human and non-human—in the assembled event from the interviewer, the interviewee, the camera, tripod, and other recording technologies along with the setting, environment, as well as the harm of the refrigerator in the next room."[16]

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[10] Lee, "A Queer/Ed Archival Methodology," 46.

[11] Lee, 46.

[12] Terry Cook, "What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift." *Archivaria* 43, (1997).

[13] Lee, 43.

[14] Lee, 62-63.

[15] Lee, 36.

[16] Lee, 37.

Understanding the multiplicities of bodies in archives is highlighted in the Q/M in the way it acknowledges the "complex, messy, and contradictory"[17] nature of narratives and calls on archivists to "resist the urge to settle, to neatly organize, and to contain the archival records to consider new ways to understand and represent the dynamic (un)becomings"[18] in the face of the "dizzying effect"[19] that archives produce. The Q/M is a framework that allows for "a level of unsettledness"[20] through which contradictory and complimentary stories can simultaneously exist.[21] As "a flexible methodology,"[22] the Q/M invites archival scholars and practitioners to think through seven "distinct areas of focus"[23] so that we can all "imagine a space and a practice open enough not to foreclose the possibilities of an ongoing queer world-making space."[24] Archives just like bodies, Lee argues, "tell *stories so far*."[25] Q/M is a guide for archivists to develop "practices that can represent ongoing change."[26]

The seven areas of focus highlighted in the Q/M are: participatory ethos, connectivity, storytelling, intervention, re-framing, re-imagining, flexibility and dynamism. Along with

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[17] Lee, 65.

[18] Jamie Lee, "A Queer/ed Archival Methodology: Archival Bodies as Nomadic Subjects." *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017).

[19] Lee, A Queer/ed Archival Methodology, 5.

[20] Lee, 6.

[21] Lee, 1-27.

[22] Lee, 5.

[23] Lee, 13.

[24] Jamie Lee, "A Queer/Ed Archival Methodology: Theorizing Practice Through Radical Interrogations of The Archival Body,"183.

[25] Jamie Lee, "A Queer/ed Archival Methodology: Archival Bodies as Nomadic Subjects." 6.

[26] Lee, 6.

theoretical discussions, Lee offers questions and practical examples through which each one of these areas can be examined and explored. Thinking through the Q/M and its seven areas of focus as a flexible framework can guide archivists towards establishing radically open archival practices in order to achieve social justice and avoid reproducing "neocolonizing categories or further subjugating conditions"[27] in communities that have historically been underrepresented, misrepresented, erased, and silenced by GLAM[28] institutions.

1.2.3   @queerkadeh

Looking at its forty thousand supporters[29] now, it's hard to believe that it was only over a year ago that Mida and I started this Instagram page in Farsi and called it @queerkadeh, a made-up name which means the land of queer people. Instagram is the only social media platform that is not officially banned in Iran, yet. When we first started using this still open and accessible platform, our goal was to empower and encourage the rest of our community to join us in any way that is possible for them, and to intentionally remember[30] that despite everything our community has gone through and/or is still forced to experience, we have a dynamic existence and the right to share it with each other. We believed that we should be given the chance to be seen and/or heard even if that meant creating fake accounts on Instagram, having a picture of a plant as a profile picture, or even using a device that changes our voice as we share our lived experiences with the rest of the community.

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[27] Lee, 6.

[28] Gallery, Library, Archives and Museums.

[29] [کوییرکده] (@queerkadeh.) 2022, Instagram. Accessed April 10, 2022. https://www.instagram.com/queerkadeh.

[30] Appadurai, "Archive and Aspiration."

The two constant and scheduled programs at @queerkadeh are QueerParty and QueerNavaa.[31] QueerParty is a visual gathering of a group of queer people who talk informally in Farsi about their lives and experiences, letting the conversation flow and take them to any subject and topic. Unlike most interviews, these "parties" are not merely a series of questions expecting answers, but an exchange of stories from lived experiences between the hosts and guests as we chat about big and small events in our lives. Every QueerParty has one or two guests and runs between an hour to a couple of hours. It is recorded and edited before being uploaded to Instagram. The reason these sessions are not recorded through Instagram Live is that we want to make sure to give the guests time to look at the recordings and have the option to change, edit, or delete any part of the conversation they don't feel comfortable with. We keep the recording files on our own private server to keep the original data private and the video file safe. It airs once every two weeks on Thursdays. Every other week, @queerkadeh airs what we call QueerNavaa. While QueerParty hosts individuals or partners who live outside of Iran and feel comfortable with being seen and sharing their identities, QueerNavaa is designed for people who don't feel comfortable being seen and identified.

Mida and I use Instagram 'Live' to connect directly with @queerkadeh users, tell our stories, and give them updates, and have recently started inviting guests who are experts in specific topics related to our community to deepen our understanding of those topics. Although our Instagram Live guests don't focus on telling us stories, they often share some anecdotes with us. Instagram Story, Posts, and Reels are also used widely when we have stories in formats of photography, for example two holding hands, or text, like a love letter with its identifiers redacted.

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[31] Navaa means sound or voice in Farsi.

We hoped this digital space would become "a deliberate site for the production of anticipated memories by intentional communities"[32] of people who self-identify as queer and have access to Farsi. Looking back at the way in which this space was developed and analyzing the decisions that brought it to life through the Q/M framework, I hope to offer insight on the ways this digital space allows us to, as Lee puts it, challenge "stable categories of collection, recollection, identity, and ideas of belonging as they have become embodied, normativized, and often invisibilized."[33] Lee "call(s) forward LGBTQI voices, but with an expansiveness for many distinct non-normative multiply-situated peoples and communities."[34] Analyzing this space through the Q/M framework, helps us assess its inclusivity. Lee predicts that "it is inside the queer and queer/ed archives, then, that the ever-changing archival bodies and bodies of knowledges can tell competing and contradictory stories of desires, erotics, fears, traumas, violences, and lived truths through ephemeral and material renderings of everyday living;"[35] is relevant to this space and for this community. Throughout this thesis, I reflect on @queerkadeh to ask if Lee's conceptualizations of queer/ed archives is relevant to this space and for this community.

1.2.4   Research Questions

In this thesis, through an autoethnographic case study of @queerkadeh, I highlight the process of conceptualizing, developing, and maintaining @queerkadeh. I use my field notes and memories in addition to the posts and stories to refresh my memories from the time of @queerkadeh's inception until the time of writing this thesis, to discuss the way @queerkadeh was developed and what challenges and opportunities we encountered through its development. In the last chapter, I offer an analysis of the way

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[32] Appadurai, "Archive and Aspiration," 17.

[33] Jamie Lee, "A Queer/ed Archival Methodology: Archival Bodies as Nomadic Subjects." 6.

[34] Lee, 6.

[35] Lee, 7.

the Q/M can be leveraged as an analysis framework to assess whether @queerkadeh has met the archival

needs of this distinct and intersectional community. As one of the first case studies assessing the

development of a digital archival space on a social media platform by analyzing it through an archival

framework, my hope is that this inquiry contributes to the critical archival scholarship discourse on

methodology related to representation and user participation in archives.

Questions that guide this research are as follows:

1. In what ways can creation of a digital archival space be grounded in theory?

2. Can queer/ed archival methodology be personalized based on specific values, needs and goals

of communities from diverse backgrounds? In what ways?

3. Are there insights from this specific archival space that can contribute to further developing the

queer/ed archival methodology and the archival discipline, as a whole, in representing intersectional

communities?

4. What can a study of an Instagram account as a digital archive tell us about aspects of the

archival profession and practice such as long-term preservation and the role of professionalism?

1.3   An Overview of Iran's Sociopolitical History

It is challenging, for a number of reasons, to write about Iran's history. For one, the political

nature of this land, which I believe to be a multinational state, is unclear and contested. With many

distinct nations, ethnicities, and cultures claiming this land as theirs, the loss of many territories to war,

imposed treaties, and the still unfamiliar and bewildering notion of nationality and bordered history

adopted by Iranian nationalists in the late nineteenth century, it is difficult to define what is meant by

"Iran" and "Iranian." To make matters more convoluted, there are disagreements about the very name of

this land. The land known as Iran is also referred to as Persia by the diasporic community, and the Islamic

Republic of Iran at the same time. In addition, some ethnicities/nations such as Kurds, and Turks might or

might not think of themselves as Iranians and might, instead, feel like they belong to Kurdistan and

Turkey, respectively. Add to this, the close cultural and scientific relationships between all the nations

who speak and write in Persian, called the Persianate world,[36] it is an impossible task to talk about one nation-state without discussing the interrelated web of connections in this region.

The history of Iran has been commonly divided into three main eras of ancient (3000 BCE to 661 CE), medieval (661 to1789 CE), and modern (1789 CE- present). This thesis is concerned with the postmodern and postcolonial history of Iran between the 1750s to present time. Three governing bodies ruled Iran in this era: the Qajar dynasty ruled Iran from before the 1750s until 1925; the Pahlavi dynasty, from 1925 to 1978, and the Islamic republic from 1978 to the present.[37] The Qajar dynasty was terminated by a coup d'état, and the Pahlavi dynasty ended in a revolution.

This study highlights this era because the notions of gender identity and sexual orientations and their depiction and representation changed drastically in the mid nineteenth century. It is my goal to depict the cultural shifts from accepting same-sex unions as everyday practices to the understanding of these practices as uncivilized and shameful as being due to the influences of European morality in the modern era, and from there to the present time in which same-sex unions and acts are regarded as an intrinsically Western phenomenon. To that end, the following sections depict Iran shortly before and after European modernity. Here, I offer a brief historical timeline from European modernity[38] to the current time by centering the experiences of queer peoples living on the land known as Iran. To do right by my people who continue to be forgotten and erased by the historians of the Middle East, I draw from the scholarly works of Mohamad Tavakoli-Taraghi, and of Afsaneh Najmabadi in this chapter because they are known as pioneers in scholarship on the role of gender in the formation of Iranian modernity.

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[36] Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India.

[37] Khosrow Mostofi, "Iran," Britannica, Encyclopedia Britannica, Last updated Apr 6, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/place/Iran.

[38] In what follows, Tavakoli-Taraghi claims that modernity in the Persianate world started in the seventeenth century, so the nineteenth century modernism is referenced throughout this study as European modernity.

Tavakoli-Taraghi is an expert in the postmodern and postcolonial history and historiography of the Persianate world and is a professor of history and near and Middle Eastern Civilizations. Afsaneh Najmabadi is an Iranian-American historian, a gender theorist, and a professor of history and of studies of women, gender, and sexuality. Their scholarship is regarded as sources for postmodern and postcolonial studies of gender and modernity in Iranian historiographic traditions through which I offer an analysis of the ways European modernity shamed us for having a culture supportive of same-sex unions into their vision of heteronormativity. As Afsaneh Najmabadi posits,

> Modernity closeted the male beloved into the premodern and rendered Sufi love as transcendental. It redefined homosexual desire from natural to unnatural and abominable, blaming it on the undesirable social practice of women's seclusion and gender segregation.[39]

This section also discusses the long-lasting affects of anxiety, embarrassment, and shame that followed the closeting Najmabadi describes. It should be noted here that both primary and secondary documents that discuss sexuality in Iran in the eighteenth and nineteenth century are limited because they have been deliberately destroyed or altered to erase the queer friendliness of our society. Most of what is left from this era has been written by each culture's "spectators" in order to "exhibit" their own culture as the most advanced and morally righteous. In other words, as Tavakoli Taraghi asserts, "there was no steady position of spectatorship and no objective observer" whose account of the historical events were not subjective.

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[39] Afsaneh Najmabadi. *Women with mustaches and men without beards: gender and sexual anxieties of Iranian modernity*, (University of California Press, 2005), Retrieved from https://hdl-handle-net.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/2027/heb.04732, 55.

1.3.1 The Unhistorical History[40] of Queer Existence

To the postmodern and postcolonial historians of the Persianate world,[41] discussions about Iran's sociopolitical history are inextricably linked to the concepts of European modernity, imperialism, and orientalism. In *Refashioning Iran,* Tavakoli-Taraghi speaks to the necessity of a deeper understanding and criticism of these concepts to achieve a better understanding of Iran's sociopolitical history from the 1750s. In order to achieve "postcolonial historiography" of this time period, scholars must "re-historicize the processes that have been concealed and ossified by the Eurocentric accounts of modernity."[42] Exploring the concept of re-historicizing is vital in this thesis, as will be shown, because the erasure of queer people from Iranian history books is, directly or indirectly, a result of Europe's imperialism in the name of modernity. Tavakoli-Taraghi especially invites scholars to go beyond Edward Said's analysis of the systematic discourse of orientalism and to consider the rights of "Europe's Other" in their investigations of Iran's contemporary sociopolitical history. Tavakoli-Taraghi further posits,

> Such a project must go beyond a Saidian critique of Orientalism as 'a systematic discourse by which Europe was able to manage — even produce — the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively.' Said's Orientalist provided the foundation for immensely productive scholarly works on European colonial agency but these works rarely explore the agency and imagination of Europe's Other, who are depicted as passive and traditional.[43]

According to the "conventional Enlightenment story… non-European societies were 'modernized' as a result of Western impact and influence."[44] Terms such as Westernization, modernization, and

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[40] Mohamad Tavakoli-Taraghi, *Refashioning Iran Orientalism, Occidentalism and Historiography* (New York, N. Y.: Palgrave, 2001), 5.

[41] Tavakoli-Taraghi, *Refashioning Iran,* 14.

[42] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 33.

[43] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 33-34.

[44] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 2.

acculturation began to be used interchangeably, not only by European historians but also in self-orientalising "Iranian historiographical traditions" whose authors "began to redefine the self in relation to Europe."[45]

About the effects of this Eurocentric historiographic tradition that "institutes Europe as the original home of modernity"[46] on Asian historians of the time, Tavakoli-Taraghi asserts,

> The universalist claims of European enlightenment has blackmailed non-European modernity and debilitated its historiography by engendering a tradition of historical writing that used a de-historized and decontextualized "European rationality" as its scale and referent. Iranian historians and ideologues, like their Indian and Ottoman counterparts, developed a fractured conception of historical time that viewed their contemporary European societies ahead of their own time. This conception of historical time parallels the time-distancing devices of European anthropologists who denied *coevalness*[47] to their contemporary non-Western societies. Such a *schizochronic* conception of history informs the nationalist historiography of Iranian modernity, a historiography that assumes the non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous Iranian and European societies.[48]

Among many examples provided by Tavakoli-Taraghi as evidence of Europe's attempt to erase the history of scientific progress in Asia, the following quote by Bernard Lewis, who until very recently was known as "the West's leading interpreter of the Middle East,"[49] is perhaps the most telling. Quoted in Tavakoli-Taraghi,[50] Lewis asserts that by the end of the eighteenth century, "there was a complete lack of interest and curiosity, among Muslim scholars about what went on beyond the Muslim frontiers in—Europe." There was, he continues, a "total lack of any such literature in Persian…" and the Ottoman

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[45] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 4.

[46] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 1.

[47] Italicized by the original author.

[48] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 4.

[49] James Abramson, "Will the West and the United States Go the Distance?" American Diplomacy, June 8, 2007. https://americandiplomacy.web.unc.edu/2007/06/will-the-west-and-the-united-states-go-the-distance/

[50] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 18-19.

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writings on Europe "had not yet amounted to anything very substantial." Depicting Asians as war-loving, ignorant people, Lewis compares Asians to Europeans "in the study of languages and religions;"[51] Lewis, claims:

> Europeans at one time or another have studied virtually all the languages and all the histories of Asia. Asia did not study Europe. They did not even study each other, unless the way for such study was prepared by either conquest or conversion or both. The kind of intellectual curiosity that leads to the study of a language, the decipherment of ancient texts, without any such preparation or motivation is still peculiar to western Europe, and to the inheritors and emulators of the European scholarly tradition in countries such as the United States and Japan.[52]

Both Tavakoli-Taraghi and Najmabadi believe that it is in this moment in history that any practice or ideology that was not familiar to European traditions, religious or otherwise, would be marked as stagnant, backward, unreasonable, non-scientific, and uncivilized. Therefore, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, "alternative non-European historical processes have been characterized as the absence of change and as unhistorical history."[53]

1.3.2   Bordered History: A Colonial Heritage

The same colonial and Eurocentric historiographical traditions that depicted Europe as the origin of modernism, also mapped the world as a compilation of united and single entities and viewed 'the nation' as "a concrete and observable reality" rather than as "a modernist style of collective imagination, societal organization, and self-disciplining of citizens."[54] As mentioned earlier, this "gap between a kind of historical thinking that hasn't been confined to the boundaries of modern nation-states" is one of the most important reasons that it is challenging to investigate any historic phenomena in Iran.

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[51] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 19.

[52] Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West,* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993): 123-4, quoted in Tavakoli-Taraghi, *Refashioning Iran,* (New York, N. Y.: PALGRAVE, 2001): 18-19.

[53] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 5.

[54] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 1.

Whether Iran of today is a multi-nation state as opposed to a multi-ethnic nation is a controversial topic that often leads to hostile debates. Geographically, Iran's territorial enclosure is a result of a series of imposed treaties[55] in which parts of the "country" were lost. It was this boundary enclosure, Tavakoli-Taraghi believes, that "shaped the national body politic."[56] Linked to "the global emergence of nation-states and the international demarcation of national boundaries,"[57] the modern notion of nation-state was introduced to Iranians in the late nineteenth century. Iranian nationalists conceived of Iran as the motherland, and Persian became the official language.

To "overcome debilitating historical amnesia"[58] Tavakoli-Taraghi encourages scholars who are interested in learning about Asian modernity to focus on Persian texts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He specifically advocates for exploration of the Persianate world, which is mainly today's Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India. He sees the Persian language as a unifying factor that brought the scientists of the eighteenth century together.[59] It is the modern conception of nationality that assumes these countries have "divergent national characters, traditions, and cultures."[60] This belief is reflected in the way these countries and regions are studied today: in separate zones of the Middle East and South Asia.

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[55] The most famous of these treaties are Gulistan (1813), Turkamanchay (1828), Erzurum (1823 and 1847), and Paris (1857).

[56] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 114.

[57] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 114.

[58] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 100.

[59] It is important to note that Persian (Farsi) was, and still is, forcibly imposed to other nations, such as Kurd, who call Iranian state home. Until very recently, teaching mother tongs, other than Farsi, was strictly prohibited. For further discussion on this subject see Soleimani, *Can Non-Persians Speak?*

[60] Tavakoli-Taraghi, xi.

This forced division, Tavakoli-Taraghi believes, has led to "several historiographical problems."[61] It has contributed "to the hegemony of the Eurocentric and orientalist conceptions of modernity as something uniquely-European" and convinced local historians "to consider modernity only under the rubric of a belated Westernization."[62] In other words, separating these cultures and studying them separately contributed to the "institutional erasure of the labor of Persianate scholars,"[63] which in turn made it easier to erase our history and change the Iranian narrative to match the dominant narrative of the West.

To establish an "alternative account of Persianate modernity,"[64] Tavakoli-Taraghi invites scholars to decolonize the "historical imagination;"[65] to do so, scholars should investigate texts of the eighteenth and nineteenth century again "without the themes of 'decline' and 'disintegration' that were based on a projection about the rise and progress of Europe."[66] Tavakoli-Taraghi asserts that in these texts, scholars "vanished stories…from a large corpus of texts made homeless with the emergence of *history with borders*, a convention that confined historical writing to the borders of modern nation-states."[67] Tavakoli concludes, "a postcolonial historiography of Indian and Iranian modernity must begin to reactivate the concurring history that has been erased from memory by colonial conventions and territorial divisions."[68]

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[61] Tavakoli-Taraghi, x.

[62] Tavakoli-Taraghi, x.

[63] Tavakoli-Taraghi, x.

[64] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 9.

[65] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 6.

[66] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 16.

[67] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 9.

[68] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 9.

1.3.3   (Un)historical Affects and Memories (17-19CE)

In this section, I outline two of the most important aspects of Iranians' lives that were erased

from history books centuries ago: gender identities and same-sex practices. As Najmabadi posits,

> homoeroticism and same-sex practices came to mark Iran as backwards; heteronormalization of
> eros and sex became a condition of "achieving modernity", a project that called for
> heterosocialization of public space and a reconfiguration of family life. While we may consider a
> society in which men and women mix at all levels as less gender stratified, the very notion of
> mixing assumes a binary of two kinds, men as one gender category and women as the other. In
> this sense, modern heterosocialization became, paradoxically, productive of gender as a binary.[69]

1.3.3.1   Gender Expression

Najmabadi "consider[s] gender as an analytical category." [70] Many other historians of the same

era do not focus their research on non-males. While they express their "regret and dismay that doing

Qajar[71] Women's history [is] impossible because few historical sources and solid extant records about

women of that period [exist],"[72] Najmabadi believes that "if we use gender analytically, sources about

men are also sources about women."[73]Najmabadi reports that as part of her research into the Iranian

national emblem of the lion-and-sun, which became the "official emblem of the Iranian state"[74] in 1836,

she realizes that gradually and over the decades following the adoption of the emblem, the image of the

sun transforms from what Najmabadi assumed, at the beginning of her research, as having "feminine,"

characteristics into a "completely masculinized national emblem."[75] Confused by this bizarre gender

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[69] Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards, 3.*

[70] Najmabadi, 1.

[71] The era between 1789 to 1925

[72] Najmabadi, 1.

[73] Najmabadi, 1.

[74] Najmabadi, 63.

[75] Najmabadi, 63.

change,[76] Najmabadi questions her initial assumption that the emblem depicted "feminized"[77] features.

By exploring the history of representation, Najmabadi realizes that the image of the sun on the 1836

emblem never meant to depict feminine characteristics; it was Najmabadi who made this assumption

based on the current gendered aesthetics of representation:

> I realized that my association of beautiful faces with femininity and femaleness, and thus my
> unquestioning reading of the sun in the national emblem as female, did not correspond to the
> nineteenth-century Qajar sensibilities. In the Qajar period, a beautiful face could belong to either
> a young male or a female with identical features.[78]

Following the same lines of inquiry, Najmabadi explores the "taken-for-granted man/women Binary" and

realizes that she "overlooked the erasures that made this binarity of gender possible"[79] in the process of

modernization.

Najmabadi further explains that she "was first intrigued and then obsessed by the remarkable

amnesia and the work of that amnesia in conceptualizing the gender of modernity."[80] In her book, *Women*

with Mustaches and Men without Beards, Najmabadi further interrogates these binary assumptions "by

mapping modes of maleness in nineteenth-century Iran that were distinct from manhood."[81] She further

elaborates that it is possible to draw the same maps for femaleness of that time as well.

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[76] Najmabadi, 2. Her exact words, "how did this sex change, so to speak, happen?" changed here for a more trans-inclusive terminology.

[77] Najmabadi, 2.

[78] Najmabadi, 2.

[79] Najmabadi, 2.

[80] Najmabadi, 3.

[81] Najmabadi, 3.

1.3.3.2   Same-sex Desires

Written texts show that in the nineteenth century Iran, men and women were described by the same adjectives, such as "rose-faced, silver-bodied, cypress-statured, narcissus-eyed, coquettish."[82] Additionally, there were "extensive records of male same-sex activities"[83] because sexual preferences were noted, especially in documents coming from court poets and storytellers. For Iranians, noting sexual preferences, which continued to the late nineteenth century, was informed not by "the modernist tendency to take heterosexuality for granted"[84] but out of the desire to provide the best services to the royalties of the courts. As Najmabadi notes, in Iran "recording of sexual preference and activities was merely incidental."[85] This is evident by the fact that individual men were explicitly marked as woman-lovers or amrad[86]-lovers. For example, Reporst suggest that Shah Sultan Husayn Safavi (1694-1722) was "fully inclined to women"[87] and Shah Tahmasb II (1722-1732) "preferred one Joseph-faced to thousands of Zulaykhas[88] and Laylis[89] and Shirins."[90]

To illustrate the "enormous transformations of notions of beauty, love, and sexuality in the nineteenth century,"[91] Najmabadi suggests exploring the ways these concepts were depicted in visual and

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[82] Najmabadi, 11.

[83] Najmabadi, 34.

[84] Najmabadi, 21.

[85] Najmabadi, 21.

[86] A phrase used for non-females.

[87] Najmabadi, 20.

[88] A name commonly used for non-males.

[89] A name commonly used for non-males.

[90] A name commonly used for non-males, Najmabadi, 20.

[91] Najmabadi. 5.

contextual cultural products of the decades before European judgment shamed Iranians into denial, disavowal, dissimulation, and cross-representation. She posits:

> the disappearance of the male beloved from visual representation, like his disappearance from love poetry in the same period, may have been an alternative resolution to the moral and cultural challenges posed by European judgments. As "another gaze" entered the scene of desire, as if an intruder had entered one's private chamber, the scene of homoerotic desire had to be disguised.[92]

In the decades before this transformation, "certain same-sex practices occurred in daily life."[93] Lasting love stories between men in this era linger in our collective memories. In many of these instances, clues for social life were hidden in stories.[94] Because no social histories of this period of Iran exists,[95] "the gender-undifferentiated concept of beauty and desire...the dominance of male beloved in cultural sensibilities, poetic and visual" along with personal narratives from that era are especially important for re-historisizing[96] everyday lives of people.

Ghazal, the most famous Persian poetic tradition of love poetry, celebrated male homoeroticism as well as heterosexual love. However, from an early period, around the ninth century, within the "Sufi-inspired love poetry, the beloved was almost always male."[97] The most celebrated Sufi couple, whose love produced exquisite poetry, much of which has been translated to English, were Rumi and his beloved Shams. As the anxiety and shame from European moral judgment intensified, Sufi male homoeroticism was "reconfigured...as purely allegorical and transcendental."[98] In a significant departure from Sufi

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[92] Najmabadi, 38.

[93] Najmabadi, 24.

[94] Najmabadi, 18.

[95] Najmabadi, 18.

[96] Tavakoli-Taraghi, *Refashioning Iran,* 33.

[97] Najmabadi, *Women with mustaches and men without beards,* 53.

[98] Najmabadi, *Women with mustaches and men without beards*, 56.

traditional poetry where the beloved was almost always male, towards the end of the nineteenth century, "the story of Shaykh San'an's legendary love for the Christian maiden of Rum [sic]"[99] replaced classical Sufi tales and "became a privileged narrative" and "paintings, pen boxes, and vases reproduce scenes from the story."[100]

The majority of the personal narratives remaining from this era were written by "men of the court and the political elite."[101] That said, illustrations of powerful people such as kings and princes, were similar to those of everyday people. Royal portraits, as well as paintings depicting common people, "closely mirrored these literary descriptions."[102] Aa an example, adjectives like "sweet-featured, tall and well-proportioned, and sweet-scented" were used to describe men as well as women. Both men and women were said to have "large green eyes, wide connected eyebrows, red cheeks, narrow waists, slanted nose, thin lips, and long fingers."[103] The "notion of beauty" among men and women was so similar until the mid-nineteenth century, that "sometimes only the style of headgear distinguishes male from female in visual representations." Notions of beauty had sexual connotations and could be sexualized, as "desire could be aroused by any beautiful face, *male* or female" and "such desire was not considered improper or sinful."[104]

By the end of the nineteenth century "the language of representation underwent important shifts."[105] "As beauty became feminized" Najmabadi asserts, "even abstract, previously ungendered

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[99] Najmabadi, 42.

[100] Najmabadi, 41.

[101] Najmabadi, 2.

[102] Najmabadi,13.

[103] Najmabadi, 11.

[104] Najmabadi, 17.

[105] Najmabadi, 26.

figures, such as angels, became feminized."[106] Depictions of beautiful, narrow waisted men, along with

portraits of male lovers disappeared form royal courts and were replaced by an "abundance of female

objects of desire," including "bare-breasted female entertainers."[107] Najmabadi further explains,

> baring the breast became another way of emphasizing that these dancers were women and not young men; another way of making unambiguous that the figure of desire was feminine. Display of the breast, emphasized by arrangements of objects, flowers, or fruits, became a distinct mark of womanhood, at once intensifying eroticization of the breast and heterosexualization of eros.[108]

Women's attires continue to be the focus of the project of "modernization," an integral part of which was

changing the queer culture in Iran.

1.3.4   "Uncivilized"[109] Queerness

For European travelers to Iran, "people's sexual preferences were not considered irrelevant." To

be "worthy" of notice in European's travelogues, chronicles, and biographies, one needed to exhibit

morality as defined by Europe's modernity. In many instances, Europeans who wrote negatively about

Iranian sexual preferences published their memoirs as travelogues upon their return to their home country.

One such travelogue includes the following description:

> I have, besides, still other vices to reproach them with; the most serious is their injustice and indifference to a sex which elsewhere forms all the charm and happiness of our existence. Women are merely, in the estimation of these men, beings created solely for their pleasure. Preserved by their education and habits from the pains and vicissitudes of love; incapable, on the other hand, by their religious prejudices, of appreciating its delights and enjoyments, they have degraded that sentiment to the excess of reserving it at times for their minions, and of turning it into a crime against nature. Many of their poems turn entirely on this inconceivable degeneracy; and their moral depravity is such that far from making a mystery of this new species of amorous

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[106] Najmabadi, 26.

[107] Najmabadi, 41.

[108] Najmabadi, 41.

[109] Tavakoli-Taraghi, *Refashioning Iran,* 67.

intrigue, they appear, on the contrary, to take pride in it; speak publicly of their minions, as if they were speaking of their mistresses.[110]

Iranian men who traveled to Europe were enraged and ashamed by Europeans' negative assessments of their sexual habits in published travelogues. At this point in time Iranian men started to pay attention to the way their love for each other was described in European contexts and insisted, as they still do, that many of the practices Europeans call same-sex desire, were in fact "homosociality" with no sexual undertones. Practices such as men holding hands, embracing, and kissing each other in public, Iranian men argued and still argue, should not be regarded as queer.[111] By the end of the nineteenth century, homosexual accounts were mostly seen in political discourses as tools for discrediting the opponent and accusing them of immorality[112] to a degree that Muzaffar al-Din Shah's [113] homosexual practices, "became grounds for calling an end to his rule."[114]

In the process of forming a "purely self-congratulatory view of European civilization as the paragon of universal reason"[115] Tavakoli-Taraghi argues, Europeans "exoticized and eroticized the Other."[116] At the same time, wishing to offer an alternative representation of self, Iranians "returned the

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[110] Tancoigne, (Tehran, 1820): 174, quoted in Najmabadi, *Women with mustaches and men without beards, 34-35*

[111] Najmabadi, *Women with mustaches and men without beards*, 38.

[112] Najmabadi, 23.

[113] "Persian ruler of the Qājār dynasty whose incompetence precipitated a constitutional revolution in 1906."
Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mozaffar-od-Din-Shah.

[114] Najmabadi, *Women with mustaches and men without beards*, 24.

[115] Najmabadi, 8-9.

[116] Najmabadi, 36.

gaze"[117] in the similar manner of "cultural looking,"[118] by exoticizing and eroticizing Europe. This

"interplay of looks between Asians and Europeans" became grounds for "modern national identities."[119]

1.3.5   Historian-driven Amnesia Early Twentieth Century

According to Tavakoli-Taraghi, after the interaction between Iran and Europe intensified, local

historians searched for "facts that illustrate the backwardness and the disintegration of the empire…and

depicted Qajar period[120] as the dark ages of Iranian society."[121] Their willingness to accept false narratives

and promote historical amnesia, to a degree that modernization became synonymous with westernization,

is largely due to a "historical dissociation." Tavakoli explains,

> historians of modern Iran inherited historiographical traditions that militate against the
> construction of historical narratives about pre-modern time as anything but an age of ignorance,
> stagnation, and despotism.[122]

The global rise of nationalism gave hope to the oppositional forces who were unhappy with the

sociopolitical conditions of nineteenth century Iran. Historians supported their efforts by crafting

"narratives of intolerable conditions"[123] and "deployed a regressive conception of time that constitutes

their respective histories in terms of lacks and failures."[124] This became a popular practice among

oppositional groups and their supporting historians. For example, as Tavakoli-Taraghi explains, in order

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[117] Najmabadi, 36.

[118] Najmabadi, 36.

[119] Tavakoli-Taraghi, *Refashioning Iran*, 37.

[120] 1794-1925 CE

[121] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 16.

[122] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 16.

[123] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 16.

[124] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 16.

to legitimize "the Pahlavi dynasty[125] as the architect of Iranian modernity and progress, Pahlavi historians

likewise depicted the Qajar period as the dark age of Iranian history."[126]

In order to protest the shortcomings of the ruling party and mark them uncivilized, Iranian

historians of the time accepted the false history of Europe's superiority in terms of scientific and social

progress. Tavakoli-Taraghi sees these practices "as divergent strategies of identification and

disidentification, mimicry and mockery,"[127] employed to contest "local, regional, and global networks of

power and knowledge."[128] These strategies lend themselves to the creation of two antagonistic identities

and a "double consciousness."[129] Tavakoli-Taraghi further posits:

> In the nineteenth-century Iranian political discourse, for example, identification with heterotopic
> Europe served as an oppositional strategy for the disarticulation of the dominant Islamicate
> discourse and for the construction of a new pattern of self-identity grounded on pre-Islamic
> history and culture. Mimesis did not signify only mindless imitation but was rather a strategy for
> the creative reconstruction of Iranian history and identity. Correspondingly, Iranian counter-
> modernists represented Europe as a dystopia and thus sought to preserve dominant power
> relations and to subvert this oppositional strategy of secularization and de-Islamization. Thus
> mockery was not a "reactionary" and "traditionalist" rejection of Europe. By mocking Europe,
> counter-modernists were able to remake the Perso-Islamic tradition and culture in
> contradistinction to Europe. Both the secularist Europhilia and the Islamist Europhobia
> constituted Europe as a point of reference and created competing scenarios of vernacular
> modernity.[130]

To imagine a glorious pre-Islamic past,[131] nationalists and historians projected "an Iran-centered

universal historical narrative that subordinated the Biblico-Qur'anic 'mythistory' to its own all-

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[125] 1926-79 CE

[126] Tavakoli-Taraghi, *Refashioning Iran*, 16.

[127] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 37.

[128] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 37.

[129] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 44.

[130] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 37.

[131] 3000BCE- 661 CE

encompassing framework."[132] The Iranian nationalists imagined an ancient and just empire that tragically and forcefully came to its end by "the Muslim conquest."[133] For this fake "etymology" to succeed, it needed to assume "resemblance … [to the] modern European Institution."[134] This is why Iranian nationalists of the time would claim that their pre-Islamic empire and France were "born from the same"[135] parents, or that the style of uniforms of a European country was a "copy of ancient Iranian uniforms." In their haste to "catch up with Europe,"[136] Iranians felt they had to reconfigure their queer society and act modern to gain the approval of Europeans. As Najmabadi asserts, "to become modern required one's modernity to be legible for the already modern; Iran's modernity had to be recognized by the Europeans."[137]

1.3.6   The Twentieth Century and the "Heterosocialization"[138] of Public Spaces

When Iranians accepted that their homoeroticism and same-sex practices were backward, they started the process of the "heterosocialization of public space and reconfiguration of family life."[139] Same-sex practices and the homoerotic culture of Iran were attributed to the practice of gender segregation and the absence of women in public spaces. Unsurprisingly, "men's same-sex liaisons and sexual practices were blamed on ignorant wives."[140] Europeans who traveled to Iran called Iranian homes

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[132] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 77.

[133] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 94.

[134] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 103.

[135] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 103.

[136] Tavakoli-Taraghi, 138.

[137] Najmabadi, *Women with mustaches and men without beards*, 137

[138] Najmabadi, 146.

[139] Najmabadi, 133.

[140] Najmabadi, 133.

"bastion[s] of ignorance and superstition."[141] Najmabadi posits that "the uncoveredness of European women and the coveredness of Iranian women were repeatedly signaled in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Persian travelogues as something that connoted a difference in the sense of being-in-the-world."[142]

The process of civilization of Iranians became dependent on eradicating the queer structure of Iranian society, which in turn needed women's presence in public spaces. As a step toward ending gender separation, "unveiling women became pivotal, not simply in the sense that later modernists insisted, that is, as necessary for women's emancipation, but for the modernist heterosocialization of culture and heteronormalization of eros and sex."[143] Najmabadi continues,

> The modernist thrust to desegregate men and women, to which unveiling was central, in fact worked at once as a masqueraded campaign to eradicate same-sex practices and unnatural sexualities. The one and the same move was to produce a double miracle: overcome women's backwardness (transform them into companionate wives, educated mothers, useful citizens) and make same-sex practices, especially among men, socially redundant.[144]

1.3.7 Locating Civilized Queerness

In 1979, Kate Millet and Sophie Kier travelled to Iran to document the women's protest of "the misogynist laws proposed by the newly formed Islamic Republic in Iran." [145] Years later, in 2018, Sara Mameni discusses Millet and Kier's project in *What Are the Iranians Wishing For?* Mameni, who is specifically interested in Millett and Kier's "extensive audiovisual archive" of photographs and

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[141] Najmabadi, 133.

[142] Najmabadi, 134.

[143] Najmabadi, 148.

[144] Najmabadi, 150.

[145] Sara Mameni, "What Are the Iranians Wishing For? Queer Transnational Solidarity in Revolutionary Iran," *The University of Chicago Press Journal 43,* no. 4 (2018): 956, accessed March 18, 2022, https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/10.1086/696628

audiotapes, analyzes their work through a queer lens. This audiovisual archive, Mameni asserts, "places us in the midst of women's demonstrations,"[146] and despite being fragmented due to the nature of photography, this collection is "rich with daily experiences of protest."[147] The photos were mainly made up of close-up portraits of "the feminists"[148] who worked with Keir and Millet in Iran. What caught Mameni's attention in these photographs was the ways in which "Keir's photographs of the women's march visualize[s] homosociality."[149] However, unlike the 'civilized' Western queerness and same-sex practice, Mameni notices, same-sex unions and acts in Iran is considered backwards and the result of gender segregation. Looking further, Mameni examines the gay and lesbian journals of the eighties to find examples of how these journals portray queer Iranians in the same era of the first years of the Iranian revolution of 1979.[150] Mameni reports that these journals, ironically, consider Iran as a backward religious country that hinders its gay citizen's sexual liberty, and at the same time portray Iran "as a site of desire" for the West.[151] A section from Kafi's 1985 article *Tehran: Dangerous Love*,[152] quoted in Mameni, can best depict the Western "image of a civilizing Iran:"[153]

> Homosexuality, an ancient practice in Iran, has taken the most horrid form under the mullahs. Those openly gay are executed, but a blind eye is tuned on the religious colleges, traditional centers of male-male love. Alas the times of Hafiz are gone. No great poet around to sing the

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[146] Mameni, "What Are the Iranians Wishing For?" 956.

[147] Mameni, 956.

[148] Mameni, 956.

[149] Mameni, 969

[150] Mameni, 969

[151] Mameni, 969.

[152] Hélène Kafi, "Tehran: Dangerous Love." *In Sexuality and Eroticism among Males in Moslem Societies*, (ed. Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer, New York: Haworth, 1992): 67–69, quoted in Mameni, "What Are the Iranians Wishing For?" 967.

[153] Mameni, "What Are the Iranians Wishing For?" 967.

praise of boys. During the last years under the Shah, fucking of young boys (who were not asked whether they liked it) slowly gave way to western style homosexuality. In 1977 all of Tehran twaddled about the [gay] marriage of a painter and a musician. Today it is out of the question to advertise one's "abnormal and anti-Islamic" liking.[154]

Mirroring the orientalists' attitude towards Iran, Mameni argues, Western feminists delegitimize Iran's feminist movement by labeling Iranians as "repressed by their religion."[155] "While Muslim men are the instruments through which white liberal gay subjectivity is produced," Mameni asserts, "the definition of the white male homosexual is also dependent upon the refutation of Muslim sexuality." [156] This is the reason that, as with Iranian feminism, Iranian's same-sex unions and acts could never "be properly assimilated" [157] into the West's epistemology of civilization, gender equality and sexual orientation.

In a similar discourse, Najmabadi calls out Iranian historians, as opposed to the Western media, who have failed to see the relationship between the queer society of premodern Iran with homosexuality as a concept that "defines particular notion of erotic desire." It is not surprising that these Iranian historians who continue to regard Europe's progress, in all aspects of life, too advanced for Iranians to reach, also diminish the "pre-modern" Iranian same-sex practices. The homosexuality that came from Europe has been considered both civilized and different, rendering "homosexuality external to other places, an alien concept for formation of desire in these other cultures." [158] This very argument has been used, time and again, "by homophobic cultural nativists who are happy to (al)locate homosexuality in the West." [159] This "radical alterity with the past," Najmabadi argues, leads to a conception of premodern Iran

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[154] Kafi, Tehran: Dangerous Love, 67-69.

[155] Mameni, "What Are the Iranians Wishing For?" 967.

[156] Mameni, 967.

[157] Mameni, 967.

[158] Mameni, 967.

[159]Mameni, 967.

"as a radically different time."[160] The irony, Najmabadi points out, is that this very argument has been

consistently used by the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), who "is set on eradicating homosexuality," by

calling it a Western phenomenon, "oblivious to the irony of its shared ground with secular modernists and

with Orientalizing Europeans,"[161] rather than Islam's classical teachings.

1.3.8   The current state of our non-existence

In *Staying I(ra)n: Narrating Queer Identity from Within the Persian Closet*, Shadee Abdi writes

about her experience as an Iranian-American lesbian who has not yet "come out" to her immediate

family:

> This unique perspective, though rarely heard, may open (closet) doors that can help destroy the
> rigid barriers causing the muting of those who have stories to tell. I am optimistic that through
> narrative trespasses, through the sharing of my story, that other
> queer Iranians, and those who have been historically silenced, marginalized, and Othered, may
> attempt to break free. It is my hope to finally exist.[162]

Although both Abdi and her family live in the US, her sentiment, of wanting to exist, is shared among all

Iranians, wherever we live. For queer people in Iran and neighboring countries, threats to existence can be

identified in the country's queer-phobic laws which are exacerbated by a lack of access to information

and to online spaces.

Iran imposes one of the strictest and most inhumane laws against same-sex practices. In 2019,

Hristina Byrnes wrote in USAToday that,

> In January 2019 a man in Iran was hanged after being found guilty of having sex with
> another man. Homosexuality was made a crime punishable by the death penalty in
> 1979 after the Islamic Revolution. In 2007, then-President of Iran Mahmoud
> Ahmadinejad infamously said during a visit to Columbia University: "In Iran, we don't

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[160] Najmabadi. *Women with mustaches and men without beards,* 50.

[161] Najmabadi. 57.

[162] Shadee Abdi, "Staying I(Ra)n: Narrating Queer Identity from within the Persian Closet." *Liminalities* 10, no. 2

(2014): 8.

have homosexuals, like in your country.[163]

Humandignitytrust.org reported that in 2017:

> In April, 30 men were arrested at a gathering in central Iran, transferred to Dastgerd Prison and charged with sodomy by a local court. It is reported that since at least 2007, there have been a number of state-led raids on private parties followed by mass arrests and detention on suspicion of same-sex sexual acts. Following their arrests, detainees are often forced to reveal the names of other LGBT people.[164]

The US Department of State's Human Rights Report on Iran stated that the law is enforced actively and does not distinguish between consensual and non-consensual same-sex intercourse, and NGOs reported that this lack of clarity leads to both the victim and the perpetrator being held criminally liable under the law in cases of assault. This report further states that those accused of "sodomy" often faced trials where evidentiary standards were not always met.[165]

Articles 233 and 234 of the 2013 Iranian Penal code discuss the types of criminality of same sex activities. Between women the punishment for the first three incidents of reported sexual activities is 100 lashes and time in prison. Any subsequent incident results in receiving a death sentence. Between men, depending on the circumstances, same sex is at best punishable by lashes, and at worst by death penalty. All the political parties in Iran, the hardliners, and the liberals, agree with these laws and advocate for them. The hardliners deny queer existence altogether; President Khatami, who is considered the most liberal president of Iran called same-sex desires sodomy and claimed that not only is the death

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[163] Hristina Byrnes, "13 countries where being gay is legally punishable by death," USA Today, accessed March 14, 2022. https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2019/06/14/countries-where-being-gay-is-legally-punishable-by-death/39574685/

[164] "Iran," Human Dignity Trust, accesses March 20, 2022, https://www.humandignitytrust.org/country-profile/iran/

[165] "Iran."

penalty an appropriate treatment for sodomy, but also that being hanged for sodomy is a sign of God's love.[166]

Iran has, also, continuously limited access to the internet for its citizens to a degree that today, as mentioned above, Instagram is the only social media platform that is still accessible without the use of virtual private networks (VPNs). Writing for BBC Global News, Leyla Khodabakhshi asserts,

> VPNs route internet traffic through different computers and networks and can in effect trick the censors by making a user "appear" to be outside Iran. But of course, the authorities are aware of such tricks, and it's a game of cat and mouse, with censors hunting down VPNs and ordinary Iranians finding new ones.[167]

VPNs are commonly used in major cities and are often available for free. However, finding them on the web and setting them up requires at least a basic understanding of and reading skills in English which the majority of Iranians don't have access to. In 2018, there were only two social media channels that remained unblocked in Iran: Telegram, an instant messaging service similar to WhatsApp, and Instagram. According to Khodabakhshi, in 2018 "almost 40% of Iran's international internet bandwidth [was] taken by Instagram."[168] In early 2019, after many episodes of temporarily being blocked, Telegram was permanently banned, leaving 40 million users in Iran stranded, and making Instagram the only non-restricted social media platform.[169]

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[166] Hassan Agha, "محمد خاتمی: اعدام درمان همجنس گرایی است," YouTube video, 1:24, September 29, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sKLiZ9yen9Y.

[167] Leyla Khodabakhshi, "Why ordinary Iranians are turning to internet backdoors to beat censorship," BBC News. January 10, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-42612546#:~:text=Social%20media%20in%20Iran%20is,virtual%20private%20networks%20(VPNs).

[168] Leyla Khodabakhshi, "Why ordinary Iranians are turning to internet backdoors to beat censorship."

[169] Leyla Khodabakhshi, "Why ordinary Iranians are turning to internet backdoors to beat censorship."

In addition to internal censorships, there are also US imposed sanctions to consider. In 2019, TheNextWEb.com website published an article called "The Iranian Developer Deadlock: Stuck Between Censorship and US Sanctions," in which they highlight internet services that are no longer available to those living in Iran due to US Sanctions. Ivan Mahta, the author of the article pulled multiple Tweets from known Iranian developers on Tweeter who suddenly found their accounts shut down. In one of these tweets an Iranian developer published a letter he received from Amazon Cloud Services, dated August 2, 2019, that reads:

> Hello Saber, Amazon has a policy to comply with government sanctions and export control regulations, and we identified your account during a recent check for countries and regions where we are not authorized to provide services. As a result, we have disabled your Amazon account. [170]

This tweet was retweeted by another more famous web developer, Nima Fatemi, on August 6th of the same year that said:

> Hey @awscloud if you ban all the Iranian devs from using AWS [Amazon Could services], and the other cloud companies follow suit, then where the heck are they supposed to run their proxies and VPN servers to bypass censorship and access the free and open web?[171]

And finally, Fatemi's tweet was retweeted on the same day by Edward Snowden's Twitter account. It reads:

> You might not know it, but Amazon runs basically half the internet on their cloud platform. Now they're cutting off the lifeline of Iran's liberal opposition in a misguided attempt to please – far beyond what the law requires- one of Amazon's biggest customers: the US Government."[172]

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[170] Ivan Mahta, "The Iranian Developer Deadlock: Stuck Between Censorship and US Sanctions," TheNextWEb, TNW News, October 24, 2019, https://thenextweb.com/news/the-iranian-developer-deadlock-stuck-between-censorship-and-us-sanctions

[171] Mahta, The Iranian Developer Deadlock: Stuck Between Censorship and US Sanctions.

[172] Mahta, The Iranian Developer Deadlock

Mahta further lists some of the other internet services that are banned in Iran, the most noteworthy of which are: GitHub, Amazon's Goodreads, Android's developer site, App Store, and Slack.[173] It is also important to note that even one of the most used internet services during the Covid-19 pandemic, Zoom, was banned in Iran for the same reason. In an article for Undercurrent News, Matilda Mereghetti wrote:

> Iranian representatives were unable to attend the first two days of the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) special session to address yellowfin overfishing because of the inability to access Zoom services in the country, according to sources attending.[174]

The literature reviewed in this section depicts the isolated, unsupported, and suffocatingly silenced position in which many queer people who live within the borders of what is commonly known as Iran find themselves. With massive media blackout inside and outside of the borders of this land, many of us who live abroad exist under a constant state of terror and anxiety about our loved ones' conditions as their lives don't seem to matter to those in charge, and internet services, often our only means of communication with our loved ones who live in Iran, are unreliable. As will be shown in this thesis, even when we leave the country, our troubles are far from over. From the time I started conceptualizing this thesis, in September of 2021, until writing this section in April 2022, our community has mourned the loss of six more lives inside and outside of Iran:

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[173] Mahta, The Iranian Developer Deadlock

[174] Matilde Mereghetti, Zoom ban prevents Iran from attending tense start to IOTC yellowfin special session. Undercurrentnews, March 10, 2021, https://www.undercurrentnews.com/2021/03/10/zoom-ban-prevents-iran-from-attending-tense-start-to-iotc-yellowfin-special-session/

Alireza Fazeli Monfared was brutally beheaded by his cousins shortly before seeking asylum in Turkey. He was only twenty years old.[175]

Mehrdad Karimpour and Farid Mohammadi were murdered by their own government.[176]

Ella Nik Bayan died by suicide in Germany.[177]

Doski Azad was killed by her brother.[178]

Farshad died by health complications due to extreme emotional stress.[179]

These are the names of those whose loss is known to us. It is not possible to estimate how many of our community we lose every day without knowing their names. Mida and I developed @queerkadeh so that our queer community could have an accessible space to tell our everyday life stories; to know that we are many and we each have stories to tell, of joy, love, loss, and (un)belonging; to feel that our existence matters and our struggle to survive this calamity will only be forgotten if we decide it needs to be and not because we have been forced or shamed to deny and erase our existence.

[175] Joel MacKay, "Iran: Why Was Alireza Fazeli Monfared Murdered?" Amnesty International, Amnesty International Australia, May 21, 2021. https://www.amnesty.org.au/iran-why-was-alireza-fazeli-monfared-murdered.

[176] "Rights group: Iran executes 2 gay men over sodomy charges," abc News, The Associated Press, February 1, 2022, https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/rights-group-iran-executes-gay-men-sodomy-charges-82595118

[177] "Remembering Our Dead," Trans Lives Matter, March 21, 2022, https://tdor.translivesmatter.info/reports/2021/09/14/ella-nik-bayan_berlin-germany_5017563d

[178] Dilan Sirwan, "Trans Woman Killed by Brother, Perpetrator Flees Country," Rudaw, February 2, 2022, https://www.rudaw.net/english/kurdistan/020220223

[179] Farsi Twitter. (The exact citation is omitted due to security consideration).

1.4   Literature Review: Critical Archival Studies

In *Archives as Spaces of Radical Hospitality,* Lee explores the meaning of radical hospitality in the context of archival theory and praxis. Through a "mediation on what it might mean, look, and feel like for an archives to be"[180] radically hospitable, Lee asserts

> to be radically hospitable is to be prepared for change – a change in relationship, in perspective, in being. Radical hospitality in archives and archival studies requires the messiness of poetry and serendipitous practices of storytelling that can produce new understandings, new knowledges, new theories.[181]

As explained earlier, the erasure of queerness in Iranian historiographic tradition was due to European modernization, imperialization, and patriarchy. Establishing a digital archival space for my community of Farsi-speaking queer people in a way that is situated within critical archival scholarship is my family's attempt at healing some of this painful non-existence past. As such, any attempt at healing this painful past must be postmodern, postcolonial, and feminist. This literature review focuses on some of the ways archival discourse is enacting "change"[182] in order to move the discipline away from the "oppressive archival theories"[183] and towards a place where archival scholars, practitioners, and users can "radically rethink and redo and reuse archives."[184]

Archival scholarship has experienced a significant transformation in the past decade. As Anne Gilliland and Sue McKemmish note,

> Until the mid-1990s, much of the archival discourse focused on the archive(s) as
> an institution that systematically promotes, preserves, and makes accessible

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[180] Lee, "Archives as Spaces of Radical Hospitality," *Australian Feminist Studies* 36, no. 108 (2021): 156-164.

[181] Lee, "Archives as Spaces of Radical Hospitality," 3.

[182] Lee, 3.

[183] Michelle Caswell, "Feeling Liberatory Memory Work: On the Archival Uses of Joy and Anger," *Archivaria* 90, no. 1 (2020): 152.

[184] Michelle Caswell, "Feeling Liberatory Memory Work," 152.

memory, culture and identity in the form of bureaucratic and social evidence…The later studies indicate subsequent major shifts in the types of research being undertaken… critically-framed participatory and partnership approaches in the areas of community and Indigenous archives and recordkeeping, grounded in an ethos of equity, rights and community identified research needs, have come to the forefront.[185]

As critical archival scholars, J.J. Ghaddar and Michelle Caswell note, the "dominant western archival theory was developed largely to meet the needs of western imperial and colonial regimes, bureaucratic administration in formal institutional and organizational settings, and the western scholarly profession of history writing."[186] Accordingly, my reaction to the traditional archival scholarship was anger and disappointment. However, as Caswell asserts, "anger is productive. It should mobilize us to act."[187] Over the last decade, "informed by several approaches to critical theory, ranging from decolonization to postcolonialism, feminism, queer theory, critical race theory, and deconstructionism,"[188] several archival scholars whose reactions to the teachings of traditional archival studies were similar to mine,[189] acted by questioning the foundation of traditional archival theory. Pondering the modernist contemplation of archives as "institutions that systematically promote, preserve and make accessible memory, culture and identity in the form of bureaucratic and social evidence according to professional best practices,"[190] they

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[185] Anne Gilliland and Sue McKemmish, "Chapter 4 - Archival and Recordkeeping Research: Past, Present and Future," In *Research Methods*. Second ed., (Elsevier Ltd, 2018), 91.

[186] J. J. Ghaddar, and Michelle Caswell, ""To Go Beyond:" Towards a Decolonial Archival Praxis." *Archival Science* 19, no. 2 (2019): 80.

[187] Michelle Caswell, "Feeling Liberatory Memory Work," 156.

[188] Michelle Caswell, Ricardo Punzalan, and T-Kay Sangwand, "Critical Archival Studies: An Introduction." *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017): 1.

[189] Remembering fondly when Michelle Caswell asked, "why aren't you angry?"

[190] Anne Gilliland, Andrew J. Lau, and Sue McKemmish, "Pluralizing the Archive." In *Archives for Maintaining Community and Society in the Digital Age*, Singapore: Springer Singapore, (2020): 61.

ask whose memories are being promoted and preserved? Whose culture is being made accessible, and for whom? What kinds of evidence are admissible and to whom? Best practices according to professionals in what subjects? Who do archives serve? Who do archives leave out? Whose narratives do archives silence? What are archives *really* about?

In what I like to refer to as a call to fight, Caswell tells us that archives are not about the truth: "Archives have never been about truth. They are partially about evidence – evidence catalyzed in support of a claim."[191] From the perspective of postmodern and postcolonial approaches there are aspects of archival theory and praxis that "are regarded as integral to the apparatus of colonialism and imperialism, with archivists acting as agents who shape how the past is viewed by the present and by the future."[192] From this perspective, archives are "associated with the promotion of asymmetrical power, grand narratives, nationalism, surveillance, and the omission, diminution or silencing of alternate narratives as well as subaltern, non-normative, or non-conforming voices."[193] Caswell, Punzalan, and Sangwand tell us about the role of archives in the modern and hierarchical vison of the world:

> Archives are part of the "worlding" of the Third world, of the process whereby the First world defined the Third or Fourth, whereby colonial and imperial actors from soldiers to statesmen to anthropologists to housewives to archivists constructed a representation of the colony—be it India or Iraq or Canada or Guatemala—that would become the reality of the colony. In constructing its racial and colonized others, the First world defined itself. Even colonial archives that are an instrument for overseas rule serve to reaffirm national identity in the western metropolitan.[194]

Yet, when I started my education in an Information School, still in some classes, I was taught that archives are neutral causing me to question whether I, as a future user of the archives I was building, who is not at all objective, would ever actually be allowed to establish one.

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[191] Michelle Caswell, "Feeling Liberatory Memory Work," 155.

[192] Gilliland, Lau, and McKemmish, "Pluralizing the Archive," 62.

[193] Gilliland, Lau, and McKemmish, 61.

[194] Gilliland, Lau, and McKemmish, 79.

"To give such little consideration to these colonial and imperial issues within the field" Caswell et al. argue, "entails a discursive move that erases the foundational role of white supremacy, violence, genocide, slavery, exploitation, conquest and plunder in the making of modern Europe and the entire edifice of the west."[195] Additionally, Ghaddar and Caswell argue that "a decolonial archival praxis begins from this understanding, that western colonialism, empire and race are much more pervasive aspects of our field than is usually considered,"[196] and encourage us to "rethink and dismantle the theoretical foundations on which dominant western archival theory and practice is based."[197] The 'origin' story that the English language archives like to tell us, Ghaddar and Caswell posit,

> emphasizes the foundational connection between public governance, democratic accountability, national historiography, and the forging of a national or collective identity. Yet, crucially for our purposes, these national archives and the principles underpinning their management are always already colonial and imperial, always already white supremacist.[198]

As Jennifer Douglas posits, it was the

> postmodern turn in archival theory, which arrived later to this discipline than to many others, [that] brought with it awareness of the fallacy of the traditional archival paradigm of neutrality and objectivity and a concomitant interest in the subjectivity of the archivist and her impact on the shaping of archives.[199]

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[195] Ghaddar and Caswell, "To Go Beyond," 78.

[196] Ghaddar and Caswell, 78.

[197] Ghaddar and Caswell, 79.

[198] Ghaddar and Caswell, 76.

[199] Jennifer Douglas, "A Call to Rethink Archival Creation: Exploring Types of Creation in Personal Archives," *Archival Science* 18, no. 1 (2018): 32.

The research conducted by archival scholars who continue to critically question the foundation of

traditional archival theory becomes the pioneer of what Caswell, Punzalan, and Sangwand call "critical

archival studies,"[200] which they define as,

> those approaches that (1) explain what is unjust with the current state of archival research and
> practice, (2) posit practical goals for how such research and practice can and should change,
> and/or (3) provide the norms for such critique. In this way, critical archival studies, like critical
> theory, is emancipatory in nature, with the ultimate goal of transforming archival practice and
> society writ large. As an academic field and profession, critical archival studies broaden the
> field's scope beyond an inward, practice-centered orientation and builds a critical stance
> regarding the role of archives in the production of knowledge and different types of narratives, as
> well as identity construction.[201]

Archival scholar Jamie Lee's queer/ed archival methodology is situated within critical archival studies in

which "ethnic and critical race studies, transnational approaches and theories of the diaspora are

informing the re-conceptualization of archives in a trans-disciplinary, multicultural, pluralistic, and

increasingly interconnected and globalized world."[202] Since I discuss this framework in the methodology

section of this thesis, here, I proceed to discuss some of the many recent approaches to critical archival

theory such as defining radical hospitality, dismantling false dichotomies,[203] looking and listening with

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[200] Michelle Caswell, Ricardo Punzalan, and T-Kay Sangwand, "Critical Archival Studies: An

Introduction," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017).

[201] Michelle Caswell, Ricardo Punzalan, and T-Kay Sangwand, "Critical Archival Studies: An

Introduction," *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017): 1.

[202] Gilliland and McKemmish, "Chapter 4 - Archival and Recordkeeping Research: Past, Present and Future," 93.

[203] Jamie Lee, "Archives as Spaces of Radical Hospitality," *Australian Feminist Studies* 36, no. 108 (2021): 156-

164.

love,[204] taking feelings seriously,[205] and "centre[ing] the feelings and perspectives of those most oppressed by WEBCCCHAM[206] power structures,"[207] to name a few. As Lee reminds us, "whether one takes a messy or a direct route one can find so many surprises. Remember, this work is a theory in the making. And remaking."[208]

Ghaddar and Caswell, tell us that "effective decolonization requires a radical transformation that can only be realized through a radical praxis."[209] An approach is radical, they posit,

> that goes to the root cause of social, cultural, economic and political phenomena; that reflects on and is transparent about the assumptions and positionalities of those producing and disseminating knowledge; and that is committed to dismantling structures and systems of oppression and domination. It is change-oriented and future-minded insofar as it helps us imagine both a different way of archiving and a different world to be archived.[210]

The works I discuss in this section radically challenge archival theory and bring attention to different complexities that should inform archival theory and practice.

Through a case study of animal rights advocacy, Jarvie, Evans, and McKemmish examine radical recordkeeping on online platforms such as social media. They believe that recordkeeping practices on

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[204] Jennifer Douglas and Alexandra Alisauskas, "It Feels Like a Life's Work: Recordkeeping as an Act of Love," *Archivaria* 91, no. 91 (2021): 36.

[205] Caswell, Michelle. "Feeling Liberatory Memory Work: On the Archival Uses of Joy and Anger." *Archivaria* 90, no. 1 (2020): 148-164.

[206] Hope Olson, "Patriarchal Structures of Subject Access and Subversive Techniques for Change," *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science* 26, no. 2–3 (2001): 4.

[207] "White, ethnically European, bourgeois, Christian, heterosexual, able-bodied, male" identities, to which I would also add, at the suggestion of Marika Cifor, "cis" and "citizen," to form WEBCCCHAM." (Caswell, 2020, p.154).

[208] Jamie Lee, "Archives as Spaces of Radical Hospitality," 159.

[209] Ghaddar and Caswell, "To Go Beyond," 71.

[210] Ghaddar and Caswell, p.72

online platforms are especially important for activist groups because among other benefits, "online platforms enable activists to co-exist and interact within the broader animal rights movement and the public,"[211] and provide them an "unprecedented reach and immediacy of impact and community building."[212] Acknowledging the radical use of online platforms for "in time" contribution to social change, Jarvie, Evans, and McKemmish argue that "attention must also be paid to how reliance on these frameworks through time can be made viable."[213] Since most of these platforms are "cloud based and third-party owned" it can be challenging to ensure "the longevity of its records of continuing value in this environment."[214] To evaluate the problem of long-term preservation of records on online platforms, Jarvie et al. apply a Records Continuum lens to researching this case study. They explore the benefit of considering appraisal throughout the activists' process of recordmaking and posit, "radical rethinking of appraisal is needed to support radical recordkeeping and archiving as an integrated process, rather than rely on end-point appraisal (after decades of evolution of the social movement over various media types) into traditional archival constructs." [215]

They conclude that "online platforms and technologies can support radical recordkeeping by activist groups, shift societal opinions about animal rights and strengthen the community"[216] only in the short term. Using online platforms can "limit the degree of autonomy in recordkeeping and may not

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[211] Katherine Jarvie, Joanne Evans, and Sue McKemmish, "Radical Appraisal in Support of Archival Autonomy for Animal Rights Activism." *Archival Science* 21, no. 4 (2021): 361.

[212] Jarvie, Evans, McKemmish, "Radical Appraisal in Support of Archival Autonomy for Animal Rights Activism," 354.

[213] Jarvie, Evans, McKemmish, 354.

[214] Jarvie, Evans, McKemmish, 355.

[215] Jarvie, Evans, McKemmish, 367.

[216] Jarvie, Evans, McKemmish, 368.

provide for the sustainability of records through time."[217] Calling "traditional collecting frameworks"

more of a problem than solution, they encourage "radical recordkeeping researchers" to be a part of this

inspiring movement and "rethink and remodel inequitable recordkeeping structures embedded into

broader societal frameworks."[218] They further posit,

> Working with activist groups, radical recordkeeping researchers can contribute to a future in
> which integrated radical recordkeeping and archiving processes are supported by transformed,
> distributed platforms, free from outside control, commercial misappropriation of content,
> hacking, or governmental intervention.[219]

Lee believes that to be prepared for change is to be radically hospitable.[220] Emphasizing the relationality

of archives, they further elaborate on the kinds of archives they do and do not consider radically

hospitable:

> Traditionally these relations have been undertaken in the service of asymmetrical social relations.
> That is, they have been created to categorize and contain stories that supported normative societal
> structuring and hierarchies, or what I like to playfully call traditional hierarchives to draw
> attention to this longstanding relationship that I am working to dismantle in my work. The
> archival stories possessed structuring power. The archives I am inviting and welcoming you to is
> a multi-perspectival space of exchange, meaning/s-making, and reservation![221]

About the importance of reservation, Lee asserts, "reservations are the critical practice that make room for

consistent questioning in a space meant to remain radically open.[222] To Lee, who identifies as "the

storytelling receptionist and concierge,"[223] the "elemental part" of archival hospitality is storytelling.[224]

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[217] Jarvie, Evans, McKemmish, 368.

[218] Jarvie, Evans, McKemmish, 368.

[219] Jarvie, Evans, McKemmish, 367-68.

[220] Jamie Lee, "Archives as Spaces of Radical Hospitality," 3.

[221] Lee, 2.

[222] Lee, 2.

[223] Lee, 1.

[224] Lee, 3.

Despite the "messiness" of storytelling, Lee uses it as both an archival methodology[225] and as an "organizing principle and practice."[226] Believing that "Stories and storytelling are the embodied forces that can animate connections in and across space and time,"[227] Lee asserts that community archives can help create the kinds of "new worlds" that are "defined by embodied stories and archival storytelling practices."[228] Calling radically hospitable archives places "to be moved in and by stories and storytellers that help to shape our ideas of connecting within the world,"[229] Lee concludes:

> Radical hospitality is a world-making practice that recognizes all the ways people and their histories have been oppressed, erased, and denigrated. It is also a space to lift the voices and visions and living histories of those who have experienced the inhospitable. The archives that I continue to co-create with, for, and from these oral histories become the spaces for ongoing education and community participation so that people from our local LGBTQI communities have their hands, heads, and hearts involved in the building of their own ongoing histories of having been, being, and becoming.
> Welcome to the archives.[230]

Lee believes that the "foundational move into a paradigm of radical hospitality begins with community archives and their work to be the spaces of and for relationships across temporal moments."[231] Caswell, Punzalan, and Sangwand assert, in turn, that "community-based archival initiatives critically interrogate the role of archives, records and archival actions and practices in bringing about or impeding social justice, in understanding and coming to terms with past wrongs or permitting continued silences, or in empowering historically or contemporarily marginalized and displaced communities."[232]

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[225] Lee, 1.

[226] Lee, 2.

[227] Lee, 5.

[228] Lee, 1.

[229] Lee, 6.

[230] Lee, 7.

[231] Lee, 3.

[232] Caswell, Punzalan, and Sangwand, "Critical Archival Studies: An Introduction," 1.

In *Urgent Archives*, Caswell elaborates on what she believes to be the "the radical politics of

community archives" and discusses the oppressive nature of the "dominant Western archival theories and

practices." She further posits that "based on more than a decade of ethnography at community archives

sites including the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA), the book explores how members of

minoritized communities activate records to build solidarities across and within communities, trouble

linear progress narratives, and disrupt cycles of oppression."[233] Douglas et al. assert that community

archives "are often formed in reaction to the failure of mainstream archives to tell an accurate and

complex story of marginalized communities."[234] Caswell, Cifor, and Ramirez report on their empirically

assessed research on the impact of community archives on communities.[235] They posit,

> community archives can have an important epistemological, ontological, and social impact on the
> communities they represent. While quantitative measures of such impact remain elusive, it is
> possible to qualitatively assess this impact through in-depth interviews with community users, as
> our research has indicated. The themes identified in our research—the absences of mainstream
> media and repositories, the affective impact of discovery both personally and on students, the
> complex representation of diversity within the community, and the promotion of feelings of
> inclusion—all point to the ways community archives are powerful forces in communities who
> have historically been excluded from more formal and well-established institutions.[236]

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[233] Michelle Caswell, *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work*. Abingdon, Oxon; (New York, NY:

Routledge, 2021.

[234] Douglas et al. ""Come Correct or Don't Come at all:" Building More Equitable Relationships between Archival

Studies Scholars and Community Archives." (2021): 4.

[235] SAADA, "Community Archives Collaborative," https://www.saada.org/project/community-archives-

collaborative. Initial ideas for the Collaborative emerged at the Architecting Sustainable Futures event in September

2018. Architecting Sustainable Futures, https://architectingsustainablefutures.org/.

[236] Michelle Caswell, Marika Cifor, and Mario H. Ramirez, ""to Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing": Uncovering

the Impact of Community Archives," *The American Archivist* 79, no. 1 (2016): 35-36.

They subsequently coin the term "representational belonging"[237] in order "to describe the ways in which community archives empower" marginalized people and communities to negate the adverse effects of "symbolic annihilation" imposed on them via memory institutions and mainstream media's misrepresentation and ignorance of and about their culture.[238] Being represented in their community archives gives minoritized communities "autonomy and authority to establish, enact, and reflect on their presence in ways that are complex, meaningful, substantive, and positive to them in a variety of symbolic contexts."[239]

In "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives*,"* Caswell and Cifor advocate for "a shift in the theoretical model used by archivists and archival studies scholars to address social justice concerns – from that based on individual rights to a model based on feminist ethics."[240] Feminist ethics of care centers "radical empathy and obligations of care" [241]over "individual rights."[242] In their roles as "caregivers"[243] archivists have "affective responsibilities"[244] to "records creators, subjects, users, and communities."[245] Caswell and Cifor define radical empathy in an archival context as a kind of empathy that "define[s] archival interactions even when our own visceral affective

[237] Caswell, Cifor, Ramirez, "to Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing," 3.

[238] Caswell, Cifor, Ramirez, 3.

[239] Caswell, Cifor, Ramirez, 4.

[240] Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor, "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives," *Archivaria* 81, no. 1 (2016): 23.

[241] Caswell and Cifor, "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics," 23.

[242] Caswell and Cifor, 23.

[243] Caswell and Cifor, 24.

[244] Caswell and Cifor, 24.

[245] Caswell and Cifor, 24.

responses are steeped in fear, disgust, or anger. Such empathy is radical if it is directed precisely at those we feel are least worthy, least deserving of it."[246] They argue that "a rights-based approach"[247] has only been useful in extreme circumstances in the context of social justice archives, however, "it ignores the realities of more subtle, intangible, and shifting forms of oppression that are also pressing social justice concerns."[248] Further explaining the concept of empathy in archival context, they posit,

> Our conception of empathy is radical in its openness and its call for a willingness to be affected, to be shaped by another's experiences, without blurring the lines between the self and the other. The notion of empathy we are positing assumes that subjects are embodied, that we are inextricably bound to each other through relationships, that we live in complex relations to each other infused with power differences and inequities, and that we care about each other's well-being.[249]

In a call to archivists to learn to "look with love", Jennifer Douglas and Alexandra Alisauskas refer to the concept of archivists' "affective responsibilities" to records created by bereaved mothers.[250] Radically questioning the ability of foundational archival theory to engage with these materials, recognize them as records, and enact care, they ask, "what has archival theory missed?" In their attempt to "centre" parents' "loss, and their love and the ways these have shaped their understanding of what a record is and what it can do in the world,"[251] Douglas and Alisauskas "worked to suspend disciplinary judgment and to listen to what recordmaking and recordkeeping means to the parents"[252] to whom they spoke.

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[246] Caswell and Cifor, 25.

[247] Caswell and Cifor, 27.

[248] Caswell and Cifor, 27.

[249] Caswell and Cifor, 31.

[250] Jennifer Douglas and Alexandra Alisauskas, "It Feels Like a Life's Work: Recordkeeping," 6.

[251] Douglas and Alisauskas, 10.

[252] Douglas and Alisauskas, 10.

By radically replacing the traditional archival theory with "looking and listening with love," Douglas and Alisauskas were able to not only identify types of "records of grief, love, and connection,"[253] but also to learn about the functions of those records. Moving beyond the traditional archival definition of records, which "is to provide information about and evidence of past event and actions…[and] as perpetuating memory,"[254] Douglas and Alisauskas identified the following functions for these records: records as proof of life and love;[255] recordkeeping as a kind of parenting;[256] recordkeeping as a means of communicating and continuing a relationship;[257] recorkeeping as imagining."[258] Confirming that "records exist outside custody, in personal and intimate contexts, and are not lesser records because of those contexts,"[259] Douglas and Alisauskas ask, "how should archival theory and practice engage with these types of materials?"[260] They further conclude that "looking with love requires us to rethink the fundamental premises employed in archival theory to make decisions about what is or is not a record and what needs to be done to records in order to care for them."[261]

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[253] Douglas and Alisauskas, 10.

[254] Douglas and Alisauskas, 23.

[255] Douglas and Alisauskas, 23.

[256] Douglas and Alisauskas, 25.

[257] Douglas and Alisauskas, 26.

[258] Douglas and Alisauskas, 28.

[259] Douglas and Alisauskas, 34.

[260] Douglas and Alisauskas, 34.

[261] Douglas and Alisauskas, 35.

In "Pluralizing the Archives," Gilliland, Lau, McKemmish argue that "pluralization of the

Archive can help society to address bitter pasts through reconciliation in the present."[262] In particular, it

can help answer questions such as:

> What are the ethical imperatives for archives and archivists to address the legacy of past injustices? How can traditional institutional archives support multiple stories and also protect vulnerable communities and individuals associated with the records? How can differently configured archives enable oppressed, ignored and misrepresented communities and individuals to tell their stories in their own ways? How can recordkeeping and documentation practices address the needs of parts of communities that have been broken up or dispersed, or are closeted or underground? How can archival and recordkeeping theory and practice be transformed to support an archival multiverse?[263]

Speaking to "the complexities of queer identities and groups"[264] they argue that a close attention to

intersectionality is required to stop "double marginalization." [265] Discussing queer archives and the need

to create spaces for the "complexities within queer communities in respect to race, class, gender, and

ability, among other categories,"[266] Cifor posits,

> the turn toward participatory archival practices in community-based archives offers the opportunity to have queer and trans communities develop collection priorities themselves, and for archival repositories to collect with greater complexity. Collecting around violence matters, but there is a need to move toward commemorating queer and trans lives that are being lived, and not just those that are brutally cut short…While hate-based violence against LGBT people must be remembered in the archives, we should employ a queerer and more critical archival practice to contend with hatred in all its multiple forms and avoid reflecting and reifying problematic systems of power that operate to harm queer and trans people.[267]

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[262] Gilliland, Lau, McKemmish, "Pluralizing the Archive," 62.

[263] Gilliland, Lau, McKemmish, 62.

[264] Gilliland, Lau, McKemmish, 65.

[265] Gilliland, Lau, McKemmish, 65.

[266] Marika Cifor, "Aligning Bodies: Collecting, Arranging, and Describing Hatred for a Critical Queer

Archives," *Library Trends* 64, no. 4 (2016): 768.

[267] Marika Cifor, "Aligning Bodies: Collecting, Arranging, and Describing Hatred for a Critical Queer

Archives," 768-69.

Because "hate mail and other manifestations of the affect of hatred emerge in small spurts and unexpected files," we might miss the chance to critically examine "hatred as an organizing principle."[268] To "fully consider the content, focus, and implications of placing records of hate in conjunction with other artifacts in the file"[269] Cifor argues that we must name the negative affect. For example, Cifor talks about a grassroot queer community archives called Sexual Minorities Archives (SMA) that "responds to hate, as found in those materials that negatively describe sexual minorities, by classifying it as 'bullshit'." By naming the negative affect, Cifor argues, "the archivist also speaks to the alignment of queers with archives through affect. Such a queer and critical descriptive practice requires archivists to engage affectively, raising important questions about our roles in shaping collective memories and our accountability to archival constituencies."[270]

Although as Ghaddar and Caswell posit, "critical archiving, recordkeeping and practice are emerging at the nexus of continuum and critical theories,"[271] Gilliland cautions,

> we should not congratulate ourselves too much. Archives remain saturated with the power relations and bigotries along all of the axes that have divided and subordinated societies, generations, and practices; and even though, by-and-large, they know better, both archival professionals and scholars and the infrastructures within which they function are still predominantly responsible for this status quo.[272]

Heeding Gilliland's warning, this autoethnographic case study is designed to depict alternative archival spaces designed by community members for community members. @queerkadeh is developed in a specific and distinct manner to meet the community's specific and distinct needs and can serve as an

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[268] Cifor, 757.

[269] Cifor, 757.

[270] Cifor, 764.

[271] Ghaddar and Caswell, "To Go Beyond," 80.

[272] Gracen Brilmyer, María Montenegro, and Anne Gilliland. "Introduction: [Mis]Representation, [Dis]Memory, & [Re]Figuring the Archival Lens." (2019).

example of an alternative archival space for safekeeping and providing access to memories that would otherwise be lost.

1.5   Summary and Conclusion

In this chapter, I offered an overview of the objectives of this thesis and outlined the overarching questions that guide this research. I provided a brief summary of the history of queer erasure in Iran and explored its underlying causes and the ways in which this "historic amnesia" affects the lives of queer people living in the multi-national state of Iran. I concluded this chapter by offering a literature review of critical archival scholarship that continues to move the archival discipline towards a decolonized and just future in which distinct communities can use their own voices to represent their dynamic, complimentary, and contradictory lives.

Chapter two of this thesis outlines the methodological approach leveraged in this thesis and offers a discussion about the importance of autoethnographic approaches in research and how self-reflection as a methodology can contribute to decolonizing research. This discussion is followed by a brief narrative of how I conceptualize and represent myself in the context of research and research practices. I then introduce the seven areas of focus outlined by the queer/ed archival methodology and describe the ways I leverage this approach as an analysis framework to retroactively assess the decisions and events that shaped @queerkadeh's development. A discussion about the ethical consideration of this research concludes chapter two.

In chapter three, I offer autoethnographic narratives from two phases of @queerkadeh's development through which I outline what @queerkadeh does, the content it creates and effects of Instagram's affordance on @queerkadeh's flexibility and functions. Phase one tells the story of @queerkadeh's genesis and early days of operational planning and activities. The narratives in phase two describes a tragic event and the way it affected @queerkadeh's outlook on activism and archival practices, as well as the outcomes that followed and the changes that occurred in the structure of

@queerkadeh from a community space to a non-profit organization. Narratives from each phase are followed by brief reflections about that phase through the Q/M approach.

Chapter four offers a discussion on how the Q/M can be leveraged as an analysis framework to gain an understanding of the ways digital spaces such as @queerkadeh might function as an archives for their distinct communities. I offer a discussion about each area of focus outlined in the Q/M and explore the extent to which @queerkadeh might adhere to its recommendations by outlining some of the themes that emerged from the narrative in chapter three. As @queerkadeh leverages Instagram as its platform, some of the discussions about the flexibility and dynamism of @queerkadeh also reflect on Instagram affordance. This chapter also reflects on the flexibility of the Q/M as a framework for analysis of spaces designed for intersectional and distinct communities. A discussion about the limitations of this thesis and the possible next steps followed by an overall conclusion of this thesis concludes chapter four.

Chapter 2: Methodology

2.1   Introduction

In *Archival and Recordkeeping Research*, Anne Gilliland and Sue McKemmish "provide an overview of research in the archival multiverse"[273] and argue for the necessity of a pluralistic, postmodern, postcolonial, and post-conflict approach in archival research "in response to societal challenges relating to social justice and inclusion." [274] Since research is supposed to "challenge and transform existing paradigms, constructs and practices," especially in this "increasingly interconnected and globalized world,"[275] and "promote nuanced responsiveness to social, technological and intellectual developments,"[276] they believe that "ethnic and critical race studies, transnational approaches and theories of the diaspora" must inform archival reconceptualization.[277] In this thesis, I leverage autoethnographic methodology to the case study of @queerkadeh, a digital archival space on Instagram, and follow that narrative by assessing this space through the framework of Lee's queer/ed archival methodology. This chapter introduces the multilayered research methodology employed in this thesis and outlines some of the reasons the combination of these approaches was chosen as the appropriate approach for this thesis. I conclude this chapter by offering a discussion about the ethical ramifications of autoethnographic case study of a marginalized community.

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[273] Gilliland and McKemmish, "Chapter 4 - Archival and Recordkeeping Research: Past, Present and Future," 85.

[274] Gilliland and McKemmish, 100.

[275] Gilliland and McKemmish, 93.

[276] Gilliland and McKemmish, 86.

[277] Gilliland and McKemmish, 93.

2.1.1   Autoethnography as Research Methodology

Autoethnography can address "unanswered questions,"[278] disrupt and challenge "the power imbalances associated with race and class," and explore "what constitutes knowing."[279] The postmodern philosophy[280] embedded in autoethnographic research "make[s] room for non-traditional forms of inquiry and expression."[281] This qualitative methodology is closely related to critical theories[282] and nudges against the traditional "scientific and objective" assumptions about research. Autoethnography "holds wonderful, symbolic, emancipatory promises" according to Wall, who believes autoethnography has the power "to change the world and create a space for the sharing of unique, subjective, and evocative stories of experience that contribute to our understanding of the social world and allow us to reflect on what could be different because of what we have learned." [283]

According to *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, "autoethnography refers to ethnographic research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political."[284] Wall similarly suggests that by making space "for non-traditional forms of inquiry and expression,"[285] autoethnography depicts "an inextricable link between the

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[278] Walls, 149.

[279] Wall, 147.

[280] Sarah Wall, "An Autoethnography on Learning about Autoethnography," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 5, no. 2 (2006): 146.

[281] Sarah Wall, "An Autoethnography on Learning about Autoethnography," 146.

[282] Wall, 147.

[283] Walls, 214.

[284] Lisa Given, *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, edited by Lisa Given. Los Angeles, Calif: Sage Publications, 2012: 50.

[285] Sarah Wall, "An Autoethnography on Learning about Autoethnography," 146.

personal and the cultural."[286] Considering autoethnography as a possible decolonizing approach, which

"uses self-reflection and writing to explore … personal experiences situated within wider cultural,

political, historical, and social contexts,"[287] Norissa Williams believes it "is an apt research method

to explore issues of importance to marginalized communities."[288] Using her "own life experiences as

a starting point and a site of research,"[289] Williams explores "the impact of colonization on psychology

and discussion of the need for decolonizing research methods"[290] and asserts that "the use of

autoethnography in the exploration of coping and resilience from a Caribbean perspective proved fruitful,

with many advantages for both the researcher and the researched."[291] Wall too points to

autoethnography's "usefulness in explicating tacit knowledge and improving practice."[292] As such, Wall

argues, "ultimately, using self as subject is a way of acknowledging the self that was always there anyway

and of exploring personal connections to our culture."[293]

In *Is This Too Personal,* Douglas "demonstrate(s) how autoethnography can provide a lens for

identifying points of tension, conflict and vulnerability in online research,"[294] by drawing from her own

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[286] Wall, 146.

[287] Norissa Williams, "Autoethnography: A Decolonizing Research Methodological Approach," In *SAGE Research Methods Cases*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2022. https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781529759563.

[288] Norissa Williams, "Autoethnography: A Decolonizing Research Methodological Approach," 2.

[289] Williams, 7.

[290] Williams, 12.

[291] Williams, 12.

[292] Sarah Wall, "An Autoethnography on Learning about Autoethnography," 158.

[293] Sarah Wall, "An Autoethnography on Learning about Autoethnography," 158.

[294] Jennifer Douglas, "Is this Too Personal? an Autoethnographic Approach to Researching Intimate Archives Online," In *Diversity, Divergence, Dialogue*, Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021: 301.

"experience of bereavement and her subsequent research in online grief communities."[295] Douglas offers

a narrative about the processes and outcome of the ways in which "a research project evolved from

personal experience." [296] This experience compels Douglas to discuss the value of "a personal approach

to data collection, analysis and understanding."[297] Furthermore, Douglas references the works of Carolyn

Ellis[298] regarding compassionate research and advocates for and agrees with Ellis's assertion that

"compassionate research connects us with others, emphasizes what we can do for participants, and

contributes to social justice."[299] Douglas's discussion on autoethnographic methodology is important in

the present study, which is also online, personal, and intimate, because through her research, Douglas sets

a precedence of leveraging this methodology in the archival field and also advocates for employing

compassion when entering these spaces. Both Ellis and Douglas agree that autoethnographic research

strengthens the "development"[300] of compassionate research.

In another article, Douglas and Allison Mills each carry out an autoethnographic approach to

explore their "personal relationship to a particular set of institutional records."[301] By arguing that

"autoethnography itself is a means of activating records in a personal capacity,"[302] Douglas and Mills

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[295] Douglas, "Is this Too Personal?" 301.

[296] Douglas, 302.

[297] Douglas, 302.

[298] Ellis, "Manifesting Compassionate Autoethnographic Research," 54.

[299] Carolyn Ellis, "Manifesting Compassionate Autoethnographic Research: Focusing on Others," *International Review of Qualitative Research* 10, no. 1 (2017): 54.

[300] Douglas, "Is this Too Personal?" 301.

[301] Jennifer Douglas and Allison Mills, "From the Sidelines to the Center: Reconsidering the Potential of the Personal in Archives," *Archival Science* 18, no. 3 (2018): 263.

[302] Douglas and Mills, 264.

"explore… the personal relationships between individuals and records." "Centering the personal" Douglas and Mills assert, can bring more understanding to archivists' perspective of "their responsibilities to those who create, are captured in and consult the records in our care."[303]

Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis, editors of the second edition of *Handbook of Autoethnography*, believe autoethnography is "a genre of doubt and dissent."[304] Departing from the traditional objective stance of research, autoethnography questions the "uncertainty" within research and elevates "vulnerability and reflexivity" to depict different sides of life.[305] As a genre of dissent, autoethnography leverages "our thoughts, dreams, and prayers" in a call to action to bring about change in research practice and representation.[306]

Adams, Holman Jones and Ellis argue that presently researchers are more open to considering autoethnography as a method than they were when the first edition of *The Handbook of Autoethnography* was published. They assert that "autoethnography has changed, and continues to change, the landscape of interpretive methods and qualitative research."[307] To show the increasing validity of this method among the research community, they point out that "autoethnography and autoethnographic research" have been the "focus of several international gatherings"[308] such as "The International Congress of Qualitative

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[303] Douglas and Mills, 254.

[304] Tony Adams et al. ed, *Handbook of Autoethnography,* 2021, Routledge, 12,
https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429431760

[305] Tony Adams et al. ed., *Handbook of Autoethnography*, 12.

[306] Tony Adams et al., 13.

[307] Tony Adams et al., 2.

[308] Tony Adams et al., 1.

Inquiry (ICQI)… the International Symposium on Autoethnography and Narrative, and The Qualitative Report Annual Conference."[309]

Even so, there is still considerable push back against "autoethnography, [as] an approach to research."[310] As Wall asserts, the "ways of inquiry that connect with real people, their lives, and their issues are seen as soft and fluffy and, although nice, not valuable in the scientific community."[311] Similarly, in *A Millennial Methodology?,* Nathan Stephens Griffin and Naomi Griffin "highlight the challenges … [of] producing insider autoethnographic research, [by] drawing a parallel with criticism frequently levelled at the so-called millennial generation."[312] These disapprovals dub both millennials and autoethnography as "lazy and narcissistic."[313] Despite being rejected and "ridiculed," however, autoethnography continues to be a relevant research method "that attempts to qualitatively and reflexively make sense of the self and society in an increasingly uncertain and precarious world."[314] Stephens Griffin and Griffin, as well as Wall,[315] advocate for a an autoethnographic methodology that creates balance "between analytic and evocative autoethnographic traditions."[316] Following their recommendation, in this

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[309] Tony Adams et al., 1-2.

[310] Nathan David Stephens Griffin and Naomi Christina Griffin. "A Millennial Methodology? Autoethnographic Research in do-it-Yourself (DIY) Punk and Activist Communities." *Forum, Qualitative Social Research* 20, no. 3 (2019): 2.

[311] Sarah Wall, "An Autoethnography on Learning about Autoethnography," 147.

[312] Stephens Griffin and Griffin, "A Millennial Methodology," 2.

[313] Stephens Griffin and Naomi Griffin, 2.

[314] Stephens Griffin and Griffin, 2.

[315] Stephens Griffin and Griffin, 2.

[316] Stephens Griffin and Griffin, 2.

thesis I offer narratives from the processes of developing and maintaining @queerkadeh, an intimate

archival space, and follow that by offering a theoretical analysis through the Q/M framework.

2.1.2   Autoethnography as a method

The second edition of *The Handbook of Autoethnography* tells us that, as a method,

autoethnography should engage in "three characteristics or activities: the "auto," or self; the "ethno," or

culture; and the "graphy," or "representation/writing/ story."[317] "Auto" refers to a stage in which

ethnographic researchers "share intimate and vulnerable experiences that sometimes bring forth shame or

sorrow; experiences and situations that shaped us and these events; and moments that motivated joy,

confusion, conflict, grief, passion, and possibly trauma," and thus "foreground … [their] personal

experience and reflections."[318] "Ethno" refers to autoethnographic researchers' use of "extensive

reflective journal(s) …as e-mails, memos, and sketches" [319] as well as "memory work and archival

research"[320] in order to support and evaluate their work, "identify patterns of thought, talk, feeling, and

action… and offer insights about issues and contexts that other research methods are unable to access."[321]

Lastly, concerned with the "craft of the representation" autoethnographers "take… the 'graphy' seriously"

and seek "to tell a carefully written, vibrant story that revels in rich description"[322] by employing

techniques such as "character development, dialogue, [and] narrative voice."[323]

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[317] Tony Adams et al. ed., *Handbook of Autoethnography*, 3.

[318] Tony Adams, 3.

[319] Wall, "An Autoethnography on Learning about Autoethnography," 45.

[320] Tony Adams et al. ed., *Handbook of Autoethnography*, 3.

[321] Tony Adams et al., 3.

[322] Tony Adams et al., 3-4.

[323] Tony Adams et al., 3.

According to Williams, due to "diversity in autoethnographic approaches" data can be collected, analyzed, interpreted, and presented as findings in different ways, including "traditionally (i.e., peer reviewed publications and conference presentations) or non-traditionally (i.e., interpretative performances like dance or theater)."[324] Wall identifies several sources of data in autoethnographic examples she studied, including reflective journals, emails, memos, sketches;[325] citing Ettore's work, Wall also acknowledges memory as a source of autoethnographic data.[326] Wall references Margaret Mead's use of "headnotes,"[327] and asserts "perhaps unexpectedly, it might also be that headnotes are more reliable than field notes or other written records of the field."[328] Although headnotes may seem less precise and dependable than a written journal, what is remembered from events provides context as it is not just the event that is remembered but also the affects brought on by that event.

Whether autoethnographers use headnotes, written journals, or other notetaking/memory keeping tools as our sources of data in autoethnography, *The Handbook of Autoethnography* suggests adhering to the following steps "to create compelling and useful research:"[329]

(1)   foreground particular and subjective knowledge;

(2)   illustrate sensemaking processes;

(3)   make contributions to existing research;

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[324] Williams, "Autoethnography: A Decolonizing Research Methodological Approach," 7.

[325] Sarah Wall, "Easier Said than done: Writing an Autoethnography." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 7, no. 1 (2008): 38-53.

[326] Elizabeth Ettorre, "Gender, older female bodies and autoethnography: Finding my feminist voice by telling my illness story." *Women's Studies International Forum*, 28, (2005): 535–546.

[327] Wall, 45.

[328] Wall, 45.

[329] Tony Adams et al., ed., Handbook of Autoethnography, 4.

(4)   challenge norms of research practice and representation; and

(5)   engage and compel responses from audiences. [330]

2.1.3   A Narrative of Vulnerability and The Self

Before beginning a full account of my autoethnographic study, it is important that I situate myself as a researcher. As a former informant and a current researcher, in what follows, I share my tale of "anger and joy"[331] and explain how these affects shaped this project and changed my understanding of the role of the researcher from an observer to "a holder of space." [332]

I come from a culture that has long been the subject of research by those foreign to it. In my very first semester as a university student in the United States, I took Anthropology 101, and was shocked by how different my culture was represented from how I had known it to be in the twenty-one years I spent there. This prompted me to question how "other" cultures are represented in the dominant narrative of the West. Naively, due to an utter lack of any education or awareness on topics of colonization, imperialization, and racism throughout my education in Iran, I thought my culture was misrepresented because of the absent lines of communications between our academic worlds. I believed if there were a bridge that connected the two worlds, at least in fields of humanities, arts, and culture, we would have better representations. So, I decided to major in Middle Eastern Studies and represent my community through my work and scholarship; I hoped that would help the white folks identify and fix their "mistakes." However, I am, to this day, traumatized by the outcome of that experience.

As a young scholar, new to Western academia, and aching to hear my mother tongue, I started conversing with the head of ████████ at the university. He was white, although I hadn't learned to

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[330] Tony Adams et al., ed., Handbook of Autoethnography, 4.

[331] Michelle Caswell, "Feeling Liberatory Memory Work."

[332] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance (*Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 13-15.

notice such things or be suspicious of them at that time yet, and young. More importantly, he spoke Farsi well, for an American. We became interlocutors and I told him about my dreams of becoming a scholar and making meaningful and lasting changes in the way the Middle East was studied in the West. He seemed supportive. When he asked me to grade his papers and find resources for his upcoming books and taught me how to use the microfiche reader to find him evidence of fifty-year-old movies in old Iranian newspapers, without pay or title, I thought I was being trained for my future career.

When he asked for my assistance in planning a trip to Iran with a number of his students, family members, friends and his boyfriend, I felt honoured to be a part of this "dialogue among civilization."[333] The journey to Iran with ten Americans was as hard as it sounds, and as expensive. The "guests" required constant supervision and handholding. After two weeks touring around the country all the Americans left, except for him. He stayed in Tehran for an additional two weeks, was hosted by me and my father, and conducted research for his second book. I would accompany him, of course, and would plan some of his meetings and help as a translator when he had a hard time finding research-appropriate words in Farsi. On our last day, walking down on one of Tehran's most beautiful and famous streets, he told me I shouldn't apply for the PhD program after all; that he had already received an application he was intrigued by, and even if that wasn't the case, Middle Eastern Studies "was just not right" for me. Exhausted from playing the host, the research assistant, the secretary, and the tour guide all at once, my hopes for the future shattered. I remember vividly, at what intersection, by which bookstore, and at what time, I gave up on my lifelong dream.

A year later, I was admitted to the University of British Columbia's iSchool program to pursue a double master's in library and archival studies. The world seemed to have gone mad, or maybe it was just

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[333] Seyed Mohammad Khatami, "Dialogue Among Civilizations: Contexts and Perspectives," UN Chronicle, United Nations, Retrieved March 8, 2022, https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/dialogue-among-civilizations-contexts-and-perspectives

my world that didn't make sense. The forty-fifth president of the United States banned my people from

entering the country, a place I had been calling home, at that point, for over a decade. Mida, my wife of

only two weeks, was stuck behind the racially constructed red tape of the American immigration system,

and I was very broken. In my second semester, while questioning if I would ever fit in the academic

world, and if there could ever be a real decolonial research methodology, I was assigned Leanne

Betasamosake Simpson's book *As We Have Always Done* in one of my courses about the treatment of

First Nations in academia. In the first chapter, she describes her account of working with a non-native

anthropologist and her suspicion of him at the beginning of their project. Surprised by his

"overwhelmingly different"[334] approach, she writes,

> Paul did something that has stayed with me and has always informed my approach to working with communities and to research. He was invited into the community to do a specific task, which in the end he delivered, but he actively and continually divested himself of the false power the academy bestowed upon him when he drove onto the reserve. He asked the Elders if they thought the project was a good idea. They said it was. He asked them how best to proceed. They told him. He asked them if they would be the decision makers. They agreed, and then they were, and he got out of their way.
> …At the time, I could only frame it within collaborative or participatory or community-based methodologies, but it was really none of those. Those kinds of methodologies to some degree privileged Western theories, epistemologies, or knowledge systems, and the process that emerged in this situation was Nishnaabeg to the core. These methodologies assume there is a role for the aca- demic. Paul did not. He came into their circle on the terms of the experts, the Nishnaabeg Elders, not the other way around… By taking such a radically different approach to both community and research, Paul divested his power and authority as an academic that had been placed on him by the academy and then by an Aboriginal organization and placed that responsibility where it belonged: with the leaders and the intellectuals of the community. *Paul was a holder of space*[335]. He created the space for Elders to not just say the prayer and smudge us off at the beginning of the meeting but to be the meeting. He created the space to put Nishnaabeg intelligence at the center and to use its energy to drive the project.[336]

I still read this passage from time to time to remind myself that there is, indeed, another way to do

research. I am, however, reminded of that more often recently, every time I engage with critical archival

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[334] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Don,* 13.

[335] Italicized by thesis author.

[336] Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Don,* 13-15.

scholars and scholarship. Through my remaining years at UBC's iSchool, I learned about ethical research, research reciprocity, and mutual respect. I learned about the #ownvoices movement and the difference it makes in preventing "harmful tropes"[337] in representation. Additionally, I learned about the concept of parachuting researchers[338] from the Reciprocity in Researching Records Collective [339] who referenced an editorial[340] in *The Lancet: Global Health* that defined a parachute researcher as "one who drops into a country, makes use of the local infrastructure, personnel, and patients, and then goes home and writes an academic paper for a prestigious journal."[341] The Lancet editors assert their "extremely unfavourabl(e)"[342] view "on papers submitted by authors who have done primary research in another country (particularly a low-income or middle-income country) but not included any author from that nation."[343] In response to authors who might claim there was no "substantial contribution" from local scholars, they assert,

> perhaps, as events played out, none of those individuals additionally fulfilled the criteria of a substantial contribution to the design of the study or writing of the report, but then perhaps they were not given the opportunity. Perhaps if they had, the design would have been more appropriate to the setting and the contextual interpretation more realistic.[344]

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[337] Shannon, Steffens, "Despite Controversy, #OwnVoices is Here to Make a Difference," WWU Honors Program Senior Projects, (2021): 5, https://cedar.wwu.edu/wwu_honors/499

[338] Douglas et al., "Come Correct or Don't Come at all," 5.

[339] Douglas et al., 5.

[340] The Lancet Global Health. "Closing the Door on Parachutes and Parasites." *The Lancet Global Health* 6, no. 6 (2018): e593-e593.

[341] The Lancet Global Health, "Closing the Door on Parachutes and Parasites," e593.

[342] The Lancet Global Health, e 593.

[343] The Lancet Global Health, e 593.

[344] The Lancet Global Health, e 593.

I was faced with two main challenges on my way to become like Paul. The first challenge, which I am still struggling with, is that I am not a white middle-aged male professor in a systemically racist, sexist, heteronormative, and ableist society. I am aware that the space I can hold will be much smaller than Paul's. In fact, there are days when it is too hard to keep my own space as a Middle Eastern queer person who sometimes forgets essential English words in the middle of her speech. It is a constant battle to be me in this field, but that is not likely to be fixed anytime soon.

My second challenge, which was the one I absolutely needed to address before carrying out any kind of research for the benefit of my community was, and still is, their need for anonymity. The community that I wanted to hold a space for, so that they can be their own voices, have the agency to represent themselves, and manage and own their own archival material, needs to stay anonymous. Any recognition would risk their lives and the lives of their loved ones.[345] Finding a way to keep them both safe and represented continues to remain my biggest challenge.

In August of 2020, I came across Jamie Lee's Queer/ed Archival Methodology, Q/M as part of my reading assignment for a course. Besides its title, its concepts caught my attention as I found it relevant to my work. Lee asserts, for example, that "visibility might also create higher degrees of vulnerability,"[346] that the diversity in self-representation is "integral"[347] to their work, and that the

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[345] There are exceptions to this rule for those who identify as trans *and* heterosexual, are ing to undergo gender re-affirmation surgery, *and* have an official letter from a judge. Only in that case, they   be allowed to legally change their documents. For further information see Khorashad, Behzad S., Ali Talaei, Zahra Aghili, and Anahita Arabi. "Psychiatric Morbidity among Adult Transgender People in Iran." *Journal of Psychiatric Research* 142, (2021): 33-39.

[346] Jamie Ann Lee, "A Queer/Ed Archival Methodology: Theorizing Practice Through Radical Interrogations of The Archival Body," (PhD diss., University of Arizona, 2015): 163.

[347] Lee, "A Queer/Ed Archival Methodology," 162.

"flexibility" of Q/M can "respond to changes in local as well as global context."[348] Reading Lee's queer/ed archival methodology gave me an abundance of inspiration and a sliver of hope that perhaps there is a way to help my community represent themselves while staying safe and anonymous. Building @queerkadeh via my interpretive application of Q/M became my first attempt to become a holder of space.

2.2   Queer/ed Archival Methodology

For those of us "who are interested in the mundane, the ordinary, the queer, and… the non-normative,"[349] Lee's Q/M offers a "radically open," posthuman, and flexible framework through which we can "reimagine and allow for more complicated stories and interpretations to emerge in and around the archives."[350] Lee argues for the vitality of a shift, in archival theory and practice, from the postmodern to post-human framework which conveys different understandings of the concepts of body including how bodies, human and non-human, as well as bodies of knowledge are related to one another in "complex" [351] ways. This, in addition to the ways a posthuman approach allows for "simultaneously becoming and unbecoming within multiply-situated locations, identities, and timescapes"[352] are the reasons that the posthuman approach, Lee argues, "offers many possibilities."[353] The post-human framework is especially fitting in analyzing @queerkadeh. The everchanging content on Instagram that can be shared in real time as well as @queerkadeh's method of telling and hearing oral history accounts through friendly gatherings requires an analytical framework that accounts for its flexibility and dynamism. Since content on

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[348] Lee, 185.

[349] Lee, 41.

[350] Lee, 43.

[351] Lee, 12.

[352] Lee, 43.

[353] Lee, 12.

Instagram can be easily updated, revisited, and retold as many times as needed,[354] through Instagram's technological affordances, the relationship between the humans, Mida and I, @queerkadeh users, and the non-humans, such as various types of technology, is an important aspect that needs a reflection that the Q/M framework can provide as it is rooted in both the postmodern approach, which accounts for simultaneous multiplicity of positions and stories, and the posthuman approach, which stresses the connection between humans and the world around them.[355] As Lee suggests, working "from a postmodern framework in which there are multiple voices and multiple truths…[toward] a posthuman framework in which the multiplicities of human and nonhuman bodies are inextricably linked to the processes, politics, and productions of archives, archival collections, and archival records,"[356] is essential for "a holistic and transdisciplinary understanding of archives."[357]

As the founder of "Arizona's first LGBTQ archives and queer oral history collection,"[358] Lee questions the practices that urge archivists to normalize the otherwise complicated, contradictory, and "competing histories that are present in any given community." In the complex process of oral history production, bodies, including "bodies of knowledges, interviewer, interviewee, chairs, camera, video tape, memory card, digital video editor, computers, streaming media video producer, bandwidth, online media cataloger, and users, just to name a few,"[359] come together "in order to represent human and non-human records creators in relevant and meaningful ways."[360] Within the posthuman framework, Lee "turned to

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[354] Lee, 13.

[355] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, (Oxford: Polity Press, 2013).

[356] Lee, 46.

[357] Lee, 58.

[358] Lee, 18.

[359] Lee, 175-76.

[360] Lee, 67.

theories of embodiment to better grasp how the organizing principles of the politics of respectability—

one's desire to be respectable and 'good'… might function to promote a kind of exceptionalism and,

subsequently, work to exclude broader accountings of the lived histories.[361]

"As filmmaker and oral historian," [362] Lee emphasizes the importance and "the power of personal

stories" [363] and is interested in the way in which "some oral history interviewees upend dominant

narratives while others adhere to them"[364] However, Lee cautions that "memories are sometimes

disciplined to produce normative narratives about queer pasts."[365]Archivists and oral historians must be

aware that "traditional practices can run the risk of reproducing sexual normativities and social divisions

in the name of dominant and/or singular versions of lived histories," [366] since "generally these socially

approved norms are heteronormative."[367] For example, Lee talks about the emergence of "the common

'coming out' narratives that have come to define LGBTQ experiences as traumatic revealing and

vulnerable positioning."[368] Upon "closer examination" however, Lee argues that "the bodies perform and

present modes of knowing with gaps and silences that tell parts of the stories as well." [369] They "are

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[361] Lee, 78.

[362] Lee, 33.

[363] Lee, 33.

[364] Lee, 33.

[365] Lee, 42.

[366] Lee, 42.

[367] Lee, 101-02.

[368] Lee, 82.

[369] Lee, 82.

always in the process of becoming," [370] creating "multiple truths and multiple histories" that traditional archival practices are not equipped to capture.

As noted in the literature review of this thesis, the traditional archival practices have been challenged by critical archival scholars and the discipline's recent shift towards postmodern and anticolonial methodologies. In a 2018 article, for example, Douglas asserts that the traditional and classical theory of archives obscures "the creative roles of other individuals, communities and groups"[371] due to its narrow interpretation of key archival concepts, such as creatorship[372] which has remained "under-theorized and poorly defined."[373] As her research on writers' archives "clearly" depicts that the recent criticism on the traditional notion of archivists' neutrality and objectivity "are justified," Douglas calls on archival scholars and practitioners to continue examining and discussing the concept of creatorship. Challenging "the traditional view of creatorship,"[374] Douglas argues that "the act of creation, even when carried out by the individual traditionally named as creator, cannot be easily and straightforwardly characterized. Archives are created in any variety of ways, for any variety of purposes, and with any variety of deliberation and intentionality."[375] Douglas further argues that the traditional understanding of archives which depicts archives as "impartial," and archivists as neutral and objective, doesn't account for the fact that "archives have complex histories that affect how they accumulate and are arranged, re-arranged, interpreted and communicated over time."[376]

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[370] Lee, 82.

[371] Douglas, "A Call to Rethink Archival Creation," 30.

[372] Douglas, 40.

[373] Douglas, 40.

[374] Douglas, 30.

[375] Douglas, 42.

[376] Douglas, 35.

In addition to the limitations of the traditional understanding of archives and records, Lee is concerned about storytelling practices because not everybody "consider(s) themselves important or…their lives or stories as worth recording." [377] Understanding the notion of 'not/being "colorful" [378] enough' to tell stories becomes an important consideration in understanding @queerkadeh. Lee emphasizes the importance of a "transdisciplinary approach"[379] which "blends queer, social justice, feminist, and decolonizing methodological approaches."[380] They develop Q/M by applying these transdisciplinary approaches in their "observation and narrative analysis"[381] of selected fonds at several archival sites that held "normative and non-normative"[382] stories which were at the same time "complimentary and contradictory."[383] Defining "queer" in Q/M, Lee asserts that it is "both a practice and a politics of mis/recognizing, critiquing, and challenging stable categories of collection, recollection, identity, and ideas of belonging as they have become embodied, normativized, and often invisibilized."[384] As such, Lee extends the functionality of queer/ed archival methodology to "many distinct non-normative multiply-situated peoples and communities,"[385] in addition to calling "forward LGBTQI voices." Lee further asserts that "this work allows for the recognition that such bodies are simultaneously producing and being produced by the bodies of knowledge that are 'captured' (momentarily) and in the process of being

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[377] Lee, 18-19.

[378] Lee, 18-19.

[379] Lee, 11.

[380] Lee, 187.

[381] Lee, 11.

[382] Lee, 12.

[383] Lee, 12.

[384] Lee, 8.

[385] Lee, 8.

preserved within the archives." [386] Therefore, queer/ed archives can be the site of competing and contradictory stories of desires, erotics, fears, traumas, violences, and lived truths through ephemeral and material renderings of everyday living. It is no surprise then, Lee asserts, that these "bodies of multiple knowledges"[387]had never and never "fit into normative stable categories as dictated by dominant discourse and ideology."[388]

By analyzing their "early practices collecting oral histories as part of the Arizona LGBTQ Storytelling Project,"[389] Lee also explores how "radical openness" can "intervene in neocolonizing practices … that uphold the hierarchies and power differentials within the archival collections." [390] These neocolonizing practices, Lee believes, often "take place without questioning the politics and effects of those practices on the stories that the archives tells and the multiply-situated subjects therein." Defining radical in "its Latin tracing of radix" meaning "root" [391] Lee aims to "challenge the ongoing default settings of everyday archival practices,"[392] that "normalize and piece together a pre-scripted and easy-to-swallow story about people and their embodied experiences."[393] Q/M, then, is designed to help the "archival traditions [move] toward increasingly dynamic, radical, and open processes… through a queer and posthuman lens."[394]

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[386] Lee, 9.

[387] Lee, 44.

[388] Lee, 44.

[389] Lee, 34.

[390] Lee, 170-71.

[391] Lee, 15.

[392] Lee, 15.

[393] Lee, 217.

[394] Lee, 170-71.

Lee's "self-reflexive"[395] framework includes seven "key approaches."[396] These approaches, which are meant "to promote archival sustainability and ongoing relevancy,"[397] are: participatory ethos, connectivity, storytelling, intervention, re-framing, re-imagining, flexibility and dynamism. For each of these approaches, Lee offers theoretical and practical context along with examples of archival work, as well as a list of questions for archivists to explore as they move through these approaches. In what comes next, I offer my understanding of these approaches and/or note the main concepts about which they are each concerned.

2.2.1   Participatory Ethos

Participatory ethos, Lee explains, is an approach in which "meaning is derived through many perspectives, lived knowledges, knowledge systems… [ensuring that] many subjects and subjectivities are able to cross the archival threshold and be represented meaningfully."[398] Calling on archivists and "archives to make spaces for" existing voices who "are often erased from, hidden in, or pushed out of archival projects" rather than claiming to "give voice" to them, Lee asserts that participation is "urgent from community as well as from those developing the archives. Participation is reciprocal."[399]

2.2.2   Connectivity

Connectivity explores how archives relate to communities, and whether there is flexibility in these relationships for when there is a need for change. Acknowledging that "identity politics are complicated" Lee emphasizes the importance of "recognizing the shifting identificatory spaces,

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[395] Lee, 13.

[396] Lee, 12.

[397] Lee, 13.

[398] Lee, 92.

[399] Lee, 189-90.

intersections, and assemblages as they relate to race, class, gender, sexuality, ability"[400] in archival work and in archives as "radically open" spaces. Connectivity, Lee asserts, "constitutes connection, disconnection, and re-connection to contexts, histories, spaces, as well as to time and temporality." [401] Through this approach, "archives may become spaces for emerging connections to longing, belonging, desire, and erotics as archival records and collections intersect and bodies of knowledges as well as bodies themselves encounter one another."[402]

2.2.3   Storytelling

Referring back to "politics of respectability," Lee cautions archivists not to create a space in which archival users feel the need to tell their stories just "to belong to particular bodies of knowledges."[403] Lee questions the "entrenched and embodied archival practices" and at the same time critically interrogate(s) the embodied technologies of digital media, other nonlinear engagements, the implications of storytelling for individuals, cultures, communities, and society, as well as the issues of access tied to such historical productions.[404] Additionally, Lee encourages archives to "recognize that when contexts change the stories and storytelling techniques might also change and, therefore, the archives must remain flexible and dynamic."[405] To fulfill their role as human rights archives, and to promote social justice, archives must "consider the multimodal ways to represent multiple subjectivities as keys to promoting equity."[406] Through this approach, Lee questions the role of archivists "in collecting

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[400] Lee, 79.

[401] Lee, 197.

[402] Lee, 198.

[403] Lee, 201.

[404] Lee, 40.

[405] Lee, 200.

[406] Lee, 201.

and documenting stories,"[407] and provides multiple examples and suggestions of storytelling techniques to increase the flexibility and inclusivity of archives.[408]

2.2.4   Intervention

By revisiting archival collections and examining how they are connected to communities, archives can check the assumptions that a collection makes about "the community it pretends to represent."[409] Gaining an intimate knowledge about collections and the way they are arranged and described can help archivists identify the stories that "are being silenced in the not telling." This intervention can guide archivists in developing the future collection of their archives. Emphasizing that archives can contain multiple truths told "through digital video oral history interviews, photographs, documents, ephemera… and through multimodal representations," Lee stresses the importance of knowing the collections intimately, identifying misrepresentations, and "reflect(ing) on the silences, not to fill them with something else, but to recognize these spaces as such."[410]

2.2.5   Re-framing

Re-framing is a form of intervention that approaches archival practices through critically "queering and decolonizing"[411] archival spaces and practices. As an example, Lee explores how reframing might "shift the power of classification so that a radical openness to archival productions might break open the archive to expanded ways of thinking about multiply-situated non-normative peoples and communities."[412] It is through re-framing that archivists can explore how they "make sense" of traditional

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[407] Lee, 13-14.

[408] Lee, 203.

[409] Lee, 204.

[410] Lee, 204-05.

[411] Lee, 206.

[412] Lee, 209.

archival theories and practices to explore, for example "the recordness of the record along with the roles that the archivist plays"[413] to radically open archival spaces for the communities that use them.

2.2.6   Re-imagining

This approach makes use of transdisciplinary theory and methodology in order to "re-imagine complex pasts along with new possibilities that don't fit into disciplinary frames but open up new and generative spaces."[414] It can help "archives to be attentive to sexuality, race, class, gender, sex, ability, and geography," and define them through a "change-oriented"[415] mentality. Re-imagining, as a "transdisciplinary approach… directly connects to human rights archives and practices of social justice so that archivists can recognize and be attentive to complex pasts to then re-imagine new possibilities for a present and future."[416] As shifting bodies which are "always in motion as stories so far," the Q/M itself must be robust to acknowledge and assist to re-evaluate the archives in question.

2.2.7   Flexibility and Dynamism

This approach "involves the importance of queer theory to the Q/M as a flexible and dynamic framework."[417] Through this approach, Lee argues, we can ask "one important question"[418] about "an ideal configuration"[419] of the archives. Reminding us that "the normative and non-normative shift,"[420] Lee asks us to "keep in mind that you will be re-configuring this shape and structure in order to keep it

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[413] Lee, 209.

[414] Lee, 210.

[415] Lee, 210.

[416] Lee, 14.

[417] Lee, 211.

[418] Lee, 211.

[419] Lee, 211.

[420] Lee, 211.

relevant to communities, technologies, timescapes, emotions, and social, technical, cultural formations."[421] By asserting that "remembering and forgetting rely on collapsible/expandable frames of past, present, and future," Lee points to the "problematic"[422] nature of fixity.

It is, perhaps, obvious why I was drawn to this methodology as a member of a "non-normative multiply situated community that (has) been traditionally excluded from archival contexts… [and was only] included through colonizing and neocolonizing practices,"[423] Q/M is specifically applicable to my work since it was developed "most primarily, as an approach to archival work within communities that may be underrepresented in more traditional archives."[424] Questioning the "socially constructed" divide between "professional archivists and the nonprofessional archivists," Lee calls our attention to "the complexities involved in archival theories, practices, and productions as they are always already entangled with peoples, peoples' stories, as well as the non-human elements that may 'fix' and 'capture' these intimate memories, movements, and machinations."[425] Acknowledging that the Q/M "is not intended to resolve all archival dilemmas," and that it "is not a toolbox of practices and methods for contemporary archivists."[426] I especially appreciate the "guiding questions tied to Q/M …put forth for future scholars and practitioners to call upon when needed, especially in cases of new queer/ed archival development for and with multiply-situated subjects so as to meet the particular needs of distinct communities."[427]

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[421] Lee, 211.

[422] Lee, 167.

[423] Lee, 16.

[424] Lee, 177.

[425] Lee, 38.

[426] Lee, 38.

[427] Lee, 41.

2.3   Data Collection and Analysis

In this thesis, I offer autoethnographical narratives from two significant phases in the development of @queerkadeh and critically analyze and discuss the decisions I made that brought @queerkadeh to life. I offer this analysis through an application of the Q/M framework. The first significant incident that I talk about is from the genesis phase of @queerkadeh's story. Through a narrative style, I discuss retroactively, the way in which @queerkadeh can be understood as a flexible and dynamic archival space. In the second narrative, I the discuss incidents that changed @queerkadeh significantly eighteen months after its genesis.

The sources of data are my headnotes, @queerkadeh's biography on Instagram, my memory of the discussions I had with Mida, Instagram posts that Mida and/or I created, and several notebooks and notepads in which we took notes, planned events, and drew our visions for this developing digital space according. In my discussions, I leverage the Q/M as an analysis framework, keeping in mind that my understanding of this approach is both interpretive and shaped by other critical archival scholarship such as outlined in the literature review.

2.4   Ethical Considerations

In her own autoethnographic work, Douglas asserts:

As an archival scholar, my personal experience has profoundly affected my professional life, my research agenda, my ideas about archives, what they are for and what they can do, and it has become a defining feature of my methodological approach to the questions I ask about recordkeeping and griefwork, the focus of my most recent research project.[428]

Douglas's work on conducting research in communities to which we belong and which are located in intimate public spaces,[429] has given me much needed language to talk about my research regarding @queerkadeh. Douglas puts into words the questions and concerns I have been feeling but was

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[428] Douglas, *Is This Too Personal,* 304.

[429] Douglas, 304.

unable to describe. She asks, "how do I talk about this community ethically? How do I approach this topic with the sensitivity and care it deserves and requires? How can I think about the things I want to think about without exposing this community to unwanted scrutiny?"[430] "Being a participant in the community, and not just an observer of it," Douglas notes, "has clearly affected the way I understand the role of the researcher and the impact of research on the community."[431] I too have felt the discomfort of even imagining researching my community through the stories they share on an intimate public space that I created. In her timely article, Douglas talks about experiencing the "point of tension" through "the question of visibility and how much to reveal"[432] which helped her define "vulnerability," and note how it "changed over time."[433] Observing her own habits of recordkeeping, Douglas asserts "I am attuned to times where I feel discomfort, where points of tension arise, and to where and how I draw the boundaries of public and private as well as when and why I feel vulnerable."[434] I also ask myself whether I am willing to share my stories to the extent that I ask my community to share theirs. How would I feel if scholars wanted to "look at, study, share and talk about"[435] my personal experiences? This discourse inspired me to design this study in a way that allows me to explore my research questions without having to give an intimate account of my community, and without disclosing the details of the stories they shared at @queerkadeh. I further acknowledge that the strengths of autoethnography can also easily become its ethical weaknesses. A methodology that relies so heavily on the concepts of self and vulnerability, must be further explored in terms of its ethical ramifications.

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[430] Douglas, 303.

[431] Douglas, 303.

[432] Douglas, 305.

[433] Douglas, 305.

[434] Douglas, 305.

[435] Douglas, 305.

2.4.1   The Self

Since I, following some of the other autoethnographers, declare that to a large part, I am the source of the data against which I analyze Lee's Q/M, it is necessary to explore my concept of "self" and the degree to which I am aware of what shapes my identity from an ethical perspective. On this topic, I draw from and subscribe to Judith Butler's theory of the "formation of the subject" in which they assert, "a theory of subject-formation that acknowledges the limits of self-knowledge can work in the service of a conception of ethics and, indeed, of responsibility."[436]

Criticizing the views of those who believe that if one cannot "self-ground" one's subjectivity, it "undermines" their ability to act ethically and responsibly in society, Butler argues that "my account of myself is never fully mine and is never fully for me."[437] This is due to reasons that are beyond our control, according to Butler. When we give an account of ourselves, it is never outside of the boundaries of "the norms [which] are to some extent impersonal and indifferent [to our lives], and they introduce a disorientation of perspective for the subject."[438] This doesn't mean that we shouldn't tell our stories. But we should recognize and acknowledge that "the "I" cannot tell the story of its own emergence, and the conditions of its own possibility, without in some sense bearing witness to a state of affairs to which one could not have been present, prior to one's own becoming, and so narrating that which one cannot know."[439] Our narratives never actually start at the origin: they start after events "have already taken place to make me and my story in language possible."[440]

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[436] Judith Butler. *Giving an Account of Oneself*, (1st ed. New York: Fordham University Press, 2005): 22.

[437] Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 26.

[438] Butler, 22.

[439] Butler, 26.

[440] Butler, 27.

In my application of autoethnographic methodology, I do not claim to fully know myself, nor do I claim that this is the only way I can or will represent myself in all events and to all whom I address. As Butler asserts, there is "a history to my body for which I can have no recollection," and the limited way by which I know myself is "produce(d)… differently in the very act of telling."[441] In Butler's view, to which I prescribe, we fail to act ethically and responsibly if "we claim to know and present ourselves"[442] holistically and truthfully. By contrast,

> To know the limits of acknowledgment constitute a disposition of humility, and of generosity, since I need to be forgiven for what I cannot fully know, what I could not have fully known, and I be under a similar obligation to offer forgiveness to others who are also constituted in partial opacity to themselves."[443]

The stories I tell in the next chapters are the result of my current understanding of who I am, how I felt when I was establishing @queerkadeh, the decisions I made, and my reasoning for choosing those specific decisions. This account is also influenced by its format of delivery which is a written thesis designed to answer specific questions. Since I am the source of data in this project, I must acknowledge that my narrative is limited to what it is humanly possible to remember and to know about myself.

2.4.2   The Self and Representation

Even though this study is not directly about the community of @queerkadeh's users, in my account of myself, I unavoidably, also give some account of this community. In *The Force of Non-Violence*, Butler explores the concept of self in the "condition of radical dependency," [444] and asks, "If

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[441] Butler, 27.

[442] Butler, 28.

[443] Butler, 28.

[444] Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind.* (London; New York; Verso, 2020), 41.

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one self is vitally connected to a set of others and cannot be conceived without them, then when and

where does that singular self start and end?"[445]

This concern about radical dependency has been raised by other autoethnographers as well. For example,

Wall describes how she aims to tell her story, and at the same time, protect her son. Wall argues,

> Personal experience methods, such as autoethnography, justify themselves by observing that individuals do not exist apart from their social context, and for this reason personal experience can be the foundation for further sociological understanding. Ironically, it is the intricate connection between the personal and the social that made it impossible for me to speak of myself without also speaking of others, thereby creating my ethical conundrum.[446]

Similar concerns have also been raised by critical archival scholars. Douglas reports that it was

"extremely difficult" for her to explore "the types of memory work being performed by bereaved parents

online,"[447] because of her "personal involvement in the communities."[448] Douglas asserts that due to the

influence of using an autoethnographic approach, she came to understand "the vulnerabilities of online

communities,"[449] including the community of bereaved parents, and "realize(d) there is no way to

adequately honour, care for and support the range of voices and experiences shared in the online

communities"[450] she knows.

Since the safety and anonymity of the community of @queerkadeh users are my main concern, I

don't refer to their names and/or digital credentials. I don't provide identifying information such as

demographic details and/or information about their occupations. Instead, I refer to them, if I absolutely

need to, in order to talk about the users' needs and wants, as either "one user," "some users," or "many

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[445] Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence,* 15.

[446] Wall, Article Easier Said than Done: Writing an Autoethnography, 50.

[447] Douglas, *Is This Too Personal,* 302.

[448] Douglas, 303.

[449] Douglas, 306.

[450] Douglas, 306.

users." Additionally, I do not offer any translation of their remarks as this intimate online space is meant for queer people who have access to Farsi.

In giving an account of myself, and an account of @queerkadeh, I also give an account of my partner, Mida. Mida is not only my interlocutor, but is also my source of courage, joy, and empowerment. They have empowered me to talk publicly about my personal story, my fears, my traumas, and my dreams. Mida also joined me in sharing their story on public social media platforms. We both knew before developing @queekadeh that being this publicly "out" would impact our lives, as well as the lives of our family members, some of whom still live in Iran. We have both accepted that it is very unlikely that either of us could ever visit Iran again, and I know the sacrifices Mida has made in coming to this decision. Because we are the first Iranian lesbian couple who talked about our marriage and our life together publicly, we were invited to and participated in several Iranian and Afghan diasporic televised events, as well as radio shows and podcasts, in which we talked about the treatment of our queer communities in our countries of origin and abroad. None of this would have been possible if not for Mida's drive for social justice, queer rights, and equality. Having them by my side and being on their side remain the greatest privilege of my life. Their vision, enthusiasm, participation, and support were vital in the process of building @queerkadeh then, as is their permission and support in writing this thesis.

2.4.3   The Self, Vulnerability and Representation

I do, wholeheartedly, belong to the community for which I established @queerkadeh, but I am not their representative, nor am I their voice. As Butler explains, "relationality is a vexed and ambivalent field in which the question of ethical obligation has to be worked out in light of a persistent and constitutive destructive potential."[451] My community is often labeled as vulnerable. To understand the relationship between vulnerability, power, and self I once again turn to Butler. Butler believes that "we

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[451] Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence,* 10.

are never simply vulnerable, but always vulnerable to a situation, a person, a social structure, something

upon which we rely and in relation to which we are exposed."[452] In this interconnected web of

relationalities, by calling my community vulnerable, I might, inadvertently, create "a social hierarchy" in

which I, as the researcher, "emerge as charged with the protection of the vulnerable… [and] become

divested of vulnerability."[453]

The act of labelling @queerkadeh's users vulnerable, as Butler asserts, "treat(s) groups as if they

are already constituted as vulnerable or not vulnerable" which strengthens "a paternalistic form of

power"[454] that assumes there is a divide between us – me as a savior, and them, as people who need to be

saved by me – when in fact, we are all "vitally connected to a set of others and cannot be conceived

without them."[455] In this project, I subscribe to a "norm of a shared or reciprocal condition of equality."[456]

2.5   Conclusion

In this thesis I work within the conceptualization of self, community, vulnerability, and equality

to conduct an autoethnographic analysis of the creation and maintenance of @queerkadeh. I use Lee's

Queer/ed Archival Methodology as a framework for interpretation and understanding of the way in which

@queerkadeh serves its community, who for the most part need to remain anonymous, safe, and

represented. In developing the Q/M, Lee wonders about the two concepts of vulnerability. "I wonder,"

Lee asserts, "about how visibility might represent power when visibility might also create higher degrees

of vulnerability."[457] This assertion resonates with how I have been picturing @queerkadeh since its

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[452] Butler, 45.

[453] Butler, 71.

[454] Butler, 71.

[455] Butler, 15.

[456] Butler, 71.

[457] Lee, 163.

developmental phase: a space built on a fine line between visibility and vulnerability. As visibility and vulnerability change and move in relation to my community, so should @queerkadeh. In my role as @queerkadeh's developer and admin, I have constantly and tirelessly observed how the fine line moves and has moved @queerkadeh with it. I explore this movement in the the next chapter, which depicts autoethnographic narratives conducted on two phases of @queerkadeh: its genesis, and its development/maintenance and offer my observations in creating, developing, and the maintaining this space.

Chapter 3: Findings

3.1   Introduction

    @queerkadeh was not developed as a research project. There was an immediate need in my community to share our stories with each other in the most inclusive and safest way possible. To meet this need, Mida and I decided to develop a digital storytelling space and chose Instagram. As mentioned before, Instagram is the only social media platform legally available in Iran, and it is paramount for our community who still live within the boundaries of that state to be among us as we told and heard stories. As depicted in chapter one, in addition to not having access to many of our historic signs of existence as those accounts were erased by the historians of the time, contemporary residents of Iran live under one of the cruelest and most inhumane anti-queer laws in the world. Their narratives, as a result, have been silenced and their very existence is denied. It is difficult for them to get their stories out to us who live abroad, not only because of IRI's imposed laws that threaten their lives, but also because of the normative and dominant narrative of their victimization as their tales of joy, love, and happiness have traditionally not been heard. Although @queerkadeh was developed to intervene and disrupt these dominant narratives, it was a personal and family project initiated by Mida and I as community members who experienced this need and wanted to change that.

    As will be discussed in what follows, before writing this thesis, I never thought of Instagram as a legitimate platform for archival practices and/or research. I believed it lacked, the necessary professionalism, the organizational requirement, and the possibility of long-term preservation of records. In a more academic and professional capacity, I remained interested in learning about developing an inclusive and dynamic archives for intersectional communities such as mine, as I made progress in my master's program. However, the two projects were completely separate in my mind. It wasn't until I conducted an analysis, in this thesis, of @queerkadeh through the Q/M framework that I thought @queerkadeh might have the potential to be considered an archives. This thesis offers a retroactive

analysis of how @queerkadeh was built, and in what ways a diverse and dynamic framework such as the Q/M would define this digital space.

In this chapter I offer autoethnographic accounts from two phases of @queerkadeh's development. The narratives I offer here are related to the decisions Mida and I made in the development and maintenance of @queerkadeh based on our observations in this digital space. From the first phase, I recount stories of @queerkadeh's genesis, followed by a brief reflection on phase one with the Q/M framework. The autoethnographic account presented from the second phase recounts the story that changed @queerkadeh's structure and the difficult questions we had to ask ourselves. This phase is also followed by a reflection on its main concerns with the Q/M.

As a reminder, unless noted otherwise, every time I use "we" or "us", I am referring to Mida and I as the decision makers of @queerkadeh. As this chapter includes narrative accounts of the decisions that led to the developments of @queerkadeh, I refer to me and Mida more frequently. Also, as noted earlier, I use they/them pronouns to refer to the users of @queerkadeh to help preserve their identities, except when I refer to the community members we lost recently.

3.2   Applying the Q/M to Autoethnographic Accounts

Finding the best solution for developing a space that would/could represent the multifaceted, multilayered, dynamic, and ever-changing aspects of queer lives in a way that is accessible to my community and specific to our various, contradictory, and competing values and needs has occupied my mind since I first became aware of my own sexual orientation. I couldn't connect with or speak to anyone around me. No one I knew around me had similar lived experiences as me. The fact that my mind could conceal such a salient aspect of my being was shocking to me: "What else do I not know about myself?"

When my sexual orientation was revealed, I was overwhelmed by fear and loneliness, not because suddenly my body had decided it didn't want to love men, but because I never could love men and yet, I tried. As I grew, my dislike for myself also grew because I couldn't feel or act the way I was supposed to. Looking back at those experiences through the Q/M framework it seems to me that the dominant narrative

of the world around me did not match my experience of myself and/or my story, and I couldn't understand why. Understanding the reason, I realized as I learned more about myself, was the key to accepting who I am and accepting my story, as messy and unruly as it was.

I could see, from my own experience, that stories cannot be contained in regular boxes. I needed to find a magical container that could grow as my story grew. I wanted this container to also be big enough to house the stories of others like me so that at least we could learn about each other and know that we are not alone. We should never have to feel alone. Our stories would help us reclaim our existence from what Fanon famously calls "the zone of non-being."[458] After decades of erasure, we needed a container that could adapt to change and contradictions and the multiplicity of our truths. A fitting container needed to account for and acknowledge our painful and imperialized past, present in most of our minds, as it directly and constantly affects our futures as people born in, around, or with ties to a land with complex borders and many contested names.

A year into my master's program in archival studies, busy learning new concepts, terminologies, and rules of archival work, I felt like I was drowning. The concepts I vaguely understood didn't seem applicable to me and my community. The concept of creator, for example, was more confusing to me than helpful because most people for whom I wanted to develop this container wouldn't be able to publicly identify themselves. If I were their archivist, what would I call their fonds? Even in my limited archival experience of that time, I still knew how important names of the creators were in archival processes, if nothing else, at least for retrievability of the fonds. So, seeing a room full of flying nameless fonds became my new recurring nightmare.

In the real world, I knew that queer people who live under harsh laws often don't create or keep written documents especially in the absence of a free press. If Mida and I were not married and didn't live

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[458] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 10.

outside of Iran, we would only have one written text in our fonds. We had, instead, many separate pieces of fabric that would make up a rainbow flag to be used in our events and taken apart right after. We knew not to leave any recognizable traces of queerness behind, so we could stay safe. If an archivist were to arrange and describe the many different pieces that made up our belongings, I am doubtful they could make out what these different pieces of fabric were, what they meant to us and the stories they could tell.

My introduction to the Q/M framework coincided with my introduction to critical archival scholarship. Douglas' work on creatorship, for example, introduced me to a critical investigation and re-framing of archival concepts, including a concept as "central"[459] to archival studies as creatorship. Through critical archival scholarship, I sought to learn about non-traditional methods of exploring record-making and recordkeeping practices that are capable of adequately and holistically telling the stories of my diverse and dynamic community. Although I couldn't find archival scholarship that discussed the specific needs of my community, especially their need to remain anonymous, critical archival scholars have been exploring how alternative forms of archives might have the potential to be more inclusive and serve diverse and marginalized communities. Alana Kumbier, for example, identifies and analyzes a diverse set of critical archival practices through which, she argues, archivists can be more "critical in a reflexive, productive, transformative sense."[460] The archives that practice these diverse methods "are critical in a reflexive, productive, transformative sense."[461] Emerging "in response to traditional archival logics, practices, and modes of historic knowledge production,"[462] creators of these archival practices are

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[459] Douglas, "A Call to Rethink Archival Creation," 29-30.

[460] Alana Kumbier, "Ephemeral Material Developing a Critical Archival Practice, (PhD diss., Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, 2009): 24.

[461] Alana Kumbier, "Ephemeral Material Developing a Critical Archival Practice, (PhD diss., Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, 2009): 24.

[462] Kumbier, Ephemeral Material Developing a Critical Archival Practice, 23.

from a "diverse group of actors, including artists, filmmakers, genealogists and family historians, geneticists, and activist-archivists."[463]

Kumbier argues that these different "modes of documentation" prove that archives are biased in nature, and it is the power of the dominant and normative narratives that decides "whose experiences are documented, represented – and how; what kinds of records constitute a particular collection; and whose access to material is enabled or disabled."[464] Kumbier believes that the critical archival practitioners prove that:

> the historic record is shaped by a multitude of factors; that the under-representation of certain subjects in the archives is not always a matter of neglect, disinterest, or exclusion – not everyone wants to be included in the archive, or at least not necessarily on the terms available in traditional and grassroots archives, or through other means of documentation … some histories and experiences may be difficult to access, to remember, let alone document. In those cases, critical archival practitioners have developed alternative strategies for representing the past.[465]

Kumbier's remarks resonate with Tavakoli-Taraghi and Najmabadi's assessment of historiographical practices of modern Iran and the way European modernity, as the dominant narrative of the time "closeted the male beloved into the premodern and rendered Sufi love as transcendental."[466]

Caswell, Cifor and Ramirez have also shaped the way I conceptualize the notion of representation in media and the role of independent community archives in countering misrepresentation in mainstream media. Their study concludes that "community archives are powerful forces in communities historically excluded from more formal and well- established institutions."[467] Both Marika Cifor and Rebecka Sheffield have written about social media as possible alternatives for record-making in disrupting the

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[463] Kumbier, 24-25.

[464] Kumbier, 24.

[465] Kumbier, 24-25.

[466] Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards,* 55.

[467] Caswell, Cifor, Ramirez, 76.

traditional methods of archival practices. Although Cifor writes about Instagram, and Sheffield about

Facebook,[468] they both explore the direct, real-time connections that social media platforms offer their

users, and the way these platforms contribute to creating dynamic and everchanging environments for the

participation of their users. In "What Is Remembered Lives," Cifor explores the ways in which The AIDS

Memorial (@theaidsmemorial) account "regenerates the face of AIDS and stands poised to redesign

AIDS' temporal registers with each post."[469] About the importance of the existence of these new media

archivers and platforms for queer communities as a whole, Cifor argues,

> The ways that the past is conceived is essential to communities as it provides the continuity
> required for self-definition and relation. LGBTQ cultures face particular challenges in asserting a
> heritage not passed down through biological familial channels and in the face of constrained
> access to power and resources. Queers must seek out or be actively confronted by our lineages.[470]

Cifor specifically writes about the possibilities that a memorial Instagram account can create to disrupt

the "dominant temporal orders."[471] By examining technological possibilities of Instagram, Cifor identifies

two benefits that an Instagram account can have for its users: 1) redesigning temporal and geographical

rhythms 2) disruptive animacy. She argues that "affective immediacy names the experience of direct,

seemingly instantaneous connection that Instagram time facilitates."[472] Through close reading of

@theaidsmemorial, The AIDS Memorial account on Instagram, and by theorizing "Instagram time, its

immediacy and nowness,"[473] Cifor argues that using "Instagram's socio-technical temporal affordances,

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[468] Rebecka Sheffield, "Facebook live as a recordmaking technology," *Archivaria*, 85, (2018): 108.

[469] Marika Cifor, "What is Remembered Lives: Time and the Disruptive Animacy of Archiving AIDS on

Instagram," *Convergence (London, England* 27, no. 2, 2021): 373.

[470] Cifor, "What is Remembered Lives," 381.

[471] Cifor, 374.

[472] Cifor, 388.

[473] Cifor, 374.

…this archive is positioned to redesign AIDS' temporal rhythms."[474] Cifor explores "disruptively animate

potentiality as the means of redesign"[475] and posits,

> …In my theorization I contend that disruptive animacy is a force that creates temporal rupture, one that prevents the normalizing forces of dominant temporal orders from simply continuing as usual through attunement to liveness. The deadly orders of normative AIDS time that threaten the most marginalized person appear static and fixed. @theaidsmemorial's acts engendering affective and spatiotemporal immediacy offer vital possibilities for enacting disruptive animacy. The account's capacity to advance disruptive animacy demonstrates that AIDS time is vigorous and changeable, thereby, opening with technology the temporal order for overhaul.[476]

As described in this chapter, Lee too explores the current understanding of temporality in both traditional

and critical archival scholarship.

In the sections above, I demonstrated some of the ways in which my current understanding of the

Q/M has been informed by other critical archival scholarships and scholars. In the process of consulting

with and engaging in critical approaches in archival thoughts and practices, my understanding of the Q/M

became more tangible. Critical archival scholarship gave me the courage, confidence, and methodological

approach to explore intimate and personal topics,[477] pursue the type of research that no one might "want

to talk about,"[478] "take my feelings seriously,"[479] and not be afraid to say, "this doesn't feel right to

me."[480]

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[474] Cifor, 375.

[475] Cifor, 375.

[476] Cifor, 374.

[477] Jennifer Douglas, "Is this Too Personal?"

[478] Douglas, "Is this Too Personal?" 301.

[479] Caswell, "Feeling Liberatory Memory Work," 148-164.

[480] Caswell, "Feeling Liberatory Memory Work," 148-164.

In developing the Q/M, Lee discusses change as an "ongoing"[481] process and believes that "interstices of the changes are generative spaces where theoretical approaches can suggest possible alternate futures for records, collections, and the peoples that constitute them."[482] The Q/M also regards "instability" as an "affective potential" through which "stories and voices that are often overlooked" might have a chance to come to the surface.[483] By virtue of leveraging Instagram ,which has a great potential for instability, as @queerkadeh's platform, and because @queerkadeh went through significant changes in its development and maintenance phases, the Q/M is a specifically fitting framework through which @queerkadeh's potentials as an open and dynamic archival space can be understood.

The seven areas of focus Lee highlights in the Q/M, participatory ethos, connectivity, storytelling, intervention, re-framing and re-imagining, and flexibility and dynamism, could offer an exploration of the nature of @querkadeh, the way in which it changed over time, and its inclusivity and dynamism as a possible archival space. Furthermore, @queerkadeh as a case study can be informative to our understanding of alternative archives, highlighting the different ways these spaces can look, feel, and function. @Queerkadeh can also act as a tangible example by which these areas of focus could be further studied and developed.

In the remainder of this chapter, I provide two autoethnographic accounts from two phases of @queerkadeh's development: its genesis phase and its development/maintenance phase. Each account is followed by an analysis using the Q/M framework. The analysis offered in this chapter, unlike the one outlined in chapter four, uses a narrative style, and offers an insight of the way I engaged with the Q/M to understand @queerkadeh and the way it functions.

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[481] Lee, "A Queer/Ed Archival Methodology," 34.

[482] Lee, 60.

[483] Lee, 34.

3.3 Phase One: Genesis

3.3.1 February 21st of 2020

On February of 2020, Mida and I traveled to Victoria for a quick getaway. During this short trip we talked about our vision for a space that would reflect our dynamic lives. As we talked Mida took notes on their iPhone, part of which read:

> Queer Hami
> Khorshid
> Kazhaal
> Light silly fun program
> Friends talking together about being a queer Iranian living in foreign countries and daily news/fashion/pop culture/poetry etc.

Mida had been wanting to host a talk show, "something like the Ellen show" they said, "where instead of celebrities we would invite everyday heroes to talk about their lives." By everyday heroes, Mida explained, they meant people who dare to be themselves and fight for their right to exist despite the anti-queer environment in which they had to survive. I thought that was a great way to hear stories of our community that focused on small victories and the aspect of our lives that reflected joy.

We started talking about what this space would look like. One of the names we thought about for our storytelling sessions was "Queer Hami" which would mean queer gathering. We changed it to QueerParty later on to highlight the celebratory aspect of being aware of our (shifting) identities and knowing that others like us exist. We also talked about using pseudonyms instead of our real names. I picked Khorshid (sun in English), and Mida picked Kazhaal (ghazal in English). Mida and I later decided to use our own names instead.

As these notes suggests, we wanted a "light, silly, fun program," where friends would chat about what it feels like for them to "queer Iranian living in foreign countries." At that point in time, we had not found a solution to secure anonymity for those who required it, so our vision didn't extend beyond the "foreign countries."

As the date of this section might suggest, March of 2020, the beginning of the pandemic for those of us living in British Columbia was fast approaching. When we returned to Vancouver and shortly after this discussion, our lives, as we knew them, changed and have not gone back to "normal" by the time of writing these lines. Covid-related lockdowns resulted in Mida losing their job as I, frantically, was looking for a second job to make ends meet.

Neither of us had the time or capacity to think about "Queer Hami."

3.3.2 August 01st of 2020

"Dear Professor Lee," I wrote, in an email to express my excitement of reading their "A Queer/ed Archival Methodology: Archival Bodies as Nomadic Subjects:"[484]

> I hope this email finds you well.
> I just finished reading your article, A Queer/ed Archival Methodology, and had to reach out to tell you how inspiring I found it. I am a second-year student at the University of British Columbia's iSchool and I intend to create a queer Iranian archives/ oral history project that would reflect the dynamic lives of my community. Being a minority within another minority, my community faces so many challenges in mis/representation and I am hoping this project would help us reflect our stories. Reading your article was the first time that I felt like I can actually carry out this project…[485]

The project I was referring to in this email wasn't @queerkadeh. When I wrote that email, I wanted to create a physical archives by leveraging the Q/M as a methodological framework. However, I couldn't conceptualize an existing archives that could offer all the necessary characteristics that my community needed in order to participate in creating and accessing the records. I had not, by that time, seen or heard of an archives that could embody the possibilities envisioned in the Q/M. I wondered, since the Q/M framework did not offer step-by-step instructions on how to create a queer/ed archives, how would one go about developing such a space? What would this space look like? What kind of platforms could be used in

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[484] Jamie, Lee, "A Queer/ed Archival Methodology: Archival Bodies as Nomadic Subjects." *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1, no. 2 (2017).

[485] Author's email, August 1, 2020.

order to stay true to the spirit of this methodology? What kinds of technologies could be employed for "collecting and disseminating so that more stories might be collected, seen, and heard through digital modes?"[486]

Around the same time, Mida and I were excited to start our Instagram show. It was a day before what would have been the Vancouver Pride Parade, which was canceled due to Covid-19. "Let's start tomorrow and talk about the Pride," I suggested. "We have a fun story to share." Mida agreed. We named the platform on which we would host our talk show, Queerkadeh, and used an Instagram account that Mida had created many years ago, when they lived in Iran, for a similar project. However, Mida's project had to be quietly shut down, fearing persecution from the government which had intensified at the time and had already led to the imprisonment of a few queer individuals, charged with "advertising homosexuality."

I had never liked Instagram, so I never invested any time learning about its features. I had a personal account only because my friends in Iran frequently used it. Instagram enables them to use anonymizing strategies by changing the settings of their accounts to stay safe from Iran's internet police. Instagram allows users to pick random profile pictures, use any combinations of letters and numbers to create their handles, deactivate their 'Live Location' and the 'Instant Information' feature of Instagram, and to set their accounts as private. All of this, plus the fact that Instagram was the only platform not blocked by the Iranian government made this platform extremely popular among my friends which was precisely why we wanted to use Instagram. When it was time for me to learn more about how it worked. Mida, who is, unlike me, a digital native, helped me navigate and explore Instagram's possibilities. The 'Reel' feature had not yet been introduced, so to tell and hear stories we could use Instagram's 'Story,' 'Post,' or 'Live' features. Mida and I started by sharing a story that meant a great deal to both of us,

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[486] Lee, 36.

hoping to start connecting with our community through our experiences. We set up our space as if we

were expecting guests and like any "real" Iranian, set our table with tea and cookies.

3.3.3   August 02nd of 2020

Wide Shot. Sadaf and Mida are sitting behind a round glass table. The wall behind them is light blue. We can see a vase on the table between the two with two stems of roses and a rainbow flag inside of it. There are two teacups and a tablet in front of them. Mida is wearing a rainbow skirt, a white tank top with a unicorn made of sequins on it, and a floral bowtie. Sadaf is wearing a black t-shirt, with the print of a rainbow-ghost on it, saying "boo, scary lesbian," a pin saying "coexist" and a headband shaped like unicorn horns. They both look gleeful.

MIDA. Hello!
SADAF. Hello!
Both laugh. Screen cuts.
BOTH. Hello!
MIDA. I'm Mida,
SADAF: And I'm Sadaf!
MIDA: Welcome to our *queer party.*
SFX[487]. Beautiful – Mida's Cover of Christina Aguilera's song starts playing in the background.
MIDA. Our goal here is to share our moments of with you.
SADAF. Mida and I   talk about our married life together and try to share the fun and not so fun parts of it with you and will talk about a book that we read or a movie we watched that had to do with our community.
MIDA. And we will try to invite queer guests each time, to share their significant or mundane stories with us.
SADAF. Anyone who identifies as a part of the Farsi speaking Queer community, can use @queerkadeh account to share their stories.
MIDA. You can either email us or contact us via Direct Message on Instagram and Twitter.
Title Clip. Beautiful – Mida's Cover plays louder, and the screen has a comic filter on now.
SADAF. So Mida, tell us why it was so important for us to start this show today, specifically, on the first Sunday of August.
MIDA. Today, Aug 2nd, is the annual Pride Parade in British Columbia, Canada which had it not been canceled due to Covid, you and I would have been partying there right now!
SADAF. That's right! You can see our photos from last year's parade on this Instagram page. Now back to our story: Mida and I got married in Denmark.
MIDA. We didn't have a lot of money so a friend from the Netherlands offered to drive us from Amsterdam to Copenhagen.
SADAF. We still had to get ourselves to Amsterdam, which is a whole different story for another time. It was August 7th. As we were getting ready to leave the city, we realized, by accident, that there was a boat Parade celebration, also known as Canal Parade, in Amsterdam.
MIDA. We got ourselves as close to the canals as possible and cheered for different boats. Where we stood, we later found out, was the end of the route, where boats put on their last performances. We could see the boats coming in one by one through a narrow canal.
SADAF. Mida told me that they can hear Persian music coming from the canal.

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[487] Abbreviation for sound effects.

MIDA. We looked at each other with surprise and bewilderment.

SADAF. Eventually, the Persian music got loud enough for me to hear it as well, and a few minutes later we saw a beautiful white boat with blue balloons, and signs in Farsi.

MIDA. The passengers, who all wore white as well, were dancing, and cheering, and laughing.

SADAF. We felt a combination of joy, sorrow, envy, excitement, and pride as we cheered for them, for our people, who were dancing on a boat in the middle of Amsterdam's pride parade.

MIDA. We are always here to listen to your stories. If you, too, want to share any parts of your stories, we will happily work with you to figure out ways of doing so without putting you at risk of exposure.

SFX. Guitar strings playing louder. Screen goes dark before contact information Outlining: @Queerkadeh – queerkadeh@protonmail.me shows up on the screen.

As soon as we posted the video, I felt mortified. I felt extremely exposed and embarrassed. I hated everything that I said in the video, the way I looked, and how I sounded in it. I kept thinking, "who was I to tell a story? Why did I think my story mattered? Who would even find that story interesting? What if we come across as pretentious with all our talk about traveling to Europe? What made me think I was a good storyteller or that I was in any position to ask others to share their stories? Would those living in Iran who had never experienced a pride parade be upset by this story? Why did I think I had any right to talk to the very people I left, so that I could have a better life?"

I avoided logging in on Instagram for an entire week. When I finally did log in, I found our DM full of messages, most of which were from people writing to express love and support, followed by either a story about their parade experience or their wish to attend one someday soon and in Iran. I received an email from someone who was on that very boat in Amsterdam. There were also many questions about us. How did we meet? Why did we get married? Were we really in love? Slowly, I felt less embarrassed to talk about myself and I felt like my story mattered.

Before hosting our first guest, Mida and I talked about the questions we could ask. I remembered reading about the concept of desire in Lee's article and had a generative conversation with Mida about the role of desire in how late I realized I am queer as opposed to Mida, who was not ashamed to experience desire in their life. We decided, instead of asking our quests about their coming out story, to ask them about desire, how they think about it, and where/when they became aware of this concept. After experiencing discomfort in telling my story, I thought about the ways in which this experience could be

more positive for our guests. Perhaps, if we had more content on the account and had some interactions with our potential audience, the environment of our account would feel more friendly.

Mida and I cared about the stories of the everyday life of our community, or as Mida likes to say the stories of "the everyday heroes." Before hosting any guest, we started posting pictures of our everyday life through Instagram's 'Story' feature. I created a series for these posts on the highlighted stories bar and called it SHEKAR, which means sugar in Farsi. In Farsi SHEKAR can also work as an acronym that translates to Daily Dose of Queerness. To communicate that this was an account for reflecting the community's life and not just our lives, I sought permission from queer members from the community who had public accounts to publish some of their posts as a story under SHEKAR. No one, to this day, has denied my request.

3.3.3.1   QueerParties

The first group who told their stories on @queerkadeh were queer activists who were based outside of Iran and were, for the most part, known for their activism on Instagram. Many of them had their own Instagram platforms and were comfortable being identified on camera. Although it could be difficult to steer the conversation away from professional activism and towards tales of everyday life, reaching out to activists proved to be a good strategy, because those activists who knew each other were excited to see this other side of their friends and wanted to participate themselves. Some who lived close by wanted to come over to our home to be our literal guests as well as our QueerParty guests. Mida and I were aware that being hosts creates an unequal power dynamic. We limited house guests to our friends and acquaintances who had been to our place before and felt relatively familiar there. We also made sure to tell them that we could stop the recordings any time they felt uncomfortable, and that although our goal was to get to know each other, we were all free to stop sharing or to change the subject of the conversation at any point. Mida who was considering how they could be the best host possible, explored several locations in our home for recording and decided that it was best to ask our guests to join us at the round table in our living room.

We used the two cameras of our iPhones, each on a stand and across from each of us. Neither of us had prior experience with film making so we played a little with the placing of the phones until it looked like we were all in the frames. Having two cameras proved helpful when we had a couple visiting us one of whom wanted to participate in storytelling but without showing their face. We sat them with their back against one of the cameras in a way that only one of their hands and their cup of tea was visible in the frame. The other camera was facing Mida, me and the other partner who did want to be visible during recording. This set up allowed us to include the couple in the storytelling while also being sensitive to their individual needs. Due to the small number of Iranian and Afghan queer communities who lived in Vancouver and were able to attend QueerParties in person, with the Covid lockdowns, and our wish to have a diversity of representations, only a handful of QueerParties have been in person so far.

The majority of our QueerParty guests were not in the same city, country, or even continent as us. Our QueerParty with them, therefore, needed different kinds of digital technology. When we were planning for the first QueerParty guest who didn't have the option of coming to our home, I asked them which platform they preferred to use to meet and record our conversations. They indicated that Zoom was their preference, so we set up a Zoom account and sent them a link. Zoom proved to be a practical and easy-to-use tool, which made editing easier than for the recordings we made with our phones. Zoom produces a separate audio recording for each account which increased the quality of the final product.

3.3.3.2   QueerNavaa, Castbox, Radio Broadcasting

For those who wanted to tell their stories without being identified, which makes up the majority of @queerkadeh's users, Mida and I proposed using Zoom when recording and then during editing to conceal the side of the screen that depicted our guest. Our first guest from Iran liked the idea but also asked us to change their voice. Mida and I were both beginners in video and audio editing, so it took us a about a week to figure out how to carry out what we had proposed. The end result looked good, we thought. I especially liked that Mida and I were visible and at the same time our guest's identity was concealed. The product's audio was a different story. We tried out a few free voice-changing software

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applications but the best option we found still sounded mechanical and very "Darth Vader" like. Our guest seemed happy with it though, so we published it on Instagram. The feedback we received from @queerkadeh users was mostly positive. However, some of them reached out to let us know that it would be a lot easier and less costly if they had the option of downloading only the audio, preferably as a podcast, because the already expensive internet services in Iran charge double when the originating servers are located outside of Iran. Mida and I taught ourselves to post the audio recordings to an application that claimed it would save us time by publishing the recording on all widely used podcast receivers. I made the mistake of not confirming with them whether Castbox, which is the easiest application to gain access to in Iran, was one of the podcast receivers to which our audio files were linked. As it turned out, to post audio files on Castbox we had to create an account on Castbox and upload our files manually, every time. The podcast series, which we called QueerNavaa, was well received in the community and soon we were contacted by a queer radio station programmer who asked for our permission to broadcast the podcast using shortwave transmission via a satellite to Iran and the neighboring states. To receive the signal, no other technology is needed than a simple, old-fashioned radio. We accepted of course, elated that our voices and the voices of Farsi-speaking queer people would reach to all corners of Farsi-speaking states. We needed to communicate this to each of our guests before recording and make sure we had their consent. In the few instances that our guests didn't want their stories broadcasted via the radio, we would let the radio producer know and that episode wouldn't be broadcasted.

3.3.3.3   Celebrations, Filters, and a Lip Sync Battle

After we had been publishing QueerParties and QueerNavaas for a few months, some @queerkadeh users asked us to post anonymized love letters for their loved ones, so they could later send our post to them and surprise them. Some sent us pictures of holding hands, accompanied by a text that often either told the short story of their love, or the story behind the pictures, or a love note for their loved ones. Around the time of their anniversaries, birthdays, and Valentine's Day celebrations, we often received a picture of the

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gifts the partners and lovers bought for each other, often accompanied by some sort of short story. We also received requests for removing a post for reasons such as break ups, to which we, of course, complied. We created content in participation with @queerkadeh users, who wanted to converse about news, books, and other cultural products. "Were these archival documents?" I didn't know. What I knew was that these were stories that needed to be told and heard, performed, and seen.

I planned a lip sync battle to as a way to connect with @queerkadehusers. It became very popular especially with people living in Iran and Afghanistan. Most of them used digital filters to keep their identities hidden; a few of the users used funny digital filters such as a potato which covered all their screen except for their lips. A few contestants showcased their makeup artistry and used actual paint and glue. The winners were picked by @queerkadeh users, and for their gifts we bought them gift cards from internet providers in Iran which were sent to them via email, so that they wouldn't have to share their physical addresses.

3.3.3.4   Instagram 'Lives' and Personal Questions

When Mida and I started receiving a significant number of similar questions, we made use of the Instagram Live feature that allowed us to connect with @queerkadeh users in real time. We continued this practice for at least once a week going forward to keep @queerkadeh users informed about the upcoming QueerParty and QueerNavaa, and to keep them updated on anything else that was going on at that time. We often talked about the week that had passed and answered the questions we received previously and during the Live. I was pleasantly surprised that we received comments under the Live videos we posted that told us snippets of everyday life of @queerkadeh users. The highly repeated question we received in Instagram Instant were mostly about how Mida and I met and how we got married and also who takes the trash out and whether we fight or argue, and what happens if one of us cheats on the other. Questions sometimes became personal, and we usually answered by providing them with information about that topic in a general way. For example, we often answered a question like "how do you reach sexual

pleasure" by sharing a link to another Instagram page that was designed by Farsi speaking queer people to talk about and answer questions related to sexual health.

3.3.3.5   Popular Content

We didn't assign a topic for our conversations with our guests and tried our best to follow their lead in how conversations flew. Inspired by Lee's email correspondence with TC in which Lee inquiries about questions TC wants to be asked,[488] Mida and I made sure to ask our guests about questions they always want to be asked. I failed to ask this question once because I felt intimidated by our guest who is somewhat of a celebrity in feminist circles. I was asked about it numerous times, in our weekly Instagram Live later that week. @queerkadeh users wanted to know why I didn't ask this specific question from that specific guest. I had to be honest, so I told them that I was intimidated by our famous guest. This event, which still to this day makes me feel called out in my moment of weakness, made me realize that this question has become important to @queerkadehusers, and I have never missed the chance to ask it again.

Another topic that became popular with @queerkadeh's guests as well as users and has become a staple of the QueerParties and QueerNavaas[489] was one we stumbled upon accidently in our very first QueerParty. Towards the end of our conversation with our guest, we found ourselves imagining what we would each do if we could be ourselves in our cities of origin. I answered the question that was raised by our guest as if I had been thinking about this question before, but I don't remember, at least in the conscious level of my brain, ever doing so. "The first thing I would do," I said, "would be taking Mida out on a date and I know exactly where, in front of Tehran's national park, where there were a bunch of ice cream places that made those ridiculously tall ice creams. We had our most important date there. I take Mida there and kiss them on the lips, this time in front of everybody, knowing that nobody would

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[488] Lee, 22.

[489] I omit discussing the topics brough on in QueerNavaas due to the sensitivity of the topics that were discussed, and out of an abundance of caution in safeguarding the identities of our guests who live under cruel antiqueer laws.

harm either of us for this public display of affection!" This topic, imagining a free Iran, imagining a free Tehran, imagining the free Sanandaj,[490]imagining a free Kabul and the first thing we would want to do in these spaces, became so popular that Mida and I hardly ever had to mention it to our subsequent guests as they, for the most part, included it in their narratives.

3.3.3.6   User Requests

Mida and I welcomed user-created content, requests, and feedback to the best of our abilities. Some of the noteworthy requests are as follows: a @queerkadeh user who lived outside of Iran offered to teach Zumba once a week in the height of the Covid-related lockdowns and it was well received among @queerkadeh users in Iran and neighboring states as well as those who live abroad. An Afghan activist asked if they could use @queerkadeh as a platform to talk about our Afghan community. We welcomed the idea which, as is discussed next, proved to be an extremely valuable communication tool when the Taliban took power in Afghanistan in the summer of 2021.[491] A Kurd activist also used and continues to use @queerkadeh as their platform to talk about what it feels to be a Kurdish queer living in Iran. With the help of a volunteer interpreter, we also hosted a guest who spoke Persian Sign Language.[492] The one important request Mida and I have not been able to grant is providing subtitles for any content we publish that includes audio. This is on top of our wish list when/if we receive funding. It is extremely time consuming to provide subtitles in Farsi especially because to the date of writing this thesis, I have not been able to locate a software, paid or free, that could at least transcribe a quarter of the sample audio I provided correctly. This is, in the most part, due to the international sanctions imposed on Iran that result

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[490] A city in western Iran.

[491] The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, "Taliban," Britannica, March 31, 2022,

https://www.britannica.com/topic/Taliban

[492] Ali Karami, and Bahman Zanj, and Azadeh Kiani Sarkaleh. "Persian Sign Language (PSL) Recognition using Wavelet Transform and Neural Networks." *Expert Systems with Applications* 38, no. 3 (2011): 2661-2667.

in overcompliance of tech companies, Apple Store, Google Store, Amazon, etc., who do not allow

applications built in Iran be housed on their platforms. Platforms such as Instagram and YouTube who

could easily embed this technology, as they have for most other languages, have also decided to disable

this vital accessibility tool for millions of users. Mida and I haven't had the resources such as time and

funds to manually provide subtitles for our content. Although some @queerkadeh users have volunteered

to provide transcription without pay, we could never accept this generous offer. As a person who has

worked for many organizations as a Farsi transcriber, I am painfully aware of the heaviness of such labour

and would never agree to assign it to someone without being able to pay them fairly.

3.4   Reflecting on Phase One with the Q/M: the @queerkadeh's Story "so far"[493]

As mentioned earlier, in this section I start exploring the narratives I provided in the last section

through autoethnographic accounts of @queerkadeh's genesis phase. The analysis and explorations that

are offered here are different than the ones offered in chapter four in format and content. In the analysis

offered here, I depict the way I was grappling with my observations trying to make sense of them through

the Q/M framework. In the next chapter, however, I attempt to explore the overall research questions that

guided this thesis and as such the analysis is more grounded in the Q/M methodology than it is in

autoethnography.

A day after excitedly emailing Lee, on August 2nd of 2021, Mida and I told our very first story on

@queerkadeh and expressed our desire to learn about stories of anyone who wanted to share them with

us. We cared deeply about their participation and tried to be as sensitive as possible to their needs, and

especially to their need for anonymity. Their stories, we told them, didn't have to be recorded, published,

or publicly available if they weren't interested in that; we just wanted to get to know each other but if they

were interested in publishing their stories, we would work with them to find the safest way possible to

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[493] Lee, "Queer/ed Archival Methodology."

share their stories from @queerkadeh account which would add another layer of anonymity. I would learn later, through leveraging the Q/M as an analysis framework that the publishing of stories through Instagram's 'Story' feature, while introducing @queerkadeh to the Instagram community, introduced an alternative storytelling technique which we still use to this day. The only difference is that now we receive numerous requests from @queerkadeh users to post their photos in this 'Story' series. These 'Stories' captured what Lee calls "the mundane" and acknowledged a "non-normative" form of storytelling and representation of my queer community.

Thinking back about my experience of telling the pride story, how I felt before, during, and after, and analyzing it through the Q/M framework for this thesis, I realized that in questioning myself, my story, and the way in which I told it, I was not only doubting whether my story was "worthy"[494] of capturing but also wondering if my story fit into the dominant and normative narratives. I felt anxious for a week waiting for others' responses because I didn't know what the parameters of "respectability" in this community were. I wanted this community to like me and connect with my story, but I had no point of reference to try and mold my story to their liking. I had never seen a queer storyteller from my community, nor have I heard many stories from them. I did know, however, that the community for which Mida and I conceptualized @queerkadeh, comes from very diverse backgrounds and storytelling practices. From years of listening to folklore from different Iranian regions, I have noticed that while storytelling is an important aspect of Iranian and Farsi-speaking communities, we tend to have vastly different styles of storytelling based on our cultural backgrounds.[495] It is important to note that having access to Farsi doesn't mean an automatic similarity in cultural or historic backgrounds. Many different cultures, while speaking their native tongues, also have access to Farsi. Anthropologists and Iranian

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[494] Lee, "Queer/ed Archival Methodology," 36.

[495] Erika Friedl, "The Folktales and Storytellers of Iran: Culture, Ethos and Identity" (*WMU Author* 2014).: 242. https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/books/242

scholars[496] have conducted several studies on storytelling practices of distinct cultures, ethnicities, and nations that make up the body of "Iranian culture," which suggests that each of these cultures come from a long line of storytelling uses and practices.[497] Fariba Mireskandari,[498] for example studies storytelling practices of Gilan, a province in the north of Iran with its distinct language and cultural practices including storytelling. Mireskandari focuses on how lullabies in Gilan have "specific cultural meanings and significance.[499] While Gilani lullabies tell of everyday lives of Gilani women, another storytelling practice from the south of Iran, Vaagooye is a storytelling format that uses self-talk and often about injustice and pain without putting forward a call for action.[500] Shahname, on the other hand, which is rooted in the folklore traditions of Eastern Iran, tells epic tales of heroism, nationality, and war.[501] Further east, between Iran and India is where indigenous fables were used to give advice and teach morality.[502] In central Iran, Shiraz and Isfahan are known for their love stories and romantic poetry,[503]and the northwest

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[496] John Perry, "Introduction." *Asian Folklore Studies* 60, no. 2 (2001): 191–202. https://doi.org/10.2307/1179053.

[497] Eric Hooglund, *Iranian Studies* 37, no. 2 (2004): 378–80. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4311644.

[498] Yaghoub Sharbatian and Fariba Mireskandari1, "An Anthropological Study of Folklore in Gilan Province with a focus on Lullabies," *International Journal of Social Sciences 5*, No.4, (2015): 75

[499]Yaghoub Sharbatian and Fariba Mireskandari1, "An Anthropological Study of Folklore in Gilan, 84.

[500] Farzin Vejdani, "Appropriating the Masses: Folklore Studies, Ethnography, And Interwar Iranian Nationalism." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 44, no. 3 (2012): 507–26. doi:10.1017/S002074381200044X.

[501] Amir Lashkari,, and Mojde Kalantari. "*Pardeh Khani*: A Dramatic Form of Storytelling in Iran." *Asian Theatre Journal* 32, no. 1, doi:10.1353/atj.2015.0015.

[502] Zolfaghar Alami and Hadis Ahmadi, Morphology of Fables of Iranian People (Tiztan, Taqdir 1 and Tamti) based on Propp theory, https://rp.razi.ac.ir/article_1078_e67cb6175290502754d286804ea25327.pdf?lang=en

[503] Setrag Manoukian*, City of Knowledge in Twentieth Century Iran: Shiraz, History and Poetry, (N.Y*; Abingdon, Oxon; Routledge), doi:10.4324/9780203802496.

of Iran has a traditional storytelling dance, called Sama,[504] to name a few.[505] Each one of these storytelling

practices has different formats and structures, and although the analysis of these differences falls outside

of the scope of this thesis, it is important to highlight that these differences exist. This doesn't mean

though that there are no normative narratives within my community. Some of us, at times, might want to

assimilate our differences by "self-regulating in order to be considered good citizens and good members

of the group,"[506] a concept known as "the politics of respectability."[507]

     My experience of what I learned to define later as "the urge towards normalcy"[508] was

accompanied by discomfort and bewilderment. Lee asserts that "normativity… circulates throughout the

oral history interview—the coming together of interviewer, interviewee, and the standardized digital

video production equipment."[509] I wondered which parts of the ways in which Mida and I conducted our

QueerParties would be among "normalizing techniques of remembering and forgetting in order to be read

as proper and good."[510]Looking back and pondering the ways I could avoid perpetuating the dominant

narratives as an interlocutor for @queerkadeh's guests highlights the complexity of the concept of "the

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[504] Esmail Zare-Behtash, "Images of 'Love'and 'Death'in the Poetry of Jaláluddin Rumi and John

Donne." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature* 6, (no. 2 2017): 97-105.

[505] Ravšan Rahmonī and J. R. Perry, "Traces of Ancient Iranian Culture in Boysun District, Uzbekistan," *Asian*

Folklore Studies 60, no. 2 (2001): 295–304, https://doi.org/10.2307/1179058, Najme Dorri and Ahmad Hajebi, "A

Survey on Nostalgic Throwback to Popular Culture Elements in Two Poems of "Yadeten" and

"Marouvezou"." *Funūn-i Adabī* 9 (No. 1, 2017.): 77-90.

[506] Lee, "Queer/ed Archival Methodology," 29.

[507] Lee, 29.

[508] Lee, 20.

[509] Lee, 20.

[510] Lee, 34.

politics of respectability," and how "fear and hope reside to push people to be 'normal' and 'good.'"[511] Although I wasn't sure what a normative archives in my community would look like, I doubted if anything in @queerkadeh as a digital archival space resembled one. As depicted in the introduction chapter of this thesis, no queer person from my community would be regarded as good and proper, so how could an archives that reflects our queer lives be "deemed normative and proper"[512] in the context of my community's "institutions, society and state?"[513]

The Q/M framework notes that some storytellers don't consider their stories interesting enough to be recorded.[514] I never thought that I would be one of them. When it was my turn to tell my story, I found it difficult to tell a story without knowing my audience. Experiencing firsthand the feeling of unease when telling my story and seeing how accurately that feeling of unease is described through the Q/M, suggests that the Q/M would be a fitting framework for developing a space that is concerned with storytelling so that the developers of that space can gain necessary awareness. I would like to suggest, too, to future developers of digital storytelling spaces to tell a story from their life in a setting in which the audiences are unknown to the storyteller. Experiencing the possible affects that arise through storytelling can enhance our sensitivities. Such experience can deepen our understanding of the way we can "recognize, challenge, and re-mix the normative functions that continue to further include and exclude even within the stories that each of us tells."[515]

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[511] Lee, 212.

[512] Lee, 20.

[513] Lee, 21.

[514] Lee, 18-19.

[515] Lee, 38.

The post-human framework embedded in the Q/M and Lee's invitation "to make technologies and techniques visible and transparent"[516] created a space for me to think about the different ways technology affected the stories we told and heard at @queerkadeh. In both digital and in-person recordings, for instance, the speakers sometimes used objects they could see or had easy access to as a symbol or a way to simplify and clarify the points they were making in the stories they told. A tree that we could all see from the window in one of our in-person QueerParties, for example, became a part of one of our guests' tales, as a stand in for a persona in their story. The music we added in editing affected the way a story was received. At the same time, watching the Zoom recordings was a completely different experience than watching the recordings we had in our home. Neither was better or worse, I realized as I was thinking about the how technology could also be a records creator, according to the posthuman framework, but the different technologies we used in the recordings made the product clearly different. This signaled to me that not only was Q/M's flexibility and dynamism applicable to intersectional communities such as @queerkadeh, but also that @queerkadeh could be a fitting case study that depicts the vitality of the Q/M and post-human frameworks. Through this case study we can clearly see that "humans do not work in isolation but are inter- and intra-connected to many networks and assemblages."[517] Lee invites archival scholars and practitioners to conceptualize, practice and teach archival processes through the post-human framework as it entails a non-linear understanding of time and space and can create an inclusive space for "human and non-human"[518] participants to make it possible for many types of non-western style of storytelling to be highlighted. The posthuman approach also

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[516] Lee, 198.

[517] Lee, 198.

[518] Lee, 37.

allows us to understand how "humans and non-humans are connected" which in turn leads us toward "further decolonizing practices."[519]

Challenging the traditional norms through the posthuman approach and from queer lenses changes the way traditional archives look and function; Lee suggests this type of change "might make room for competing perspectives as well as for a greater number of historic actors who hold and embody contradictory and complementary histories from their distinct locations."[520] I wondered how I could challenge the norms if I didn't know what they were. Lee, however, adds that "the normative and non-normative"[521] constantly shift. So even if I did know what the normative narratives would look like in my community, the storytelling space I developed needed to remain radically open, dynamic, and flexible so that its "shape and structure" could be "reconfigured." [522]

As depicted later in this chapter, I eventually learn about one of the current dominant and normative narratives in my community, but in the first days of @queerkadeh, I was going to be an honest listener and wasn't going to shy away from admitting that there were many things about queer life that I didn't know. Learning about each other and our stories was, after all, one of the most important reasons @queerkadeh was established.

3.5   Phase Two: Asking Difficult Questions

Similar to phase one, here I start by offering a narrative; however, since this is a narrative of an intimate and sensitive subject, some of the discussions are embedded in the narrative. A year and some months after developing @queerkadeh, the events in this narrative have caused me to stop and think deeply about the nature of @queerkadeh and this has led to more questions than answers. I also need to

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[519] Lee, 198.

[520] Lee, 21.

[521] Lee, 211.

[522] Lee, 211.

provide a content warning for the first two paragraphs of the following narrative for an explicit description of a graphic murder. The rest of the narrative discusses the actions that followed, the repercussions of those actions, and the way I made sense of it all by situating my analyzing thoughts within the Q/M framework.

3.5.1   May 7th, 2021

It's nine o' clock in the morning. I am at a coffeeshop working on a research proposal that is due soon and Mida is seated across the table, immersed in work. It is an extremely busy week for me as many deadlines are looming. Like most other days, I decide to check in on @queerkadeh before getting lost in school projects. The first post I see when I open the Instagram app on my phone is of a young smiling boy. The caption reads: a gay man beheaded by his family in Ahvaz. A gay man, I read again, trying to understand, beheaded by his family in Ahvaz. One of the richest oil fields of the world, Ahvaz is a city located in the south-west of what is known today as Iran. I picture Ahvaz in my head: palm trees, Karun River, forested Zagros Mountains, bright colors of traditional attire, the diversity of cultures and languages: Dezfuli, Arab, Bakhtiari, Persian and Shushtari. I also remember Ahvaz heavily bombed during the Iran-Iraq war of 1980, how hot it becomes during the summer and how thirsty. "Horrific beheading of a young gay man in Iran," is the caption of the next Instagram post. I picture Ahwaz again: palm trees… a bloody torso…a severed head on the ground…and a river… red with blood… "It can't be true… We hear these rumors all the time," I think to myself. I scroll down and see a post by a trusted queer activist who confirms the news. I feel like I can't breathe.

Most of @queerkadeh's Instagram feed is about Alireza. He was living in Tehran, I learn, and went back to Ahvaz so that he could sell his cellphone to buy a plane ticket so he could seek refuge in Turkey. Many Instagram posts seem to agree with this narrative. I feel nauseated. I look at Mida, just in time to catch them looking up from their phone, panicked. I don't even need to ask whether they had seen the news. I try to talk to them, but they can't seem to react. I am choked up. I go back on Instagram. There are no agreements on how Alireza's cousins learned about his sexual orientation. Why couldn't they just

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let him leave the country? He just wanted to leave the country. I realize my face is wet. I must have been crying. I feel cold and lonely. Who can I talk to? This is not the kind of news that other Iranian communities talk about or even know about. I feel extremely lonely. I am going live on Instagram to talk to and be with the community. A lot of anger, sadness, disbelief, and shock are expressed, along with a paralyzing fear. Something like this could happen to any one of them. I cry. I see Vancouver friends in the audience. I want to hold a wake for Alireza, I tell them. We need to do something. Some say they will help. What do I need? How does one plan a wake? Do we need a permit? Who do I ask? My head is spinning.

If we hold the wake tomorrow, I think to myself, it will be the third day after his death. In Muslim/Iranian tradition we mourn for our loved ones on the third, the seventh, and the fortieth day after they pass away. My heart feels weird and heavy, but I can't think about that right now. I learn that we do not need a permit. I pick a place and a time to gather around. I create and publish a poster on Instagram to communicate the where and when of the wake to those who can and want to attend. I text an artist friend to see whether she can make us some signs. She is not around. I contact Alireza's friends in Iran and ask if they want to participate in the wake and how. I met them when I went live this morning. They told us stories about Alireza. They must be devastated right now, I think to myself. They each send me their favorite photo of Alireza. One sends me a poem to read at the wake. I go to Staples and print the pictures on heavy papers so that we can use them as signs. It is six o'clock in the afternoon. Mida might be done with work. I feel very cold.

3.5.2   March 10th, 2022

As I write these words, several months after Alireza, I can still look at the posts from that time. I have the Instagram Live in which I cried. The comments aren't saved on Instagram Lives, as opposed to YouTube Live, for example, so I can't see any of the reactions as I talk and cry.

I see the signs at the wake, I see the pictures I printed at Staples, I see the community making a big circle around the signs and picture, I can listen to a poem a friend recited, and hear Mida singing a song about a lonely traveler to wish Alireza safe passage. Alireza will never be forgotten.

Planning and participating in Alireza's wake changed me. His loss hit me differently than any other loss I have ever experienced. I wasn't just sad, I was angry. I couldn't fully comprehend my feelings until I talked to a non-queer Iranian friend who had not heard the news about Alireza's murder. She had no idea what had happened. Her life had not changed. I was angry, I realized, because Alireza's life was only "grievable" among us. My non-queer Iranian friend didn't even believe me when I told her what had happened. She couldn't believe that people *still* get beheaded for their sexual orientations, even in Iran. Alireza was, to use Butler's words, "at the same time actively mourned within one community and fully unmarked—and unmarkable—within a dominant national or international frame."[523] I needed to mourn Alireza so that I could protest a loss that has "not yet [been] publicly acknowledged and mourned."[524] Holding a wake for him, I realized, was my way of saying that "this lost life ought not to have been lost."[525]

I wondered if I could ever sit through a story that told a real time account of an urgent need to which I could offer, at least, a temporary relief. Could I ever just hear the stories and be content with providing access to the story? Was there anything else we could do? Is there anything else we should do? Could/should @queerkadeh serve as a bridge between those who needed help and those who wanted to help by sharing these accounts? Traditionally, archives are not concerned with real time storytelling and the Q/M didn't offer any specific insight about how or if archivists should be involved in these kinds of

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[523] Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence,* 73.

[524] Butler, 74.

[525] Butler, 74.

affairs. What kinds of actions are expected in these situations? Are these records different than other records?

Mida and I decided to take action. What Alireza needed for a safe travel to Turkey was no more than fifty dollars. Surely, I thought, those of us who live overseas, can fundraise for those who find themselves in situations such as Alireza's. Sharing parts of their stories, I thought, could create a connection between those who wanted to help and those who needed it. To create an official avenue for people to donate, Mida and I incorporated @queerkadeh as a non-profit organization that was going to officially sponsor the Alireza Memorial Fund. Our goal was still the same: to improve the quality of the lives of Farsi-speaking queer people anywhere in the world. So, neither I nor Mida saw this new aspect of @queerkadeh as a fundamental change. The stories we shared were always meant to improve the quality of our lives. The possibility of making donations was just another type of life improving tool that we added to @queerkadeh. We named the memorial fund after Alireza to make sure he would never be among "those whose loss would leave no trace."[526]

Shortly after incorporating @queerkadeh, our Afghan queer family asked for financial help as they needed funds to flee Afghanistan as soon as possible in the face of the Taliban's return. Managing that level of community outreach and fundraising was more than Mida and I could manage. We decided to ask @queerkadehusers for help. Several members of the queer community who were refugees in Turkey offered to help with finding those who needed help and getting funds to them. We call these helpers @queerkadeh's field agents. Two well-known, and trusted activists offered to help us manage the funds from on our end. I volunteered to find the best way possible for sending the funds to Turkey, and Mida worked with local drag queens and queer performers to organize events to help with fundraisings.

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[526] Butler, 75.

By the time of writing this thesis, the Alireza Memorial Fund has been able to raise and donate over $35,000, as an ongoing fundraising project under the umbrella of @queerkadeh.

Our reaction to Alireza's story opened the door to stories that we hadn't heard previously at @queerkadeh. We started to hear stories about our community members who lived in Turkey, sometimes for ten years, before they could schedule an interview to be granted refugee status in Turkey. We learned that in the meantime, they didn't have access to health insurance and weren't allowed to work legally. They also couldn't have bank accounts which made it that much harder to get the donations to them.[527] We learned that since 2018, UNHCR[528] has not processed queer Iranians' refugee claims because, unlike our Afghan queer family, Iran is no longer included in the list of the countries with the harshest anti-queer laws. Instead, the Turkish police oversee their cases.[529] Not unlike their Iranian counterparts, the Turkish police, for the most part, do not have the expertise, training, or sensitivity needed to conduct interviews and make decisions about claims based on sexual orientation or gender identity. We also learned, that despite all our efforts and because Iran's banks are under sanctions, we cannot send any funds directly to those who need them most in Iran.

@queerkadeh's reaction to Alireza's story also affected the dynamic between us and some members of the Iranian queer family. Before incorporating, we weren't known among community members who didn't use Instagram. Perhaps because of our outreach and fundraising activities, this dynamic changed, and we came under the spotlight of many different subgroups within the community. Among them, we were noticed by a group of mostly gay men who used to blog in Iran in the early 2000s, when Internet use wasn't monitored. I wasn't aware of their activities and didn't know anybody, my age or younger, who really knew them. I was excited to know more about them and invited their most senior

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[527] Shaya Goldoust, "Rangin Kaman Irani," Iran wire, accessed March 27, 2022, https://iranwire.com/fa/blogs/54089

[528] United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

[529] Shaya Goldoust, "Rangin Kaman Irani," Iran wire, accessed March 27, 2022, https://iranwire.com/fa/blogs/54089

member, a leader of sorts, to @queerkadeh's Instagram Live to talk about the history of their activities. This invitation was followed by an immediate backlash from many Instagram activists and a deep admiration from the guest's followers on Twitter. This was the beginning of our troubles as we were increasingly exposed to long-standing disputes. Our attempts to keep @queerkadeh as inclusive as possible often deeply offended and upset groups with long-standing grievances.

In early January of 2022, we faced our biggest challenge, when the same blogging community leader I had invited to @queerkadeh's live, tweeted a series of transphobic remarks, and @queerkadeh was called on by many @queerkadeh users to react by removing the Live session from @queerkadeh and calling out the tweets as transphobic and the reason for this removal. How could we stay neutral in this situation? Both Mida and I were deeply hurt by the transphobic comments, but should we let our "personal feelings" affect whose stories we wanted to host @queerkadeh? What about accountability? But who were we, we kept thinking, to issue judgment? What was our role in this community? What was our responsibility?

Mida and I decided to do what our users had asked us to: we called out the tweets as transphobic on Twitter and Instagram and informed our users that the live session with that person would be removed shortly. Taking @queerkadeh's platform from this person would be our way of keeping them accountable. Still, I wasn't comfortable being the person who makes this decision. I kept asking myself, how did we get here? How are Mida and I now in charge of making such a decision? All we ever wanted was to help improve the lives of the queer community who had access to Farsi by sharing our queer stories. Were we supposed to have a policy in place for such events? What was my role in this space? What were my responsibilities? What would a real archivist do?

We eventually made this decision after witnessing other transphobic tweets on this person's Twitter account and several attempts from the trans community on Twitter to explain the harm of those remarks. The blogger community took great offence to our reaction, and there hasn't been a day since then that we haven't been the target of their anger. Mida and I are called, quite chauvinistically, "pink

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activist Instagram influencers." I was surprised that they used the word "activist" to insult us because we never claimed to be activists. I realized later, when I looked more closely at their tweets and the way they talk about the history of queer activism in Iran, that they believe themselves to be the first queer activists in Iran after the revolution of 1979. They only know gay activists. They took great offence to @queerkadeh's lack of knowledge about this person and wrote many tweets about our shortcomings. I was specifically ridiculed because I was "too soft," I "explained, with too many details, about the reasons" for our decisions in @queerkadeh, used the sentence "I don't know" more times than is acceptable as a "leader," and because I, as the co-creator of @queerkadeh "should not ask our users about their opinions and must, instead, teach them what the right thing/attitude is." I have, in their opinion, no leadership skills and therefore "cannot be trusted" by the community.

3.6   Reflecting on Phase One with the Q/M: the @queerkadeh's (Un)becoming[530]

It has been challenging for me to analyze the events that took place since the May of 2021. I know, and Lee also asserts that "identity politics are complicated and beyond the scope of" the Q/M. But how would I decide who the community is if I can't have a discussion about identities in a respectful way? This section, which was supposed to be about the way I understand @queerkadeh, is instead a long list of questions that arise as I compare my retroactive observations of the events since May 7th with the Q/M approach. These questions, although not answered yet, still depict the flexibility of the Q/M as an applicable framework for analysis in a diverse and intersectional context. Looking through the Q/M framework has offered me a chance to explore the possibilities of @queerkadeh and ask the following questions: what does it mean to be a part of queer community? Who should be included or excluded from the community and who decides that? How much of a gatekeeper have I been in picking and highlighting the stories @queerkadeh publishes? Have I, too, been silencing some stories through my practices? What

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[530] Lee, "Queer/ed Archival Methodology."

was the state of @queerkadeh's connectivity to the users, especially as the number of users kept increasing? Has @queerkadeh's connection to the community been as solid and as strong as I believed it to be? Could Mida and I remained neutral in the face of the transphobic remarks?

Both Mida and I are aware that we are not neutral, especially about the rights of our community; although we constantly seek the community's feedback, essentially, Mida and I are the decision-makers of this space. Whose rights was @queerkadeh supposed to protect? Were Mida and I in charge of safekeeping these rights? Should we try to change this system so @queerkadeh could be run by the will of the majority? Should we plan on asking @queerkadeh members how they want us to react in these kinds of situations? What would that look like? In addition to asking who the community is, I was also confronted by the question of to whom this platform should be given and from whom and under what conditions it should be taken away. Who oversaw such decisions? What was the harm of inaction? What was the harm of reacting by taking away this platform and erasing some of the stories of this already minoritized community whose stories have been erased throughout history? These dilemmas made me wonder, for the first time, whether @queerkadeh could indeed be a community archives. Why else would it matter to whom it gives a platform and/or whose stories it erases? Perhaps, I thought, @queerkadeh could be the archives I wanted to someday build. In the final chapter of this thesis, I consider this question in more detail, using the Q/M methodology as a framework to guide my thinking.

Chapter 4: Discussions and Conclusion

4.1   Introduction

In chapter three, I conducted an autoethnographic study and provided narratives of significant incidents from two phases of the development and maintenance of @queerkadeh: the genesis, through which Mida and I began developing @queerkadeh and introduced it to the queer members of our community; and Alireza's story, which also explored the difficult questions that followed when Mida and I decided to take action by incorporating @queerkadeh as a non-profit organization in Canada. The analysis offered in the last chapter concluded by raising a question: could @queerkadeh be considered as a community archives? In this chapter, I explore this question in more depth and discuss whether other spaces such as @queerkadeh could be understood as archives for their communities.

This discussion is important because as archival discipline turns to postmodern philosophy and decolonial methodologies, and as novel theories emerge, it is vital to explore alternative archival spaces. As depicted in this thesis, my community needs an accessible and relatable archival space to represent their dynamic. The Q/M offers an analytical framework that emphasises the complexity of the community of users, their changing needs, and their evolving goals. In what comes next, I offer a discussion regarding the "realness" of archival spaces and explore whether @queerkadeh is, or can be, a "real" archives. Furthermore, the discussions offered in this chapter provide insights to the research questions that guided this inquiry:

1. In what ways can establishing a digital archival space be grounded in theory?
2. Could queer/ed archival methodology be personalized based on specific values, needs and goals of communities from diverse backgrounds? In what ways?
3. Are there insights from this specific archival space that can contribute to further developing the queer/ed archival methodology and the archival discipline as a whole in representing intersectional communities?

4. What can a study of an Instagram account as a digital archive tell us about aspects of the archival profession and practices such as long-term preservation and the role of professionalism?

The analysis offered here is concluded by a discussion about the limitations of this study as well as where this study can go next and what it might be able to do.

4.2 The "Real Archives"

In their dissertation Lee asks whether what they develop in the Arizona Queer Archives is a "real archives." "I ask myself" Lee posits, "at which step would this archives be a 'real' archives? What does a 'real' archives look and act like? And how will I recognize this moment? Who is to say?"[531] In the last section, in the face of the dilemmas I encountered when determining whose stories should be represented or erased, I recognized, for the first time since starting the development of @queerkadeh, that I am in a position of power. I am the one responsible for policy making and creating bylaws. Following the incident involving transphobic remarks, some @queerkadeh users demanded to know what our policy was regarding anti-queer rhetoric. I had not thought of an exclusionary or punitive policy as I didn't see my role as an educator in the context of @queerkadeh. Looking back now through the Q/M framework, I am realizing that the participatory ethos could be applied to govern @queerkadeh by creating a simple, flexible, and participatory policy. Perhaps, instead of narrowing the community @queerkadeh serves, we could expand it in a way that other experts could collaborate with us in decision making processes.

Critical archival scholars question some of the assumptions of the profession, including the role of an archivist. Referencing Gilliland and McKemmish's[532] scholarship on the participatory role of

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[531] Lee, 181.

[532] Anne J. Gilliland and Sue McKemmish, "The Role of Participatory Archives in Furthering Human Rights, Reconciliation and Recovery," Atlanti: Review for Modern Archival Theory and Practice, (2014): 1.

archivists as a steward of records, Lee suggests that by "understanding structures and their degrees of control" archivists can start "addressing the tensions around naming practices, organization, and circulation when non-normative peoples and communities are active participants."[533] Through an autoethnographic account of @queerkadeh's development and maintenance, this study provided, as Douglas asserts "a lens for identifying points of tension, conflict and vulnerability"[534] in this digital space. This, however, doesn't answer the questions I have about my role in @queerkadeh. "Who is to say?" Lee asks; in this discussion section, I ask if the queer/ed archival methodology (Q/M) could offer an insight as to what kind of space @queerkadeh can be for this specific community, and whether what this space does can conceptually be similar to the queer/ed archives they believe a Q/M methodology can develop. Can the same be true about other digital spaces that partner with their communities to keep their histories and memories alive even if they don't look or function similar to our traditional conceptions of archives?

4.2.1   Participatory Ethos

I start with participatory ethos as it is where the Q/M starts outlining its seven areas of focus. In their exploration of what a participatory ethos would look like in archives, Lee askes three overarching questions about the "role of the archivist," in a collaborative archives, the founders' "feeling of deep ownership," [535] and the ways in which records are "identified, created, collected, described, and shared,"[536] through participation. Before attempting to answer these questions in regard to @queerkadeh, I need to know how the Q/M defines records. One of the ways the Q/M conceptualizes record and record creator is through the concept of "re-framing."

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[533] Lee, "Queer/ed Archival Methodology," 191.

[534] Douglas, "Is This Too Personal?" 301.

[535] Lee, "Queer/ed Archival Methodology," 196.

[536] Lee, 197.

4.2.2   Re-framing

Through the practice of re-framing, Lee asks archivists to "look and re-look at the many angles of the contextual situated-ness of records and records creators in order to expose the threads and structures that have upheld certain categories of belonging."[537] Through re-framing, our understanding of records can become radically open so that archival products might expand our "ways of thinking about multiply-situated non-normative peoples and communities."[538] Distinct communities determine "distinct considerations of records[539]" relevant to the contexts of their communities.[540] In addition, the record-ness of cultural products, even when defined by distinct communities, won't be fixed concepts and will change as the community and their needs change.[541]Just like bodies who grow and change, the structure of archives and the definition of archival products are "impermanent."[542] This conceptualization is far from the kinds of archives I have visited during my studies and have learned to manage, and is much more similar to how I would define a space such as @queerkadeh with no boxes, shelves, or, vaults, and no description standards.

Lee notes that the community for which the Arizona Queer Archives was designed wanted a space not just for preservation but also for display.[543] Thinking specifically about my community, I also add anonymity and the ease of access to the list. As mentioned in chapter one, the queer community with

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[537] Lee, "Queer/ed Archival Methodology," 208.

[538] Lee, 209.

[539] Lee, 131.

[540] Lee, 157.

[541] Lee, 209.

[542] Lee, 206.

[543] Lee, 206.

ties to Iran and the neighboring states, needs to "re-historicize"[544] our past due to the systemic erasure of

our history from modern historiographical traditions. The current dominant narrative about our existence

according to the current rulers of Iran, the Islamic Republic regime, is located either in our non-existence,

or in an existence believed to be a mere imitation of Western queerness.[545] The stories shared via

@queerkadeh, in all its forms and created through Instagram's various affordances, disrupt both of these

narratives as they tell the tales of real people, living real lives from before the Islamic revolution. This

community also needs anonymity and publishing stories from @queerkadeh offers an additional layer of

anonymity.

The reviewed literature from experts on Iranian historiographical practices points to the vitality of

re-historicization for my community. Najmabadi's visual analysis of cultural productions of the

nineteenth century Iran, for example, clearly depicts "the disappearance of the male beloved from visual

representation" since the early nineteenth century in the Persianate world as a sign of queer erasure from

Iran's past. Since the current rulers of Iran regard homosexuality as unnatural and as a direct result of

Westoxification,[546] my community needs to find alternative means of imagining our past, present, and

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[544] Mohamad Tavakoli-Taraghi, *Refashioning Iran,* 33.

[545] Najmabadi, *Women with mustaches and men without beards*, 38.

[546] "Term coined by the Iranian secular intellectual Jalal al-e Ahmad to describe the fascination with and dependence upon the West to the detriment of traditional, historical, and cultural ties to Islam and Islamic world. Defined as an indiscriminate borrowing from and imitation of the West, joining the twin dangers of cultural imperialism and political domination. Implies a sense of intoxication or infatuation that impairs rational judgment and confers an inability to see the dangers presented by the toxic substance, that is, the West." In "Westoxification," Oxford Reference, Oxford University Press, accessed April 10, 2022, https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803121918757

future. @queerkadeh has been able to serve as one of these alternative tools by providing a space not just for our stories of past and present but also by imagining a future in which we can freely live on our lands. As mentioned in chapter three, one of QueerParties' most popular questions is the one in which our gusts tell us about their version of a free homeland and the first thing they would do with their freedom. The comment section of Instagram allows other @queerkadeh users to share their own past, present and future with the rest of the community using texts and emojis rather than the audio/video used in QueerParty and QueerNavaa. This is an important aspect of user participation which diversifies the methods of creation according to the state of the user's privacy and anonymity needs. @queerkadeh's products, and @queerkadeh as a product, are both concerned with memory and stories which could have remained untold or lost if @queerkadeh as a platform didn't exist. Although these memories and the overall structure of social media platforms might not seem solid enough to be trusted with our memories, Lee asserts that things can be solid and flexible at the same time, noting that "solid did not have to mean rigid and unbending. Solid could mean here presently, but always in a state of (un)becoming."[547]

The Q/M also encourages archival professionals to shift our attention from fixity to flexibility to accommodate change and keep archives relevant to the communities we serve.[548] Using Instagram as a platform, we told and heard stories through multiple perspectives, and at times heard the same story from different perspectives and in different contexts. Re-shaping materiality, such as deciding to move our bodies to a love song in order to mourn a loss as a community, contributes to "establishing a generative space through which archivists alongside community and institutional stakeholders might re-consider and deploy creative modes of archival practice as linked always to emerging archival theory."[549] Through this

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[547] Lee, "Queer/ed Archival Methodology," 207.

[548] Lee, 17.

[549] Lee, 208.

framework and by reframing the definition of records based on what records do,[550] it is possible to conceptualize the @queerkadeh's shared stories as records that are relevant to the community which it serves.

4.2.3   Participatory Ethos 2.0

Conceptualizing @queerkadeh's shared stories as records, allows me to think back at the concept of participatory ethos. As mentioned, I'd like to think of myself as a holder of space[551] for my community to represent themselves using the platform Mida and I developed. I am definitely not a translator,[552] nor am I an interpreter[553] of my community's stories. In telling our stories, I could see myself as a collaborator.[554] Besides participating in creating content, the @queerkadeh users also participate in the meaning-making practices. For example, when I read about Alireza and couldn't comprehend the news, I used 'Instagram Live' to seek and give comfort, to seek and give meaning, and to seek and give suggestions on how to mourn him. Unlike the community's participation in content creation, which is reciprocal[555] since the community has different ways to contact @queerkadeh admins to send their content, the meaning-making participation is not always reciprocal. This is because the admins of the account have the opportunity to seek participation in the making of meaning and @queerkadeh users are not always able to initiate communication, especially as the number of @queerkadeh users increases. I

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[550]Douglas, Jennifer, Alexandra Alisauskas, and Devon Mordell. ""Treat them with the Reverence of Archivists": Records Work, Grief Work, and Relationship Work in the Archives," *Archivaria* 88 (November 2019): 84-120. https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13699.

[551] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done,* 13-15

[552] Lee, "Queer/ed Archival Methodology," 196.

[553] Lee, 196.

[554] Lee, 196.

[555] Lee, 190.

regard @queerkadeh as a highly participatory space which allows a participation level similar to Instagram's. However, as mentioned earlier, we haven't sought participation in managing @queerkadeh, yet. Asking for expert advice can expand the point of views and can help answering difficult questions.

In regards to the feeling of ownership, I have only recently started to recognize the power Mida and I have always had in this space. The reason I recently recognized it is that I had to draw boundaries in my relationship to the blogger community whose demands I did not want to meet. Before that, I almost never had to say no to any request unless it would jeopardize the safety and anonymity of the community members, or as was the case with subtitle requests, due to limited resources. I had never not wanted to accept a request until I refused to re-post the video I had made with a person who I later realized had transphobic ideas.

The last question I explore related to participatory ethos is about the ways in which records are "identified, created, collected, described, and shared."[556] In chapter three, I've explained the ways records are created and identified at @queerkadeh. QueerParties, QueerNavaas, 'Instagram Live' sessions, anything posted as a 'Story,' posts regardless of who creates them, 'Reel's, and everything and anything posted on the @queerkade account, including the biography, DMs, and comments are regarded as sharing memory and are therefore records. We either write the descriptions of the products with the other collaborators or post the description @queerkadeh users send us. QueerNavaa guests usually pick a pseudonym or a nickname and that is the name we use throughout the storytelling sessions. We also use that same name for describing the content. All information shared through descriptions is provided by the person whose story is reflected through the records. Instagram contributes to the dynamism of the way we provide descriptions by allowing users to change, update, or delete description already posted. It also enables the use of tags and hashtags for descriptions of the posts which can also be used as an

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[556] Lee, 197.

organizational tool. Sharing takes place through Instagram and from @queerkadeh's account, unless we are asked not to publicly share content, in which case we follow the instruction of the community member whose story is reflected by the records.

4.2.3.1   Visibility and Participatory Ethos

The immediate need of my community is to have the means to actively represent their dynamic and daily lives inclusively while remaining safe and mostly anonymous. There is a part of this community who is known publicly, often as queer activists, queer artists, and/or queer advocates. Eighteen months ago, Mida and I became a part of this sub-group when we published our first Instagram post. Those of us who call Iran home and decide to work publicly know that as long as the IRI is in power, we won't be able to visit our homes. Because this particular group has chosen to work publicly, their need for safety is often ignored especially by themselves.

A large number of my community members, who grew up under harsh internet laws, have learned how to conceal their identities on Instagram. As mentioned before, many Instagram users in Iran have found number of ways to stay hidden in plain sight: they pick random profile pictures, use any combinations of letters and numbers to create their handles, deactivate the live location tracker and Instant Information feature on Instagram, don't let their account be followed, set their accounts as private and won't follow anyone. Those of us who forgo anonymity, on the other hand, might not pay attention to the different ways Instagram can expose our location. So, as a developer of a space that was going to exist on a very fine line between visibility and vulnerability, I needed to find a way to keep the community both anonymous and safe while using @queerkadeh.

The need for safety for those @queerkadeh users who participate freely at @queerkadeh, tell their stories and create content is not overexaggerated. It wasn't that long ago that Mida and I were targeted by hate crime right outside of our apartment's elevator in Canada as we were holding hands. Not knowing who the assailant was, where they lived, how they found us, and whether this attack was premeditated, I feared for my life and the life of my beloved. Although it is true that the police might have caught this

person and/or others associated with this attack, it was highly possible for us to get injured in another attack before the police had a chance to react. We sought housing elsewhere and moved in less than a week. Other than deactivating the instant information feature, we realized that we need to be careful especially when the location from which we publish a post, a story, a reel, or a live video is recognizable. The same measures need to also be taken when @queerkadeh users from abroad join us in any shape or form. For @queerkadeh users who live under harsh and queerphobic laws, we don't ever risk publishing anything in real time to avoid sharing any information that might put them at risk inadvertently.

Thinking about how Mida and I looked to our community, in developing @queerkadeh, to learn best practices of Instagram participation in a way that is safe and accessible, affected my understanding of participatory ethos. I realized, looking back, that developing this archival space through a participatory ethos meant learning from and following the lead of my intersectional community who had developed strategies for survival long before @queerkadeh started its activities. We then continued to change the solutions, according to the feedback we received, so that this space would continue to be relevant for as many members of the community as possible. When Mida and I found ourselves walking on a very fine line between visibility and vulnerability,[557] on which we were going to develop a space, we leveraged the knowledge and expertise of the community who continues to survive under such conditions. These exchanges of strategies are increasingly important in spaces that are designed for meaning making and storytelling, especially as digital storytelling has enabled many of us to tell our own stories.

4.2.4   Connectivity

Connectivity, Lee reasons, is concerned with "connection, disconnection, and re-connection to contexts, histories, spaces, as well as to time and temporality in ways that emphasize the role of

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[557] Lee, 163.

impermanence,"[558] all of which I have experienced through @queerkadeh. I have experienced the joy of connection to history, geography, and time, as well as the bewilderment of disconnection from those with whom I thought I had strong connections related to how we understand ourselves and our identities. Connectivity is everchanging which is why the meaning of community and who we count as our kin changes. The dilemmas I've had deciding who should be excluded from @queerkadeh's platform stem from the multiply-situated nature of connectivity. Understanding this concept can motivate me and other designers and developers of digital spaces to remain flexible on all fronts and aspects of operation.

Has flexibility been built into @queerkadeh's relationships, communication, governance, and structure? The record creators have the power to decide what they would like us to do with their creation. They can ask us to post it, delete it, re-post it, edit it, change the description, close the comments, and apply any other feature afforded by Instagram. There is a procedure by which creators can ask to send us new content and a procedure by which they can communicate directly with me to manage their needs in regard to their records. This procedure takes place outside of Instagram and through an encrypted email service; the users' connections to us while sending or receiving content is the most sensitive time of our connection because if our correspondence is interfered with, the content the users usually create might serve as evidence of their queerness and against them. For this reason, this is one of the only rules we never break.

The initial flexibility is built in @queerkadeh both because of Instagram affordances and our mission in providing a supporting environment for our community to interact with each other and share their lived experiences. Where I believe @queerkadeh needs to grow is the flexibility in defining who the community is and what kind of connections are present in our relationship with @queerkadeh users. What follows are examples of connections and disconnections that could occur in a space like @queerkadeh.

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[558] Lee, 197.

These examples provide insights into the importance of both the postmodern and the posthuman frameworks in the ways we define concepts and operate according to those definitions.

While, as depicted above, the Q/M has been shown to be an apt, flexible, and approachable framework, I have noticed that each area of focus is closely related to the other. One aspect of the need for constant change, I believe, is having to balance all areas of focus, which happens only momentarily. For example, although we constantly attempted to increase our connectivity with the community, the fact is that they are scattered around the world and might not have anything in common other than the fact that they belong to an intersectional queer community. Maintaining connection in this environment can become overwhelming especially if funding and resources aren't available.

Furthermore, when a part of a community is directly targeting another part of the same community how does one stay connected to both without taking a side? If we don't stay connected, which happened in the case of the transphobic remarks, then how could we enact a participatory ethos? A radically open ethos doesn't help in defining what a community is and/or with which part of the community one should participate. Is staying connected to both groups and asking for their participation in meaning-making practices an inclusive act when one side is clearly upholding patriarchal and colonial ideologies? Since all I wanted to do was create a space in which my community could tell their stories, and because I didn't know about the different tendencies, history, and ideology of different groups within the community, I didn't think that I needed to create a policy for these incidents. Because the Q/M encourages reframing when a specific configuration doesn't seem to work, I am hopeful that asking the community to establish policy for the platform they seem to care about could help us re-imagine a different configuration in which there are some agreed upon policies to follow in these situations. That said, constantly reframing and changing configurations with limited resources can become overwhelming.

4.2.4.1   Ephemeral Records

As part of exploring how @queerkadeh identifies records, I thought about ephemeral records created through @queerkadeh. It is through acknowledging the validity of the present time that we

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recognize the importance of ephemeral records.[559] When I invited @queerkadeh users to a lip sync battle, I was driven by my recognition of the need for connection between @queerkadeh users who could be struggling to make a meaningful connection to other @queerkadeh users and to us, as @queerkadeh co-creators. I also wanted to dismantle a long-held belief in activist circles that only serious practices are important and those who dance or tell a funny story aren't teaching anything and therefore are not contributing to the betterment of the community. As I am writing this, I think about every effort that went into that event, the fact that we started to feel more comfortable with each other and were able to shake the invisible wall between the content creator and content user, especially in human rights contexts. In tracing the progress of @queerkadeh as a safe space for truly inclusive stories, the lip sync battle, is an important record even though a lot of what went into making that event possible, the conversations we had with @queerkadeh users, and all the joy, laughter, and kinship it brought to our lives were not containable.

I also started thinking about Alireza's wake and its connection to different bodies of archives as bodies of knowledge: acknowledging a loss, protesting a loss, grieving, connecting with the community, representation of people who find themselves in similar situations as Alireza, establishing @queerkadeh as a non-profit organization, and the subsequent fundraising activities to prevent Alireza's tragedy from repeating. Through contemplating these connections, I recognized that the performative nature of @queerkadeh's act in holding a wake for Alireza, although ephemeral and uncontainable, was one of the most important records that @queerkadeh produced.

4.2.4.2   The Politics of Naming

The topic of naming in the context of Iran and neighboring states, as mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, can escalate quickly to an exchange of hateful and ignorant comments. This is

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[559] Lee, 208.

not only the case regarding what to call the multi-national state known as Iran, but also about naming ourselves, and the language we use to communicate. Naming seems to be the first act of division between communities that we undertake as archivists. Therefore, the awareness of fragmented identities, temporalities, spaces, histories, and personhood, as is defined by posthumanism, plays an important role in the way we conceptualize archives.

Working with my community who might have nothing in common other than being queer and having access to Farsi, can sometimes be like walking through a minefield. Not wanting to add to an already tense environment, especially for those who already face the harsh realities of living while queer among anti-queer communities on a daily basis, I struggled to describe @queerkadeh in its Instagram biography section and in general when introducing it to others. Due to the mandates and policies of Iran's previous and current regimes, the use of no language other than Farsi has been allowed in schools and places of work across Iran. Families were prohibited to teach their children their native languages, even if a language was used constantly in their communities and cultural activities, or was important to their community for cultural and historical reasons. The severity by which these mandates are enforced has been decreasing in recent years. However, because these policies have been used to "unify" the "country" they have caused significant tension in a land that has historically been the home of many nations.[560] These tensions are often displayed publicly and as a member of this community one is usually expected to

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[560] For more discussion on this topic see chapter one.

take a side.[561] Aware of these points of tension,[562] I knew not to use the name of any nation or state in my description. For example, this digital space would never be named "Queer Iranian's Digital Storytelling Platform." What I wasn't aware of was the connotation of describing @queerkadeh as "a digital platform for Farsi speaking queer people" until we received comments about the way this kind of naming schemes reinforces the imposed "superiority" of Farsi over other native languages in Iran and the neighboring states.

What I had in mind, when suggesting to use this term, was not intended to exclude other languages. Rather than to celebrate Farsi, I wanted to say this space is for anyone who regardless of their native language has access to Farsi. What convinced me of the connotation of superiority in the term "Farsi speakers" or "Farsi speaking queer people" was the number of responses this comment received that used hateful and xenophobic language. So, after talking to the person who brought this point to my attention, the solution we agreed upon was to refrain from mentioning the name of a language when speaking and writing in Farsi, and simply refer to @queerkadeh as the Farsi translation of "A Digital

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[561] Scholarly works on this subject, although not yet prolific, are starting to be noticed. For more discussion on this topic see Kamal Soleimani and Ahmad Mohammad pour, "Can Non-Persians Speak? The Sovereign's Narration of 'Iranian Identity,'" *Ethnicities* 19, no. 5 (October 2019): 925–47. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796819853059., Mehrdad Kia, "Persian Nationalism and the Campaign for Language Purification." *Middle Eastern Studies* 34, no. 2 (1998): 9–36. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4283935, Homa Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), Accessed April 12, 2022. http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9780755609727.

Storytelling Platform." This way those who have access to Farsi understand it regardless of how they

acquired this language. When we speak any other languages, including English, we refer to @queerkadeh

as a "Digital Storytelling Platform in Farsi." Including "Farsi" in the title when using other languages is

necessary because @queerkadeh is the first of its kind and seeks to serve a community who often needs

services to be offered to them in Farsi so they can use them. By placing the name of the language at the

end of the term, I hope to render the Farsi/Persian supremacist connotation unapplicable. I have not seen

any negative feedback in this regard by the time of writing this thesis. There are many other questions

regarding connectivity between @queerkadeh and its users; however, as Lee asserts, the "Q/M is not

meant to answer them" but to help us think through what is important in our communities. In many ways

@queerkadeh is connected to the community it serves, but connectivity changes and so does the

community.

4.2.5   Storytelling

In storytelling, Lee asserts, "connections and participation occur through many modes and many

lineages."[563] Lee further posits:

> Storytelling and the archival emphasis on stories and 'stories so far' highlight for me the
> intersections and intricate webs of space and time through which multiplicity is instantiated in
> human and non-human relationships as overlapping, hybridized, layered, and imbricated
> existences that tell distinct stories from numerous positions.[564]

As mentioned in chapter three, and as with many other indigenous cultures, storytelling is an important

and pivotal aspect of my culture. Naqqali, which literally means storytelling in Farsi, is known as "Iranian

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[563] Lee, "Queer/ed Archival Methodology," 199.

[564] Lee, 199.

dramatic storytelling."[565] It is one of the oldest forms of storytelling in the world which is still practiced

widely in Iran.[566] Naqqal, the storyteller,[567]

> recounts stories in verse or prose accompanied by gestures and movements, and sometimes
> instrumental music and painted scrolls. Naqqāls function both as entertainers and as bearers of
> Persian literature and culture, and need to be acquainted with local cultural expressions,
> languages and dialects, and traditional music.[568]

Although storytelling can be done professionally in Iran, many of us recall getting together with families

and friends to hear stories about their adventures. The storytelling parties that I remember were not unlike

Naqqali. There was movement, music, and props. The stories changed every time we heard them, but no

one accused the storyteller of lying. What is known in the West as "creative license," was used frequently

in the gatherings in which we told and heard stories. Storytelling would often occur after dinner and when

everybody was ready to drink their tea, have some sweets, and be entertained but also learn from the

storyteller's experience. It might be this cultural background that affected how Mida and I designed our

QueerParties but, I, at least, didn't think about it actively. This background might also be the reason Lee's

Q/M, especially the storytelling part, seemed comprehensible and an effective tool for oral history

projects. As mentioned in the findings chapter however, despite our storytelling culture, some people we

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[565] Naqqāli, "Iranian dramatic storytelling, Intangible Cultural Heritage," (United Nations Educational, Scientific

and Cultural Organization), accessed April 10, 2022, https://ich.unesco.org/en/USL/naqqli-iranian-dramatic-story-

telling-00535

[566] Naqqāli, "Iranian dramatic storytelling, Intangible Cultural Heritage," https://ich.unesco.org/en/USL/naqqli-

iranian-dramatic-story-telling-00535

[567] Mona Emad, "Les Oeuvres Théâtrales De Bahram Beyzaie, La Forme Traditionnelle Du Théâtre Et Sa

Modernisation."

[568] Naqqāli, "Iranian dramatic storytelling," Intangible Cultural Heritage, https://ich.unesco.org/en/USL/naqqli-

iranian-dramatic-story-telling-00535

talked to didn't think they had an "important" story to tell. I also noticed the community members who

didn't think their stories mattered. In what follows, I briefly explore the topics of normativity,

temporality, and multiplicity and the ways in which these topics can be identified and explored in

@queerkadeh's storytelling practices.

4.2.5.1   Normativity

Knowing about the blogger group and their activism is the closest I have ever been to experiencing a

dominant and normative narrative within my community: they thought themselves to be the firsts, they

were extremely gay-centered and patriarchal, and they believed only one version of events, their version,

to be true and valid. They were the judges and norm setters of a community who, for the most part, didn't

know them because, among other things, their activities were limited to Twitter which is banned and

monitored in Iran. Their communication style was very prescriptive and their ideas about different gender

identities and sexual orientations were fixed, rigid, one dimensional, and one sided. These types of

reactions from within the queer community, although heartbreaking and devaluing, shine a light on the

practice of silencing stories of some intersections within the community and the way their right to take

space in the public domain is perceived. Lesbians, or those who are seen as lesbians, for examples, do not

have the right, according to some members of the community, to create too much noise and/or attract too

much attention. The stories we highlighted through @queerkadeh also were deemed unimportant and

ridiculous by the more "serious" activists. It felt, at times, that these critics were so eager to convince me

that I am not worthy of "having" such a platform and should hand it over, along with its forty thousand

followers, to the "real activists" who know how to make "real changes."

Although I had never thought about normative and dominant narratives or that there is a way to

normalize a story while developing @queerkadeh, I did experience what Lee calls "politics of

respectability" in the comments we would receive about how we look or sound, how we pronounce

certain words. I seldom received any judgment about the content of a story but have caught myself,

hopefully in time, right before I was about to raise an eyebrow, or give an all-knowing look to Mida in

response to a story we were hearing that was surprising to me or reminded me of a memory related to that story.

Most of the judgment we experienced came from definitions of different labels and identities. In our attempts to be sensitive, understanding, and accepting of identities and the ways members of our community define their identities regardless of the dominant and normalized definitions, we angered some of the community members, including activists, who were insisting on prescriptive definitions of identity labels. One of our guests, for example, who is a trans man, disclosed that he often refers to himself as lesbian. Mida and I didn't think anything of it but were later chastised for "allowing" this to happen on our platform and that it was dangerous to "let" anybody use any label they wanted to describe themselves. I believe, however, that hearing that one individual's story and making it accessible to the community was the reason @queerkadeh existed in the first place. Unknowingly, Mida and I challenged the stability and fixity of definitions of "categories of collection, recollection, notions of identity, and ideas of belonging as they have become embodied, invisibilized, and normativized."[569]

We still hear and see under our posted content, here and there, that it is "impossible" for people from Iran to be lesbians, but these remarks are not even comparable to the comments we used to receive at the beginning. As I mentioned before, the visual representation of queer Iranians is often limited to gay men. So, it was important for us to offer a visual representation of the non-male and non-straight members of the queer community. Doing so has made it possible for us to not only create a connection with the community of @queerkadeh users, but also with their families. Some families reached out and shared that they had never seen a lesbian couple before and couldn't picture it. We receive comments from religious as well as non-religious Instagram users who tell us that they were worried because they thought their children were sick but @queerkadeh and the stories they have seen and heard there have helped them gain

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[569] Lee, "Queer/ed Archival Methodology," 26.

a better understanding of the nature of gender identities and sexual orientations. They shared with us that they felt more comfortable to provide support for their children after hearing and seeing stories that reminded them of their children.

4.2.5.2   Temporality

The way we reframed our past in posting our older photos in the present time – knowing what is depicted in those intimate photos of the affection between a same-sex couple taken on the streets of Tehran – might be a future many @queerkadeh users long for. To know that not only is it possible to accept who you are, but also to find love and happiness in a place ruled by the cruelest and most queer-phobic laws could indeed be a future worthy of longing for and a will to survive.

In the traditional understanding of archives, time and place are conceptualized as linear concepts. This linear understanding of time and space is how archivists conceive of and collect records, and archival users approach archives.[570] The post-human approach allows for the "blurring" of lines of temporality and the way in which the relationship between the past, present, and future is understood and conceptualized. Instagram, as discussed by Cifor, can disrupt the dominant and normative temporal and geographical rhythms by "creating temporal rupture"[571] and through geotagging. These Instagram affordances can be leveraged to redesign our conceptions of time and space from linear to non-linear which in turn "might open up dynamic spaces and time."[572] Exploring the non-linear temporality afforded by Instagram can depict the complexities of the community @queerkadeh is designed to serve, while at the same time, offering an example of how storytelling functions within a non-linear framework.

As depicted in this thesis, the users of @queerkadeh are scattered around the world and are subjected to drastically different laws that regulate how they can express their sexuality, gender identity and sexual

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[570] Lee, 62.

[571] Cifor, "What Is Remembered Lives," 4.

[572] Lee, Queer/ed Archival Methodology," 68.

orientation. Living abroad is seen as a privilege, especially by the queer community whose lives, as well as physical and mental health, are constantly threatened by the government, and by their families. This extreme contrast in securing advancements and opportunities affects our connectivity and community building potential and creates an environment of distrust and disconnection. Looking back at @queerkadeh through the Q/M framework, I realized that by choosing Instagram as @queerkadeh's platform, Mida and I have been able to disrupt this linear, dichotomous, and very dominant narrative by positioning our stories within a non-linear framework. This could be one of the reasons for the popularity of @queerkadeh among Instagram users within my community. As depicted below, analyzing @queerkadeh through the Q/M framework allowed me to observe and recognize that Instagram provides an environment for storytelling that resembles our experience of constantly moving between remembering and forgetting, as our understanding of the past, present, and future shifts.

For those who live in Iran while queer, the experience of seeing a picture that has captured an intimate moment between two women in public isn't shocking if the couple have blond hair, blue eyes and are photographed in front of the Eifel Tower. It is, however, an acutely different experience if a similar photo is geotagged in Tehran, depicting two women in their Hijabs, who were able to capture that one moment of intimacy and affection at a public space. The photo is not only geotagged but is also linked to the couple's personal accounts which are also public. This is not a scene they are familiar with, and it might take them some time to process how they feel about it or what they think. After the initial shock they can probably guess that no one who is still in Iran can be out so publicly and live. This couple would never dare post this picture publicly if they still lived in Iran. This must be their past. At the same time, another couple who longs for an intimate moment like that can see this photo and wish it could be their future. This depiction of a future that many same-sex couples might want, might also simultaneously be seen and experienced, at the present time, by someone who might not even know others with the same desires ever existed. This storytelling technique can communicate kinship, love, and solidarity among a community who might not have anything in common except for their desire to love and an access to Farsi.

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Because @queerkadeh users live in different parts of the world and experience different shades of queerphobia, some of the content posted on the account, while being experienced in the present, can be depictions of someone's past, and, at the same time, be experienced by those who desire a similar future.

4.2.5.3 Multiplicity

Lee invites archivists to include "multimodal structures of expression, materiality, and communication technologies as active participants" within archival functions.[573] At @queerkadeh, I recognized later when I looked back at our practices, that technologies played a significant role in connecting "human to non-human in emotionally, socially, and culturally significant ways."[574] @queekadeh has also allowed for haphazard and unconscious practices of arrangement and description to stay truer to the way we experience the world around us.[575] Creatorship, I have come to realize in my analysis of @queerkadeh through the Q/M framework, can be understood by the recognition and acceptance of an existing link between human and non-human participants. Lee invites archivists to stay open about the "complexities and multiplicities"[576] of these links and the notion of creatorship so that the records that are created remain meaningful to the diverse users of archives. After Alireza's wake, for example, it felt like all joy had left my body. Mida was in a similar situation. I thought about making a video of us dancing to a famous love song with as many participants as possible, queer or otherwise. This would be a good way, I thought, to commemorate our loss and remind ourselves that his life was lost because of the person he loved. Those of us who participated, filmed ourselves dancing against the light so that only our silhouettes were visible. This form of dancing, for those of us who had the privilege and freedom to be fully visible was, and still is, a sign of solidarity with members of our community who are

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[573] Lee, 198.

[574] Lee, 198.

[575] Lee, 99.

[576] Lee, 80.

not free to do so. This way of protesting started a few years ago in reaction to the imprisonment of a few young adults who had filmed themselves lip-syncing and dancing to Pharrell Williams's "Happy" on the roof tops of Tehran.[577] To demonstrate their anger, many Instagram users filmed themselves dancing against the light with a hashtag in Farsi that read "let's dance."[578] When I was editing the video and when I posted it, I could see the multiplicity of bodies of humans and non-humans, affects, stories and memories of events years apart, and from different perspectives, identities, and different kinds of pain and loss told by this one video.

4.2.6   Intervention

To employ intervention, Lee asks us to

consider carefully the stories that are being told. What stories are being silenced in the not telling? Reflect on the silences, not to fill them with something else, but to recognize these spaces as such. What strategies might archivists consider to expand contextual knowledge about historical matters that might contain and constrain bodies in ways that might be harmful in the long run and might go unnoticed in the immediate?[579]

Focusing on finding aids and how collections are described, Lee suggests, can help archivists "interrogate their own work."[580] While I am not sure what in @queerkadeh might constitute a finding aid, I do sometimes go through our Instagram account to look at the kinds of representation we have been able to provide so far. Mida and I are often only involved with descriptions as agents of our guests and in an absence of a standard, write the descriptions of our guests in the way in which they instruct us. As long as a description or format of a description is plausible within the limitations of language and Instagram, we

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[577] BBC News, "'Happy' Iranians arrested over tribute video," YouTube video, 1:34, May 21, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=taGf9T7I1h4

[578] A direct link to this hashtag is not included here to limit sharing the identifiable information about my community.

[579] Lee, 204-05.

[580] Lee, 205.

carry out the users' instructions. Thinking though archival practices, I can see that retrieving the videos and other content might be time consuming for @queerkadeh users but as they scroll up and down @queerkadeh's profile, they can discover other content and/or can gain an understanding of the context of all the content on and the mission of @queerkadeh.

4.2.7   Re-framing 2.0

Through re-framing, the Q/M encourages archivists to move "towards an openness for social justice and equity."[581] Several archival concepts can be challenged through re-framing in order to create archives that are inclusive, equitable, and just, such as questioning who the community is, in what ways archives can serve those communities, and whether the collections in the archives are relatable to the community that archives claim to represent. Although I've talked about reframing above, I come back to it here again to demonstrate that like other aspects of the Q/M, re-framing is an on-going practice. As mentioned previously contexts and connections change and so do stories and communities. The concept of re-framing, more than any other area of focus outlined through the Q/M framework, enables me to believe that digital spaces such as @queerkadeh can in fact serve their communities as an archives. Below are some aspects of the archival profession and practice that if re-framed can open a radical space in archives for communities such as mine to "suddenly find themselves existing," rather than feeling symbolically annihilated[582] in a space that is built for representation.

4.2.7.1   Record Making and Recordkeeping

A platform such as Instagram is not always reliable to keep our records safe. We do not own our records on Instagram and have very limited options to ensure their preservation within the platform. This is not, however, a problem without solution. Today's digital technology has enabled us to procure

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[581] Lee, 209.

[582] Caswell, Cifor, and Ramirez, "to Suddenly Discover Yourself Existing."

affordable servers that we can own and trust. Inexpensive Raspberry Pi boards, for example, and personal storage drives can make it possible for non-professionals to maintain a safe and secure server and network. One of the simplest solutions, which is what @queerkadeh does at the moment, is to download and back up what we want to keep from Instagram on an external hard drive. The challenge in a situation like @queerkadeh's, more than how to practically keep our records preserved, is that the traditional understanding of recordkeeping does not adhere to posthuman framework and therefore, cannot allow for conceptualization of "product and process" being "intertwined."[583] If we adopt a posthuman approach and remain open to considering change as an integral part of archives and records, we might find creative solutions for recordkeeping even on a platform such as Instagram where change is a constant occurrence. The record continuum model of recordkeeping, which conceptualizes records as always "in a process of becoming," [584] for example, can be applied in these alternative conceptions of recordkeeping.

4.2.7.2   Re-shaping Materiality

Shifting identities in simultaneously contradictory roles such as user and creator is another conceptual and practical concept which can be challenged through re-framing. I have definitely experienced a constant blurring of boundaries between being a friend, a storyteller, a recordkeeper and a holder of space. Between worrying about the anonymity and safety of the @queerkadeh members within the content created through @queerkadeh, and my desire to connect both as a user of this space and as the person in charge of running it, I appreciate a conceptual framework that not only allows such flexibility but expects it. Rethinking archival practices through the Q/M framework and my experiences at @queerkadeh compels me to think of an archivist as a manager of change rather than a person who is in

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[583] Lee, "Queer/ed Archival Methodology," 23.

[584] Sue McKemmish, "Placing Records Continuum Theory and Practice." *Archival Science* 1, no. 4 (2001): 335.

charge of placing archival materials neatly in boxes. What if my job as an archivist could be defined in terms of change rather than fixity? Through this conceptualization, bringing about change and managing it in ways that contribute to the communities in which we serve, will not be seen as a nuisance but the very purpose of our jobs. By analyzing @queerkadeh through the Q/M, I can see how constantly thinking about different ways an archival space could contribute to a community's sense of belonging could be a part of our job descriptions. As the posthuman approach can point to the "organic connection" between dichotomies, I can also see how blurring the lines between being an archival practitioner and scholar could contribute to the archival discipline as it will empower us to carry out research on the ways communities define concepts of creatorship, records preservations, and participation, and the spaces in which they feel safe to participate by leveraging both perspectives of practitioners and scholars.

I'm afraid the disparaging way in which our traditional practices, which still have remnants of colonialism, assign values for stories from minoritized communities, by often only highlighting the dominant narratives, might irrevocably convince communities such as mine that their stories don't matter. This can be a significant loss for any community. Looking at it from my community's perspective with such a long history of storytelling, it will be a great disservice to all cultures. According to my experience at @queerkadeh and working with my community, at times it seems incredibly difficult to convince my community that their stories are valued. Given the harsh environment they find themselves in and my own privilege as a person whose life is not constantly threatened because of the person I love, I can't always communicate how important and effective telling our stories can be. I wonder about how, after initiating the Alireza Memorial Fund, stories about hardship started to appear at @queerkadeh. I don't believe that the reason for this change in valuing storytelling can only be found in valuing stories of hardship over stories of joy, because the stories told at @queerkadeh have always been about all the affects that can be communicated through stories. I believe, instead, that by initiating an act that the community values and thinks of as important and lifesaving – fundraising – they started to be willing to trust that @queerkadeh is not "just" for entertainment.

4.2.7.3 Preservation

The notion of preservation can be re-framed, through the application of the Q/M, as "practices of remembering and forgetting."[585] The lip-sync battle I mentioned above, along with the many affects it left within us, are preserved in our memories and can be clearly seen in the connections we were able to make thereafter. The same is true about Alireza's wake as it caused significant changes in @queerkadeh. The concept of preservation is also related to the recordkeeping discussed above, and the right to be forgotten. Although the right to be forgotten can be afforded through Instagram as deleting posts is easy and possible, @queerkadeh is unable to fully support these rights for its users as most records that are made available online can be saved, recorded, and downloaded by other users. Instagram policies in regards to deleting information are not very clear but we have assumed and advised @queerkadeh users to assume that Meta Platforms, Inc. is the owner of anything posted through Instagram platform.

4.2.7.4 Professionalism

Writing this thesis and engaging with theories, methodologies, and frameworks about a topic that is deeply personal, political, and professional to me, all at the same time, changed the way I think about the concept of grounding a practice in theory. I had assumed that theory is/must be rigid, objective, and impersonal, since simply mentioning "theory" used to signal to me that it's time to put aside my feelings and assess topics and situations in an impartial manner. The Q/M inspired me to break "free from containers, containment," and move forward "towards openness."[586]

Mida and I also approach @queerkadeh as a home for our stories and our communication method has been very informal. Some lines and boundaries started to blur as Mida and I shifted from the admins to users and vice versa. Lines became harder to see, also, because connecting with this scattered

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[585] Lee, "Queer/ed Archival Methodology," 208.

[586] Lee, 65.

community was difficult so we tried to make it possible for many members to participate. Sometimes our attempts would fall far beyond the job descriptions of a talk show host, or an archivist. Mida, for example, helped one @queerkadeh user study for their math finals, and I contacted an immigration lawyer on behalf of another @queerkadeh user. As I look back to these practices, I wonder even more about the concept of professionalism and the role of an archivist in a digital space. Do I still count as an archivist in the space in which I am so involved? Should all archivists be expected to exhibit this level of intimacy? If not, could a space as dynamic, diverse, and trusted as @queerkadeh be developed? In what way? If Mida and I didn't put our own lives in front of the camera, would a community like mine trust us enough to communicate with us and share their stories?

4.2.8   Re-imagining

Through re-imagining, Lee encourages a transdisciplinary approach to archival scholarship and practices. As mentioned throughout this thesis, Lee leverages posthuman, postmodern and queer lenses for developing the Q/M. A transdisciplinary approach "draws from a number of disciplines to re-imagine complex pasts along with new possibilities that don't fit into disciplinary frames."[587] Lee emphasizes the significance of having "the ability and space to re-imagine and re-configure categories," so that as archivists we can "be wary of shifts in meanings" in our attempts "to be attentive to sexuality, race, class, gender, sex, ability, and geography."[588] Here I outline three ways in which I connect with the concept of re-imagination in archival scholarship: my background, technology, and emerging archival theory. Through the Q/M, Lee argues that "the posthuman approach to archives and archiving with its methodological grounding being outside of and across and through numerous disciplines is important to queering and radically opening up the archives to new ways of becoming, being, and making meaning."[589]

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[587] Lee, 210.

[588] Lee, 210.

[589] Lee, 64.

4.2.8.1   Bodies of Knowledge in the State of (Un)becoming

In writhing this thesis and forming an archival concept for @queerkadeh, I engage with the
history, culture, language, and geography of @queerkadeh community. I also engaged with social justice,
gender and sexuality, as well as queer rights literature. In doing so, I have been able to analyze the ways
@queerkadeh serves its users and the ways in which the Q/M can be applied as an analysis framework to
understand digital spaces such as @queerkadeh. Looking back not only at the way @queerkadeh was
developed, but also the way this thesis took shape points to the importance of a transdisciplinary
approach. It has been challenging to write about the needs, values, and goals of my people because they
have never been talked about in the context of critical archival scholarship so there isn't a lot of literature
within my field that could be drawn from in this research. My department granted me an opportunity to
draw from other disciplines in order to carry out this research. The discipline of archival studies has been
setting multiple examples of areas in which transdisciplinary research has been undertaken. A
multidisciplinary project, for example, called Computational Archival Science (CAS) is "a blend of both
computational thinking and archival thinking."[590] As is discussed in what follows, the archival studies
discipline has set many more examples of transdisciplinary approaches to the study of archives.

4.2.8.2   Posthuman, Creatorship, and Technology

Working with unfamiliar technology can be frustrating, time consuming, and labour intensive. To
keep @queerkadeh relevant and accessible, Mida and I taught ourselves several technological tools and
software. In addition, the task of uploading and downloading content in separate applications and
platforms can be overwhelming. Through the posthuman approach embedded in the Q/M framework I can
understand this monumental work as a partnership in meaning-making and record creation, which if seen

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[590] Hoda Hamouda et al., "Extending the Scope of Computational Archival Science: A Case Study on Leveraging
Archival and Engineering Approaches to Develop a Framework to Detect and Prevent 'Fake Video,' (IEEE, 2019),
doi:10.1109/BigData47090.2019.9006170

through the same posthuman approach, has components of recordkeeping; as Lee notes, in a "posthuman archives, product and process are intertwined." [591] Through the posthuman approach, I can look back and explore the ways each device, application, software and platform we used connected us to others around us and was directly involved in creatorship, enabling so many members of my community whose voices have been stifled to speak up and tell their stories.

Lee's conceptualization of the "shifting positionalities of subjects, records, archivists, and archives"[592] is grounded in their "understanding of post human perspective."[593] The influence of human and non-human "on and in the archive"[594] is evident in oral history interviews in which many human and non-human participants assemble the event, "even the hum of the refrigerator in the next room."[595] In the face of increased "uncertainties in everyday archival practices that are oriented in time, space, and the body," Lee encourages archivists and archival scholars to teach new archivists how they can look at archival concepts through a posthuman framework in which concepts of time, body and space are no longer fixed so that archival practices then don't have to rely on fixed concepts.[596] Lee further explains,

> Questioning time and space in these ways lends the archives legitimacy and relevancy to non-normative multiply-situated peoples, thus challenging the normative structures that have been used to oppress and further marginalize. Justice prevails in these moments and spaces by promoting multiple historical narratives that subvert and challenge dominant power structures.[597]

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[591] Lee, 22.

[592] Lee, 36.

[593] Lee, 36.

[594] Lee, 36.

[595] Lee, 36.

[596] Lee, 37.

[597] Lee, 68.

With its emphasis on critical theory, the posthuman framework and the way it imagines ethics resemble Butler's argument about the relationship between the self and others in the context of ethics, mentioned in chapter two. Rosi Braidotti, a contemporary philosopher and feminist theoretician, stresses the need for deep contemplation of "the status of the human" in order to "invent forms of ethical relations, norms and values worthy of the complexity of our times." [598]

Far from being "indifference to the humans," [599] Braidotti suggests, a posthuman framework asserts, as did Butler, that "a sustainable ethics for non-unitary subjects rests on an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the nonhuman or 'earth' others, by removing the obstacle of self-centered individualism on the one hand and the barriers of negativity on the other."[600] Braidotti further asserts,

> Becoming-posthuman consequently is a process of redefining one's sense of attachment and connection to a shared world, a territorial space: urban, social, psychic, ecological, planetary as it may be. It expresses multiple ecologies of belonging, while it enacts the transformation of one's sensorial and perceptual co-ordinates, in order to acknowledge the collective nature and outward-bound direction of what we still call the self.[601]

The posthuman framework allows me to analyze @queerkadeh and its archival potential based on suppositions that are similar to the messy, queer, massive, and dynamic world in which I live. "Humans do not work in isolation,"[602] Lee asserts, so why should any aspect of archival work be "considered in isolation?"[603] Humans aren't one thing. We are constantly (un)becoming, so how could the records that

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[598] Lee, 186.

[599] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*. (Oxford: Polity Press, 2013): 190.

[600] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*,190.

[601] Rosi Braidotti, 193.

[602] Lee, "Queer/ed Archival Methodology," 199.

[603] Lee, 134.

are supposed to reflect our dynamic lives be static and unchanging? With so many different perspectives from which the same story can be told, how can we stop after capturing only one of its multifold possibilities?

4.2.8.3   Emerging Archival Theory

The posthuman and postmodern frameworks embodied in the Q/M suggest that transdisciplinary approaches are essential in developing a digital archival space; these frameworks expand what participatory ethos can look like, depict the many ways by which we can intervene, and offer limitless networks of relationality we can envision to connect with our communities, human or non-human. These two frameworks have shown me that just because we can't see or imagine a space and a practice that has the potential to offer endless possibilities, doesn't mean we should stop imagining.[604] The uniqueness of the Q/M, Lee suggests, lies with its aim to shift archival scholarship from postmodern to posthuman.[605] That, however, as mentioned before is one of the many examples of scholarly work in this field that have leveraged transdisciplinary approaches. Archival scholars have paid special attention to social justice in archival contexts. Duff et al. for example mention that debates around social justice in archival studies "mirror developments across a range of academic disciplines and praxis professions that have responded to and grappled with contemporary social justice imperatives." They argue that the topic of social justice must be "systematically and coherently" addressed as it has been in other disciplines. [606] Leveraging the feminist cultural studies of affect which is closely related to feminist, queer, critical ethnic and cultural studies and examines the relationality and connectivity "between affect and gendered, sexualized,

[604] Lee, 184.

[605] Lee, 81.

[606] Wendy Duff et al., "Social Justice Impact of Archives: A Preliminary Investigation." *Archival Science* 13, no. 4 (2013): 319.

racialized and classed power relations"[607] Cifor introduces affect theory in the context of archival studies arguing that "affect is a central component of social justice work and aims." Affect theory can be leveraged as theory in archival scholarship to explore power structures within archives and archival fields and can become a "needed avenue"[608] by which dominant and normative structures and narratives within archives can be challenged and disrupted.

In an article about the value of community-based archives as well as of the volunteers and professionals who work at such organizations, Caswell et al. note that "The body of work in archival studies that frames, defines and reckons with community archives conceptually is complemented by research in history, geography, ethnic and LGBT studies on specific community-based archives."[609] In an earlier work Caswell, Cifor and Ramirez leverage media studies and its terminology "symbolic annihilation" which depicts "the ways in which mainstream media ignore, misrepresent, or malign minoritized groups." To counter this effect through community archives, they proposed conceptualizing "representational belonging," so that "memory institutions with the autonomy and authority to establish, enact, and reflect on their presence in ways that are complex, meaningful, substantive, and positive to them in a variety of symbolic contexts."[610] Last, but certainly not least, Douglas employs autoethnography as a research tool for "understanding the ethics of researching online grief communities,"[611] by leveraging

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[607] Marika Cifor, "Affecting Relations: Introducing Affect Theory to Archival Discourse," *Archival Science* 16, no.1 (2016): 9.

[608] Marika Cifor, "Affecting Relations: Introducing Affect Theory to Archival Discourse," 27.

[609] Caswell et al., "'to be Able to Imagine Otherwise': Community Archives and the Importance of Representation." *Archives and Records* (Abingdon, England) 38, no. 1 (2017): 7.

[610] Caswell et al., "to be Able to Imagine Otherwise," 57.

[611] Douglas, "Is This Too Personal?" 304.

social media studies related to surveillance in order to rethink ethics in intimate online spaces.[612] My exposure to these scholarly works has influenced the way in which I understand and employ transdisciplinary approaches in my research. Postmodern, queer, and critical scholarship such as feminist ethics of care, anticolonial concepts of ownership and creatorship, and leveraging novel technologies in archival practices has made this field truly transdisciplinary.

4.2.9   Flexibility and Dynamism

In the way Lee conceptualizes flexibility and dynamism, an ideal configuration[613] does not exist due to the everchanging nature of archives, records, record creators and the shifting between normative and non-normative which make archival reconfiguration relational rather than fixed in an ideal state. The way I understand @queerkadeh's flexibility is through both the affordances of its platform (Instagram) as well as our drive for inclusivity. It should be noted that while I hope this case study has depicted the archival potential of @queerkadeh, at the time of its establishment I did not think of @queerkadeh as an archives and therefore didn't feel obligated to adhere to archival principles. It might be more challenging for future developers of digital archival spaces to forgo some of these archival principles if they do wish to present their digital space as an archives.

4.3   Limitation and Future Research

While leveraging an autoethnographic approach in exploring the potentials of @queerkadeh has revealed significant insights from the point of view of a creator of a digital archival space, voices of @queerkadeh users are missed in the present study. Planning such a study, however, considering its significant risk to the safety of my community, was outside of the scope of this thesis. The @queerkadeh

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[612] Douglas, 304.

[613] Suggested by Derrida, and noted in Lee, 211.

users' perspectives can offer invaluable insights and any future study related to @queerkadeh must be conceived in a way that would enable the users' participation.

Another possible limitation of this study, is that my conceptualization of critical archival scholarship, including the Q/M, developed and advanced in preparation for this research. This knowledge might have impacted my early memories of developing @queerkadeh. The narratives from the early stages of @queerkadeh's development in this thesis, therefore, might sound more confident than how I felt at the time.

As @queerkadeh is the first of its kind, I have not been able to locate other archival spaces that are designed for users such as my community who simultaneously need anonymity and a chance to represent themselves. Comparing @queerkadeh to such a space could offer additional insights about the potentials of online digital spaces as a community-based archives. Additionally, as @queerkadeh is at the end of its second year of operation, the present study has only been able to conduct an autoethnographic study on the first phases of development and maintenance of this digital space. Studying the way @queerkadeh changes through the years by leveraging the Q/M framework, can add to our understanding of both the Q/M and the online digital spaces that strive to serve their communities as archives.

So many of the features @queerkadeh has been able to offer its users were afforded by Instagram, however, the current study did not focus on exploring Instagram affordances. A transdisciplinary study of social media platforms, including Instagram, and the possibilities they can afford as platforms for archival spaces can be instrumental in the investigation of digital storytelling techniques. Studying digital platforms as potential archival tools, as Cifor has done in "What is Remembered Lives," will move the discipline further towards the postmodern and posthuman frameworks. Digital storytelling, which has

been studied since early 2000s as an effective tool for teachers to leverage in their classrooms,[614] can be investigated in archival discipline as well. As the archival discipline and scholarship explore nuanced definitions and practices for classical archival concepts such as records, creatorship, and preservation, gaining better understandings of possible platforms that lend themselves to accessible digital storytelling will contribute to critical archival scholarship. Social media platforms can level the field of creation and access as "many more people, and communities, are waking up to the power of their own voice in the media, and are finding the means to express themselves, for themselves and their communities through the new media."[615] I would also like to echo Douglas's concern about the ethics of research in online spaces, as it might not be clear whether users who share information publicly know the reach of their content. Even when users are aware that they are using a publicly accessible digital space, they may not treat it as such because these digital spaces "might not feel public."[616]

4.4   Summary and Conclusion

This thesis explores the representational needs of a distinct and intersectional community, introduces a digital archival space developed by two community members, including the author of this thesis, and leverages queer/ed archival methodology within the context of critical archival scholarship to gain a better understanding of the potentials of this digital space in representing its community. The community who @queerkadeh is developed to serve, has at least two traits in common: they self-identify as queer, and have access to Farsi.

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[614] Marina Amancio, ""Put it in Your Story": Digital Storytelling in Instagram and Snapchat Stories," Master's Thesis, (Uppsala universitet, Institutionen för informatik och media, 2017): 21.

[615] Joe Lambart, *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013): 4.

[616] Douglas, "Is This Too Personal?" 303.

Chapter one of this thesis demonstrates this community's distinct needs, values, and goals by offering a brief summary of their historical and sociocultural background, and a short description of their current living circumstances. The intricacies of discussing this community's notions of homeland, nation, ethnicity, language, and geographical borders are also explored in chapter one followed by a review of archival literature related to community-based archives, nuanced understandings of key archival concepts, and the archival discipline's shift to postmodernism.

Chapter two discusses the methodology and methods of research in this thesis, offers the way in which I position myself in the realm of research, and explores the ethical concerns of this study. Working through conceptualizing concepts of self, vulnerability, and community, this chapter investigates autoethnography as methodology and method for this inquiry and engages with queer/ed archival methodology as an analysis framework for gaining a deeper understanding of the potentials of @queerkadeh in representing its users.

In chapter three, I conduct an autoethnographic study by offering narratives from two phases of development and maintenance of @queerkadeh. Walking through different memories from the developing phase of @queerkadeh and exploring them via the Q/M perspective, granted significant insights on the potentials of @queerkadeh as an archives. This autoethnographic study in which I retroactively engaged with my memories through the Q/M framework depicts representational opportunities @queerkadeh offers its users by providing a participatory space in which members of the community took control of their narratives and decided how, when, and to what extent they wanted to share their stories. By leveraging Instagram's affordances, @queerkadeh has been able to offer its users different modes of storytelling and connectivity which allowed for flexibility, dynamism, and multiplicity of stories and supported the shifting of positionalities.

In chapter four I discuss the ways @queerkadeh can be evaluated as an archives. The areas of focus highlighted in the Q/M made it possible to reframe the conception of a record from a specific kind of document, made by a specific creator, appraised, arranged, and described in a specific manner, and

retained, preserved, and shared according to institutional mandates to a conceptualization of record and recordness based on what a record does for the people it represents. I also discuss the way in which @queerkadeh disrupts normative narratives through its form and content.

By writing this thesis, I set out to contribute to archival discourse, archival infrastructure, and archival institutions, as I have come to believe, inspired by Butler, that in encountering constant violence, as many in my community do, "the task of nonviolence is to find ways of living and acting…such that violence is checked…or its direction turned." Our bodies, Butler suggests "can be the vector of that turn, but so too can discourse, collective practices, infrastructures, and institutions."[617] In telling the story of @queerkadeh through the lens of the queer/ed archival methodology, I hold a space for my community to "un/become" as they tell their "stories so far."

This thesis suggests that one of the most significant aspects of the Q/M is its potential to be leveraged as a framework and not a manual. This empowering aspect of the Q/M which is embodied in all the seven areas of focus outlined by Lee, offers both freedom and structure for exploration. The structure that the Q/M provides is not a rigid and unchanging construct. Situated in a posthuman and postmodern frameworks, this structure can be conceptualized as a multidimensional and everchanging room of possibilities where time is not linear, and meanings are not fixed. In the face of constant change and movement in a world that is plagued by an impossible quest for stillness, perfection, and completeness, the Q/M acknowledges and appreciates that "bodies of knowledges are unruly" [618] and cannot be contained. Instead, the Q/M framework advocates for a constant re-configuration in archives that hold our records so that they can remain "relevant to communities, technologies, timescapes, emotions, and social,

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[617] Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence*, 10.

[618] Lee, "Queer/ed Archival Methodology," 60.

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technical, cultural formations."[619] The Q/M challenges the assumptions made about "ideal configurations" and suggests that non-normative might "shift"[620] to normative and vice versa.

As is demonstrated in this study, the Q/M is an invaluable framework that should be leveraged in archival discipline if we hope to create more just, hospitable, and inclusive spaces for reciprocal participations of multitudes of distinct communities with different needs, values, and goals. Once such spaces are created, the Q/M should also be employed as part of the archives' maintenance plans to ensure that archivists feel comfortable not only in accepting ever-growing changes, but also to seek active feedback and participation from the communities they serve. Understanding this framework is essential in our reconceptualization of what archives and records can do and how they can look like as it clearly depicts records and archives as bodies in the process of becoming and unbecoming. The Q/M's flexibility shines through as I leverage it to look back at @queerkadeh's development in an attempt to understand its nuances. This framework can be easily leveraged as a problem-solving technique while it is situated within complicated and nuanced understanding of networks of connectivity around us.

Looking at @queerkadeh through the Q/M framework made it possible for this study to engage with some of Instagram affordances, such as direct and real-time communication, which made it possible for @queerkadeh's storytelling practices to remain dynamic, flexible, and participatory. The fact that @queerkadeh has been able to leverage Instagram's affordance to offer a safe and inclusive space to an intersectional and scattered community signifies Instagram's potential as a dynamic and flexible platform for alternative archives. The Q/M is centered around what archives can do and be for minoritized communities and as such creates a space in which Instagram affordances can be examined as partners in storytelling and archival practices which increases the possibility of creatorship and access. Filters on

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[619] Lee, 60.

[620] Lee, 211.

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Instagram, for example, offer limitless possibilities for participation of inclusive and diverse communities who might need to, like my community does, walk on a very narrow line between visibility and vulnerability.

Studying @queerkadeh through an ethnographic case study, which investigated this space and what it could mean and do for its community through the Q/M as an analytical framework, offered valuable insights. It opened a door to the process of creating an alternative digital archives from a vantage point less explored: the point of view of a former informant who has been empowered to take the role of a researcher to not only represent herself but also create a space sensitive to her community's needs so that they can be their own voices and take ownership of their representation. This case study provided an opportunity to engage with a digital community archives that has made it possible for its intersectional community to be seen and heard while remaining anonymous. As an example of a space that can be understood through the Q/M, @queerkadeh proves that the community it serves exists "in ways that are complex, meaningful, substantive, and positive in a variety of symbolic contexts."[621] As @queerkadeh "creates a temporal rupture, one that prevents the normalizing forces of dominant temporal orders from simply continuing as usual," [622] a community whose members are connected to each other through an untold, erased, and contested past tell their contrasting, competing, contradictory, and complimentary stories.

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[621] Lee, 57.

[622] Cifor, "What Is Remembered Lives."

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