The Visualization of Cultural Identity in Arranged Photography

Case studies of Hans Eijkelboom, Jimmy Nelson and Shadi Ghadirian

by:

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Abstract

As we are living in a globalizing world, the local is defined by the global and the global by the local. There is a constant fluid connection between these paradoxes and artists from all over the world are responding to this interplay. A lot of contemporary photographers deal with issues that arise around the visualization of cultural identity. Photography appears in many different forms, for instance true to life or arranged on forehand or afterwards, though photography is by many still seen as pre-eminent a medium that shows the viewer a reproduction of reality. This research focuses on the visualization of cultural identity through arranged photography as photography is becoming more and more a construction, and these constructions provide other angles towards this visualization. This study aims to contribute to the recent debates, concerning contemporary photography, cultural identity and the portrayal of the contemporary human being by investigating the different ways in which cultural identity is being visualized in the works of Hans Eijkelboom, Jimmy Nelson and Shadi Ghadirian.

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Introduction

Since ages, people and their cultures from all over the world are portrayed by themselves and others. These portraits are often a combination of fiction and reality, as the maker determines how the model is represented. The representation of identity is very problematic since there is not one fixed definition of the notion of identity. Furthermore we could question who is going to determine what the identity of a certain person or group is: "How identity is constructed and presence evoked differs from culture to culture, though, it is subject to concepts of individualism, a prevailing aesthetics, and a host of social or ritual beliefs particular to a given time or place."[1] By describing identity the way art historian Jean M. Borgatti does, identity can also be embodied by a visual image as all named components in the construction of identity go often hand in hand with expressions of visual culture. That part of identity, the part that can be visualized, has a lot of common ground with the 'cultural identity' of a person or a group and is partly determined by how people look and dress themselves. Therefore it is possible to represent cultural identity, or at least some parts of it, through the medium of photography. One of the characteristics of photography is that it offers the viewer a truthful image of reality, though, we must be aware that there are all kinds of methods to change the final appearance of the photograph. Here, in this research I will deal with photography only as an arranged medium, as the constructed character of photography is increasingly emphasized nowadays. This constructed character is also evident in the representation of identity. In this study the two are combined, thus, the focus will lie on the appearances of a person or a group of people, on what cultural identity is deduced from their visual characteristics and how that is achieved by arranged photography.

Photography as a medium is preeminent suitable to record and preserve images of people. Nowadays however, the concept of truth in photography is questioned, as it is no longer just a medium for objective documentation. Photography appears in different forms and today a lot of photographers use some kind of technology to alter the appearance of their photographs and present it as accurate records. Manipulation is trendy. Not just photographers use techniques and methods to transform their photographs to accomplish the desired results, so do we, for instance by transforming our own appearances on our iPhones to look better or in any case, different. On the other side of the spectrum is straight photography, which can be defined as an unmanipulated image, true to nature, without arrangements or manipulation before or after the photograph has been produced. Arranged photography can be placed between these two extremes as it comprises

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1 Jean M. Borgatti, "Constructed Identities: Portraiture in World Art," in *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches,* ed. Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008), 304.

a form of photography whereby no technical methods or devices are used to change the appearance of the final photograph, on the other hand the final photograph(s) is also not a straight record of the 'real' world. A photograph is arranged, first, when the photographer beforehand determines the positioning of the models and everything else that is in the photograph (also staged) or second, when a photographer arranges his pictures afterwards in a way the final appearance changes. When arrangements are made in a pre-photographic stage, the photographer is actually photographing a tableaux-vivant, a living picture positioned by the photographer. Making arrangements in a post-photographic stage mostly requires for the photographer to present his photographs out of context, for instance as a series.

In the light of these different forms of arrangements I will examine how cultural identity is represented by contemporary photographers Hans Eijkelboom, Jimmy Nelson and Shadi Ghadirian. More specific, how does a constructed image affect the perception of reality, particularly the reading of cultural identity, and what aspects of cultural identity do photographers investigate through exaggerating certain elements with their arrangement techniques? In this process I will concentrate on the realization of the photograph with a focus on different forms of arranging and what underlying thoughts contributed to the final image. Eventually I will examine for each photographer individually what influences the arranging process has on the representation and perception of cultural identity. All three photographers have different motives and use different arranging techniques, yet they are all dealing with certain aspects of culture and the representation of the contemporary human being.

In the first chapter some theories concerning cultural identity and photography will be compared and explained. Before the main question can be examined we first need to know how cultural identity, a concept from the anthropology, is explained by theorists in this field before it can be combined with its visualization in photography. This chapter offers an outline of topical debates about cultural identity. Based on the ideas of anthropologist Dorothy Holland and cultural theorist Stuart Hall, I will describe what is meant with cultural identity and how it can be constructed. Then, to make a connection with photography, we need to gain insight in how anthropology, more specific cultural identity, could be visualized. Anthropologists, Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz argue for new visual forms achieved by combining anthropology and art. In a similar vein, art historian Jean M. Borgatti offers ways of visualization, by also combining objective techniques from the anthropology with artistic practices of the representation of people as he focusses on portraiture over the years. The subsequent section discusses photography as a construction. Based on the ideas of art historians Liz Wells and Derrick Prize, Hilde van Gelder and Helen Westgeest and Sabine T. Kriebel who all wrote

surveys concerning theory of photography, I will discuss topical debates about in what manner photographs could give us insight in reality.

As of chapter one there is a certain structure visible in the chapters in which the use of arrangements varies from, in my opinion, less to more. I will start with Hans Eijkelboom (chapter two) who only makes arrangements in a post-photographic stage, next I will discuss Jimmy Nelson (chapter three) who creates a cooperation between the model and himself, and I will finish by discussing the work of Shadi Ghadirian (chapter four) who does all the arrangements in a pre-photographic stadium.

In chapter two the focus will lie in the first place on typologies in photography, more specific on how the appearance and perception of a single photograph can change when it is arranged into a series. Hans Eijkelboom highlights external characteristics of the people he photographs by searching for people, preferably from the same neighborhood, with similarities in behavior or garments. He sorts the individual photographs in a post-photographic stage into a series. In doing this, he changes the appearances of his photographs, which makes us wonder, to what extent do his arrangement techniques in a post-photographic stage influence the perception of the models' cultural identity? By comparing and contrasting his work to that of Hilla and Bernd Becher and August Sander I will emphasize the power of his strategy of arranging individual photographs into a grid. Does the perception of cultural identity change when photographs are shown out of their context? Based on the ideas of sociologist John Tomlinson I will stress the role of globalization in constructing cultural identity and emphasize the importance of being different in constructing identity as cited by cultural theorist Stuart Hall and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. In the last section I will argue in what manner Eijkelboom's series differ from Sanders' and the Bechers'.

The third chapter explores the role of arranged photography realized through collaboration between Jimmy Nelson and his models. How does this dialogue influence the realization of the final photograph and what cultural identity is eventually conveyed through his photographs? Contrary to Hans Eijkelboom, who took pictures of random people, not knowing they were photographed, not staged beforehand, only sorted by visual features afterwards, Jimmy Nelson's pictures are really well thought beforehand. He gives the people a voice by letting them determine what cultural identity they want to convey in the photograph. The latter will be discussed in the light of the ideas of Dorothy Holland et al. who focus on the realization of identity in cooperation with others. This collaboration leads to a constructed photograph whereby objects are shown out of their original context. Such a construct raises similar issues as the postmodern construct of identity, as both are build up out of fragments/ smaller components.

Based on the ideas of Joel Eisinger and Lucy Soutter I will describe how Nelson's work responds to the premises of postmodernism.

The work of Iranian photographer Shadi Ghadirian has a central role in chapter four, as it discusses her *Qajar Series,* which comprises photographs of women placed in a setting and accompanied by objects that originate from different periods. This way of presenting supports the fragmented character of cultural identity in postmodern times cited by Anthony Elliot, Paul du Gay and Stuart Hall. Furthermore, in what manner do Ghadirian's arrangement techniques in a pre-photographic stage contribute to this fragmented character and is she able to question the concept of cultural identity? She gives the viewers a little peek into the world of Iranian women which is not that accessible for outsiders. Being a woman herself, she draws from her own experiences in presenting a cultural identity which is constructed out of many different influences both imposed and self-chosen. In doing this she makes a construction out of photography as well as out of cultural identity. Finally, in the conclusion I will compare the works and approaches of the three photographers in order to determine what similarities and differences are noticeable in constructing a visual cultural identity.

Chapter 1. The constructed character of cultural identity and arranged photography

There has been a shift in the field of the visual studies from mostly focusing on visual materials to a focus on other ways of looking with an "attention to the problematic nature of looking."[2] Naturally, various ways of looking are embedded in the study that concerns photography. However, what are these other ways of looking and to what extent can theories from the visual sociology and visual anthropology offer new insights in the reading of cultural identity as being depicted in photography? For decades there is a certain feeling amongst people that each person is an individual and numerous of people are claiming that they are constantly reinventing themselves, however, there is always a cultural aspect which influences people's individualism. Especially living in a global age, culture is one of the things that makes us different from the other as we are constantly defining our own but also others' identity.

Sociologists Anthony Elliot and Charles Lemert introduced three theories of individualism and beyond. Particularly striking, is that they argue in their article 'The Global New Individualist Debate: Three Theories of Individualism and Beyond' that "it is not the particular individuality of an individual that's most important." What they find "increasingly significant is how individuals create identities, the cultural forms through which people symbolize individual expression and desire, and perhaps above all the speed with which identities can be reinvented and instantly transformed."[3] It is striking that they describe identity as a creation which can be reinvented and transformed, therefore identity can be seen as a construction built up out of smaller parts, both internal and external. When identity is approached as a creation, and less as something people just have, it is possible to make a comparison with the realization of an arranged photograph, as both are in a way constructions.

When a painter puts something on support and he is not satisfied, he can paint it over a few more times, although his possibilities are not endless. Photographers who are using arranging techniques can change and fine-tune the setting as many times as they would like. On the other hand a painter can paint something that is fantasy, whereas a photographer is limited in his approach. However, due to arrangements techniques and manipulation, the photographer is able to present an image that is not true to life and at the same time not fantasy. As explained,

2 Eric Margolis and Luc Pauwels, *The SAGE Handbook of Visual Research Methods* (London: Sage Publications, 2011), 24.

3 Anthony Elliot and Charles Lemert, "The Global Individualist Debate: Three Theories of Individualism and Beyond," in *Identity in Question,* ed. Anthony Elliot and Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 2009), 58.

arranging can appear in various forms, yet the image represented in a photograph both arranged beforehand and afterwards is subject to a long process of reinvention and transformation. These possibilities might influence the fragmented, transformative character of the identity of its models. What is meant with identity in this research, how identity is constructed and how the character of photography has changed over the years will be explained further on. This chapter will first discuss (the visualization of) cultural identity as a construct based on the ideas of several critics both from the arts and anthropology, after which it focusses on the constructed character of photography in order to build bridges and see similarities between the two.

1.1 Cultural identity as a construction

It seems, when searching for theories about identity, the concept is used in many varying ways. This research concentrates on cultural identity, still a concept which is hard to define since there is not one fixed definition, however it refers to aspects associated with culture, in other words ideas, customs and social behavior of a particular people or society. When explaining cultural identity like this, it is not directly linked to the field of the arts. However, nowadays a lot of artists are dealing with identity issues in their work. To gain insight into the way photographers deal with the visualization of cultural identity, some theories concerning this concept need to be explained.

In the beginning of their book, the authors of *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* sketch two ways of identity making. One of a 35 years old man who is disabled and wishes he was 60 so his life was almost over and one of a fifteen years old girl from Nepal who is singing about her life even though she will be spending her entire life cutting grass and wood. The authors call these processes of identity making similar as both "were producing, from the cultural resources available to them, understandings of themselves that seemed to be not only "of" (about) themselves, representing the dilemmas of their respective social situations, but also "for" themselves."[4] They make a distinction between identity in a broader sense and cultural identity, which they describe as identities that are formed "in relation to major structural features of society: ethnicity, gender, race, nationality, and sexual orientation."[5] This research addresses the visualization of the latter.

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4 Dorothy Holland et al., *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* (Cambridge, MA etc.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 3-4.

5 Dorothy Holland et al., *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* (Cambridge, MA etc.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 7.

Not explicitly brought up by Holland et al. in the formation of cultural identity is the impact of other people. Cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall (1932-2014) offers two ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first position is the one in which he defines 'cultural identity' in terms of "one, shared culture, (..) which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common." This means that "our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as one people, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history."[6] Before I will reflect on this assumption and argue that it is dubious to say that cultural identity is stable and unchanging, Hall continues his definition by offering the reader another, related but different view on cultural identity. He describes this one as "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. (..) Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories but, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation, (..) they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power."[7] Summarized, Hall distinguishes two ways of thinking about cultural identity: identity as being which suggests a sense of unity based on a shared history and identity as becoming as well as of being in which the focus has a stronger emphasis on differences between people, as it shows us the discontinuity in constructing an identity in connection with others. This means people with a shared culture have a certain shared base which is defined by history, however they can individually or collectively build on this base which ensures differences in their cultural identity.

Both cultural theorists Dorothy Holland and Stuart Hall explain what they mean with the concept of cultural identity and how it can be constructed. Anthropologists, Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz have a different approach, as they are not trying to define cultural identity, yet they are looking for ways to visualize anthropology. They wrote the introduction to *Visualizing Anthropology,* of which the name refers to the 'visual anthropology', a subfield of social anthropology that amongst others deals with the study and production of ethnographic photography. They express their urge of finding new visual forms to support the anthropology they want to pursue and find a possible solution in working beyond the disciplinary boundaries.

6 Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *The Journal of Cinema and Media* 36 (1989) : 223. Accessed January 23, 2017, http://lampje.leidenuniv.nl/KITLV-docs/open/338314997.pdf.

7 Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," *The Journal of Cinema and Media* 36 (1989) : 225. Accessed January 23, 2017, http://lampje.leidenuniv.nl/KITLV-docs/open/338314997.pdf.

As an example they mention this shared ethnographic space between anthropology and art, which can be interesting for my research.[8]

These different theorists all focus in a way on what meanings derive from the notion of cultural identity, however, they do not explain how you can make such an identity visual. Art historian Jean M. Borgatti does offer ways of visualization, as she distinguishes three categories that emerge from a survey of portraiture across different cultures and time periods. He is not focusing solely on photography, though some categories in particular can be applied on portraiture in photography. He argues that "the most widespread method of portrayal is by means of a generic human representation made correct by its attributes of wealth and status but not necessarily bearing physical resemblance to the subject." In this category he talks about masks, paintings, shields and objects that can refer to a certain person, and even though a physical resemblance is absent it is possible to render someone's cultural identity. The second one he names is the category in which "cultures also use symbolic or emblematic images to evoke the individual through various associational characteristics as site, clothing, and literary convention, that is, through visual reference to the subject's name in acronym or proverbial form." In this second category the model is the central figure, although dressed, decorated or accompanied by objects, clothes or others 'things' that might refer to certain cultural aspects. The third and final category is the one in which he states that "portraiture includes works based on likeness, the result of a confrontation between artist and subject- or some facsimile in the case of posthumous portraits."[9] In that line, photography is pre-eminent suitable to record such a confrontation between artist and subject, both when the subject is aware of being photographed and when not. In chapter two, three and four I will further elaborate on the effects and results of these confrontations between photographer and object and provide an outline of how cultural identity is artistically investigated in the works of Hans Eijkelboom, Jimmy Nelson and Shadi Ghadirian.

This image construction happens in a time in which concepts and art forms are influenced by postmodernism. Also the concept of identity is subject to ideas which belong to postmodernism. The reading of images concerned with the visualization of cultural identity must go hand in hand with the understanding of identity's "fragmentarism, reconstruction and fragility

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8 In section 2.2 I will further elaborate on this concept.

9 Jean M. Borgatti, "Constructed Identities: Portraiture in World Art," in *World Art Studies: Exploring Concepts and Approaches,* ed. Kitty Zijlmans and Wilfried van Damme (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2008), 304.

in postmodern era."[10] In "The Dynamics of Postmodern Identity", Elena Abrudan offers the reader understandings about postmodernism and its influence on identity. She cites that compared to premodern eras, the innovation "lays in the fact that the individual can choose and build his identity according to the opportunities that come up within his lifetime." Besides that, an individual is able to adopt a self-chosen social role which need to be accepted and recognized by others. She proceeds by saying that the other, thus, "becomes a constitutive element and a factor that has to be taken into consideration in an attempt to establish an identity."[11] If we consider the photographer in the position of the other, the interplay between model/individual and photographer/other becomes interesting as both are contributing to the final cultural identity conveyed through the photograph.

1.2 Arranged photography: A constructed photograph

Photography is everywhere, however we must always question the truthful character of it. Due to available techniques and arrangement possibilities a photographer can transform the objective character of photography to a subjective one. There are a lot of approaches concerning theorizing photography; in the following part I will only compare some ideas towards photography which can be of importance to this research.

In her book *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, Liz Wells gives a clear overview of a few of these approaches and emphasizes that in most of these approaches the reading of photographic images is of importance, only after that follows the making.[12] When photographers are dealing with the visualization of cultural identity in their photographs it is both about the reading and the making since the reading is influenced by the making. In the following chapters will be explained how this reading can be influenced by arrangement techniques, but first it is important to explore what ideas and practices possibly have impact on contemporary photographers and can lead to the desire of arranging.

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10 Elena Abrudan, "The Dynamics of Postmodern Identity," *Journal of Media Research* 1, no. 9, (2011) : 23, http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=deb1fcdd-9c8e-4282-860a-9f32b88fb965%40sessionmgr103&vid=0&hid=111.

11 Elena Abrudan, "The Dynamics of Postmodern Identity," *Journal of Media Research* 1, no. 9, (2011) : 24, http://eds.b.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=deb1fcdd-9c8e-4282-860a-9f32b88fb965%40sessionmgr103&vid=0&hid=111.

12 Derrick Price and Liz Wells, "Thinking about Photography: Debates, Historically and Now," in *Photography: A critical Introduction*, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2004), 3.

In their introduction Liz Wells and Derrick Price distinguish a modernist and a postmodernist approach, whereas the modernists tried their hardest to represent reality with all its details, yet the postmodernists did not worry about depicting 'real reality'. In their desire to show certain things or trigger particular emotions or feelings, they did not hesitate to play with the characteristics of the medium of photography, in which they were able to follow a process wherein they allowed themselves to make a construction out of photography by making arrangements beforehand or afterwards. Postmodernism is much more than sketched above as it is an often contested term and difficult to define because of its use in many spheres and activities, however in this research used as a current that allows artists to play with reality and the visualization of cultural identity.[13] As will be clear, the ideas of postmodernism also influence the representation of identity, since people are seen as not just individuals but always connected to others and therefore they have multiple ways of being. For photographers, one way to respond to this and show the fragmented character of identity is by making arrangements. By creating a photograph (cause something into being that is not naturally evolved, making a construction out of photography) instead of just making one (taking a photographs of something that was already there), the photographer is able to taken into account multiple views, both from his own and from the models perspective, in representing cultural identity.

Wells and Price cite in their contribution to *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, 'Thinking about Photography: Debates, Historically and Now' that "two strands of theoretical discussion have featured in recent debates about photography: first, theoretical approaches premised on the relationship of the image to reality; second, those which stress the importance of the interpretation of the image by focusing upon the reading, rather than the taking, of photographic representations."[14] Responding to the first assumption, the importance of the relationship of the image to reality, we must conclude that when arrangements are made, both in post- and pre-photographic stages, this relationship gets affected since the photograph is not a reproduction of reality. Only a reproduction of an arranged reality. Second, Wells and Price cite that there are many critics today who stress that the realization of the photograph is less important than the reading. In this research the reading of the photograph is of importance, however the reading changes as the photographer is making use of arranging techniques. So

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13 Derrick Price and Liz Wells, "Thinking about Photography: Debates, Historically and Now," in *Photography: A critical Introduction*, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2004), 21.

14 Derrick Price and Liz Wells, "Thinking about Photography: Debates, Historically and Now," in *Photography: A critical Introduction*, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2004), 24.

when the process of taking the photograph changes, that includes all acts to form the final photograph or series, so does the reading.[15] Thus, in making assumptions concerning cultural identity deriving from photographs, we must take both the taking and the reading into consideration.

When something or someone is being depicted in a photograph, the perception of it might change. Not only because of the transformation from real person or thing to material, but also because of the arranged or manipulative character photography sometimes has. In *Photography Theory in Historical Perspective*, Hilde van Gelder and Helen Westgeest ask the question: "What insights do photographs provide in how societies construct reality?"[16] This question is interesting to consider when writing about the representation of cultural identity in photography. In the next chapters I will discuss if a photograph could offer us a depicting of reality, if it is a fake reflection of reality or if there are other indications recognizable that can give us insight in the cultural identity of the depicted people.

Someone who is emphasizing that the understanding of photography has changed over the years is Sabine T. Kriebel who wrote the introduction 'Theories of Photography: A Short History' for James Elkin's book *Photography Theory.* In this introduction she gives an historic overview of theories concerning photography. A lot of these theories are still used in the current debates. She cites that when we want "to speak of "the photograph" [it] would be to speak of its multiplicity and malleability."[17] Art Historian Lucy Souter argues that amongst others this multiplicity and malleability have led to the contemporary use of hybrid genres in photography.[18] Because of the possibility to reproduce a photograph multiple times and to use any form of manipulation or arrangement techniques during the process or afterwards the medium of photography distinguishes itself from other art forms. On another level, Kriebel is emphasizing the problem that there is not one 'photography', as we have genres of art photography, documentary photography etcetera, and therefore it is hard to understand what photography's

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15 'Taking' or 'making' are here associated with the realization of a photograph as a process in which multiple people are involved and in which other factors are of influence, not with the technical side of the production of a photograph.

16 Hilde van Gelder and Helen Westgeest, *Photography Theory in Historical Perspective* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 5.

17 Sabine T. Kriebel, introduction to *Photography Theory*, ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 4.

18 Lucy Soutter, *Why Art Photography?* (London: Routledge, 2013), 13.

function is in society and how to theorize it.[19] She is citing Victor Burgin when explaining that a photograph is based on its different social understandings. According to Burgin "when photography first emerged into the context of nineteenth-century aesthetics, it was initially taken to be an automatic record of reality; then it was contested that it was the expression of an individual; then it was considered to be 'a record of a reality refracted through a sensibility'."[20] Therefore she argues that when "the physical composition of the photograph changes, so too does the cultural perception of photography."[21]

In the following chapters the interplay between the physical composition of the photograph and the perception of cultural identity deduced from the photograph is central. This chapter provided a working definition of cultural identity as something that refers to the characteristics determining who or what a person or thing is, based on aspects associated with culture (ideas, customs and social behavior of a particular people or society). Cultural identity is described as a construct which is easily influenced by numerous of factors, and therefore subject to change. In the following chapters I will discuss how photographers Hans Eijkelboom, Jimmy Nelson and Shadi Ghadirian deal with the visualization of this cultural identity.

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19 Sabine T. Kriebel, introduction to *Photography Theory*, ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 5.

20 Sabine T. Kriebel, introduction to *Photography Theory*, ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 5.

21 Sabine T. Kriebel, introduction to *Photography Theory*, ed. James Elkins (New York: Routledge, 2007), 5.

Chapter 2. The ethnographic character of Hans Eijkelboom's series

In the history of photography, portrait photography is a broad genre in which people are portrayed in many different ways. A portrait is considered to be an artistic representation of a person and in classical portraiture the models are always posing for the camera. Hans Eijkelboom however, takes portraits of persons on the streets, without creating a posed appearance, just "candid pictures of everyday life in the streets."[22] Therefore his portraits can be positioned in the genre of street photography. Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz stress in their book *Bystander: A History of Street Photography* that one of the characteristics of street photographers is that "their art has a special reliance on the multiplicity of photography, its ability to create serial imagery and sequences of pictures."[23] Hans Eijkelboom (1949) depicts a certain cultural identity and uses the ability of creating serial imagery to highlight external similar characteristics of people in his series *People of the Twenty-First Century* (2014) (fig. 2.1). The cover of his book, which contains a compilation of his work up until now, gives a first glimpse to the rest of the content. It shows a collection of women wearing pink tops. For the viewer, as in all of his grids, it is immediately clear why he clusters those particular photographs. His grids are mostly based on a specific garment, however, sometimes it is a common activity as in the photographs he took on August 24th 1997. This grid shows men, 1. muscular, 2. bare-chested and 3. roller-skating through the streets of New York (figure 2.2). This demonstrates that in some grids he searches for more than one similarity.

In Eijkelboom's series, only the choices made by the photographer affect the final image.[24] These decisions are personal and can be influenced by numerous factors, such as culture and taste, and are therefore not completely objective. The final result is a construction of the artist. Even though Eijkelboom did not stage the scene, he did make well-thought-out decisions in photographing people with common characteristics or garments within a small area. Eijkelboom's final work is an arrangement of separate photographs, which are in essence truthful

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22 Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz, *Bystander: A History of Street Photography*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 34.

23 Colin Westerbeck and Joel Meyerowitz, *Bystander: A History of Street Photography*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994), 34.

24 The accent lies on the word 'choices', which here refers to making a choice within what is available to the photographer on the streets. I emphasize this, since in the following chapters photographers do not select the best out of coincidences, they stage the scene beforehand so they are not so much depending on others.

images of reality. The people in his photographs appeared like this in front of his camera while Eijkelboom secretly photographed them with his candid camera without being noticed since he was part of the 'street life'.[25] This method is quite similar to that of the participant observer, often used in the anthropology for qualitative research to get insight in societies. Eijkelboom's search, however, is far from qualitative, as he only looks for similarities in garments or behavior, that is, quantitative research for artistic purposes. His work does have a certain ethnographic touch to it. Ethnography is the branch of anthropology where people and cultures are being studied using objective methods such as interviews and close observations. We can speculate whether these close observations can always be captured by a camera, however, the camera (especially handheld) is the ultimate medium to take snapshots, quickly taken, informal photographs of reality.

Calling Eijkelboom's photographs both arranged and ethnographic requires further explanation and leads to the question: What image is Hans Eijkelboom able to present by combining arrangement techniques in a post-photographic stage with the representation of images of the everyday world and to what extent does that influence the perception of the models' cultural identity? In section 2.1 I will discuss Eijkelboom's working method and the way he presents his photographs by comparing and contrasting it to August Sander's and Hilla and Bernd Becher's approach. Subsequently, in section 2.2, will be described in what manner Eijkelboom is able to construct cultural identity and how the perception of this identity is influenced by the way he presents his photographs. The focus will lie on the constructed character of cultural identity. Concerning this constructed character, cultural sociologist John Tomlinson emphasizes the role of globalization, cultural theorist Stuart Hall and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman stress the importance of difference in constructing identity and anthropologists Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz argue for a construction between anthropology and art to make cultural identity visual. Based on their premises I will analyze one of Eijkelboom's series and thereby show how Eijkelboom combines the constructed character of cultural identity with that of photography. In the final section I will describe how Eijkelboom in a way undermines the original purpose of the archive and creates his own postmodern archives by questioning stereotypes.

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25 The concept 'Candid Camera' is often associated with a hidden camera. Hans Eijkelboom's camera is not hidden, however, people are not aware of him using it. According to the Oxford Dictionary, a candid camera produces photographs "taken informally, especially without the subject's knowledge", therefore, when writing about Eijkelboom's technique, I will refer to the concept candid camera.

2.1 Photography as a sociocultural construction

During the rise of photography it was not possible to photograph physical movement, because of the slow exposure time of the camera. But now, due to developments of the features of the camera it has been possible to record motion and today there are various techniques to do that very precisely. Normally, to take a photograph the photographer selects a subject, looks through the lens and presses the shutter release. Hans Eijkelboom goes a step further in the creation of his photographs as he is not looking through a lens or other screen while photographing. The camera hangs around his neck and the button is hidden in his pocket so the people do not know someone is observing them. He takes photographs of preferably random locals since he chooses to go to small towns to avoid the risk of photographing tourists as according to Eijkelboom they do not have the same cultural identity by nature. Then, he finds a spot, mostly really crowded places like shopping malls or busy city intersections. Next he searches for a trend, usually based on a garment however sometimes also based on behavior, and finally he photographs them.[26] He takes a lot of shots which he categorizes later on. In doing that, he gives them kind of a common group identity by judging them on their appearances. For these kind of projects, depicting people in their natural habitat in which they are presumed to act naturally, a camera which takes photographs quickly is the perfect instrument.

Not only the features of the camera influence the end result, the techniques used by the artist as well. The scale on which arranging appears in photography, differs in intensity, as it ranges from complicated constructions to only subtle adjustments. Hans Eijkelboom is using arrangement techniques in a post-photographic stage. According to Erin C. Garcia all arranged photographs lack a pretense of documenting real life, the everyday world.[27] Yet, in this, Eijkelboom might be seen as an exception, as he does make photographs of everyday life without any interference of his subjects. As individual photographs they represent how these people look and act in everyday life. When grouped together, however, the perception changes. This section explores Hans Eijkelboom's working method by comparing it to that of August Sander and the Bechers.

In line with Hilla Becher (1934-2015) and Bernd Becher (1931-2007), who are best known for their series of typologies of industrial buildings (figure 2.3), Eijkelboom makes

26 David Carrier, "Finding Your Way in Society: People of the Twenty-First Century," in *People of the Twenty-First Century,* ed. Hans Eijkelboom (London: Phaidon Press, 2014), last section.

27 Erin C. Garcia, *Photography as Fiction* (Los Angeles : Getty Publications, 2010), 6.

typologies of people based on their visual characteristics. Hilla and Bernd Becher developed a signature style that has been, and still is, an inspiration to many artists. A lot of famous photographers, such as Andreas Gursky, Thomas Struth and Thomas Ruff, were trained at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, by Hilla and Bernd Becher. Many of their works are characterized by an almost documentary quality mostly focusing on land- or cityscapes. Even though Hans Eijkelboom's photographs do not focus on land- and or cityscapes, we might say that they have quite a similar documentary quality. Furthermore, they have related approaches in arranging their photographs in grids which influences the perception of the final image. Some of Hilla and Bernd Becher's images were based on the principles of the archive, but the same as with Eijkelboom their work is about visual considerations and in first instance meant for artistic practices.

In another way similar to Eijkelboom's work are the photographs of August Sander (1876-1964), who was a famous German portrait photographer and is, by many, described as one of the most important portrait photographers of the 20th century. Contrary to Eijkelboom, who took portraits with his candid camera, Sander built on a long tradition of taking portraits of people in a staged setting. He mainly focused on the documentation of contemporary society in early 1930s Germany. He took pictures of people in their natural environment, instead of in his studio, to capture the portrayed one's 'real' identity which gave his photographs also an almost documentary quality. Sander clustered his photographs by category which eventually led to his larger project *People of the 20th Century (Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts).* A series which shows photographs of people of whom the characteristics refer to a certain social type or occupation. One of his photographs shows two 'middleclass children', recognized by their decent clothes and appearances (figure 2.4). The carpet and high doors give the illusion that the children are standing in a large, spacious room, that is usually linked to a prosperous lifestyle. With his photographs Sander is able to present stereotypes and highlights their characteristics by the garments, composition and surroundings of the subject.

Eijkelboom is combining Hilla and Bernd Becher's way of presenting similar objects as a series and August Sander's representations of stereotypes. All three are using exaggeration as a strategy, however there are some differences. First, Eijkelboom is not photographing inanimate objects or posed models. He is constructing an artistic archive with candid pictures of everyday life on the streets. And second, his work is made more than fifty years later, in a postmodern era in which images are no longer taken for granted. Sander's aim was to create a typological archive of German people, which matches the ideas of other modernist photographers who argued for straightforward, unmanipulated images of modern life. Eijkelboom however, by using

exaggeration as a strategy, presents quasi-stereotypes and is thereby questioning a fixed identity. During postmodernism photographers challenged the truth value of photography. It was more about emphasizing certain things by questioning them than through showing a truthful image. By searching for similarities and presenting them as accurate records Eijkelboom is able to raise questions concerning cultural identity and at the same time question the modernist archive. I will return to this archive-like character in section 1.3, for now I will further elaborate on the realization and presentation of his photographs.

Eijkelboom's influence is visible during the whole realization of a series. Next to picking the subjects and making pictures of them, he is not just showing the viewer photographs of random people. Eijkelboom arranges his photographs in a way in which they get the chance to interact with each other and become a new whole. His final photographs are mainly grouped in books, which are the foundations for his exhibitions. By showing such an enormous number of photographs together, the impact is even bigger. His work, broadly speaking, appears in three forms. First as a series, consisting of a number of photographs in grids (mostly three, four, five, six or seven horizontal, and three vertical). These separate series are to be found on the internet and used in articles about Hans Eijkelboom. They are also subject to a bigger whole, his book *People of the Twenty-First Century.* By putting all these series in a book, Eijkelboom is able to create new meanings as the viewer is able to contrast and compare the individual series. When exposing his photographs during exhibitions, he again shows the series individually, however still in context of the other works that are also on display. It could be looked upon as a construction, a process of building something up and then separate it again. Using these different contexts to make his art visible to the public he is able to change the perception of his photographs.

It is difficult to give Eijkelboom's work or working area one label. Genres are usually not clearly defined which can lead to an argumentation or analysis of an artwork based on presumptions from different disciplines or data. Eijkelboom's work is mostly linked to the genre of 'street photography' or 'candid photography', a genre in which the subject is unaware of being photographed, often in motion and with an absence of posing. However, just because he arranges this 'street photographs' afterwards, he is able to add more interpretations to his work which might influence the perception of the models' cultural identity.

2.2 The visualization of a 'truthful' cultural identity

In the 1960s and 70s Eijkelboom took a lot of self-portraits, often posing as someone else. For instance as a construction of influential leaders, like Lenin, Marx or Mao or as someone some of

his former classmates had formed of him ten years after they saw him for the last time.[28] Yet, Eijkelboom is best known for his series of photographs of other people. Roelstraete calls these works "the decisive turn towards the Other, in greater or lesser numbers, most easily and furtively encountered in the street."[29] In first instance Hans Eijkelboom's work revolved around his own identity in society. In an interview with Roelstraete, Eijkelboom mentions that because of his feeling that a person is more or less a product of society he started to take photographs of his surroundings as these photo-notes are influencing his own identity.[30] This turn towards the other results in different grids of photographs with people who are similar in certain ways, which leads to the question; how is cultural identity constructed by Hans Eijkelboom and to what extent do the post-photographic arrangements influence the perception of the models' cultural identity?

Eijkelboom mostly spent from twenty minutes up to four hours to make one grid.[31] Sometimes when he selected a visual feature and went looking for it the following hours, he found nothing or at least too little to make a whole series. Other times he was more lucky and he could shoot a whole series in less than one hour. In a way he dedicated his life to his work, as he has already been trying to capture similarities in the appearances of people with his camera more than twenty years now. He goes to places where the chance of accidentally photographing tourists is small, as he argues that it is important to him to capture a real cultural identity that cannot be captured when 'outsiders', tourist or people from elsewhere are photographed. However, due to globalization, we may question if it is even possible to create a 'truthful' cultural identity. Cultural sociologist, John Tomlinson argues in his essay "Globalization and Cultural Identity" that cultural identity is not the victim of globalization but its product,

28 Dieter Roelstraete, "The Mass Ornament – Revisited: Reading From Hans Eijkelboom's Photo Notes," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry*, no. 6 (2011) : 42, accessed January 12, 2017, http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/659294.

29 Dieter Roelstraete, "The Mass Ornament – Revisited: Reading From Hans Eijkelboom's Photo Notes," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry*, no. 6 (2011) : 42, accessed January 12, 2017, http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/659294.

30 Alexis Petridis, "Same but Different: Hans Eijkelboom's Tribal Street Photography," *The Guardian*, last modified October 23, 2014, https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/oct/23/hans-eijkelboom-street-photography-tribes-people-twenty-first-century.

31 David Carrier, "Finding Your Way in Society: People of the Twenty-First Century," in *People of the Twenty-First Century,* ed. Hans Eijkelboom (London: Phaidon Press, 2014), last section.

globalization rather proliferates than destroys identities.[32] He sees a shift in the meaning of the notion of 'cultural identity' from being something people simply 'had', based on tradition and history to "a considerable dimension of *institutionalized* social life in modernity."[33] By modernity he means the emanation of social and cultural practices, therefore also visual characteristics and appearances, from a context that is based on local particularities as well as how these are institutionalized and regulated.[34] He also states that for many of us cultural identity is often connected to a certain locality, however, thanks to the "deterritorializing character" of global modernity the social-geographical location gets a subordinate role.[35] In that manner we might say that since the globalization flow of the eighties our cultural identity is less determined by location and much more by a sense of community. Eijkelboom tries to capture this feeling by creating a unity within diversity by categorizing people on their appearances.

When dealing with a real crowd and the visualization of it, you are moving between different disciplines as in both the arts and in anthropology visual images are being studied. The dividing line between the field of the arts and the field of anthropology is not fixed, on the contrary, on some points they even merge. For instance, there is a certain synchronicity of the ethnographic turn in the arts, the field wherein artistic practices are used for scientific research (ethno-photography), and the visual turn in the anthropology, a subfield that is involved with among others the analysis and the production of ethnographic photography. Anthropologists Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz argue that there is a shared ethnographic space, between anthropology and art, that has led to a different way of thinking, in which we realize that working beyond the boundaries of our own discipline can lead to new insights and different

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32 John Tomlinson, "Globalization and Cultural Identity," in *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate,* ed. David Held & Andrew McGrew (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 269, 271.

33 John Tomlinson, "Globalization and Cultural Identity," in *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate,* ed. David Held & Andrew McGrew (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 271.

34 John Tomlinson, "Globalization and Cultural Identity," in *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate,* ed. David Held & Andrew McGrew (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 272.

35 John Tomlinson, "Globalization and Cultural Identity," in *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate,* ed. David Held & Andrew McGrew (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 273.

working methods.[36] They approach ethnography "not as the exclusive and specialized method of a professional discipline but instead as techniques or set of techniques linked to a critical stance toward questions of contemporary culture and society."[37] Similarly Kris Rutten, An van Dienderen and Ronald Soetaert argue in "Revisiting The Ethnographic Turn in Contemporary Art" that the ethnographic turn in the arts is connected to what they call the 'sensory turn' in anthropology. The sensory turn is similar to the visual turn, and explained as a movement in the anthropology in which multiple forms of sensory perception are addressed. In other words the visual or sensory turn in the anthropology causes a more visual approach, even a whole new subfield called 'visual anthropology' in which working with (photographic) images becomes the major research method. The analysis of the following series contributes to the process of questioning the visualization of cultural identity.

Figure 2.5 shows photographs of women, probably mothers, who are carrying a child on their arm, made in the Bijlmerpark (which is now called the Nelson Mandelapark) in Amsterdam. The longer you look the more nuances become apparent, which was also argued with the grids of the Bechers. When similar photographs are presented next to each other, we should ask ourselves if the similarities or the differences stand out. Hilla and Bernd Becher presented industrial buildings to interrogate this concept. A similar reaction of comparing and contrasting might have followed from Sander's stereotypes as, even though he did not present multiple photographs as a grid, he created one stereotype that was supposed to have all ideal characteristics of a certain profession or social status. Exactly the presentation of one fixed stereotype could also have resulted in people comparing and contrasting others with the same profession or social status to Sander's depiction. This reaction might have been similar, Sander's aim however, was not to create typologies by questioning aspects associated with a certain profession or social status, he just presented an overview in which people back then believed. This is different with the Bechers and Eijkelboom, who both use exaggeration as a strategy to question stereotypes instead of presenting them as typologies.

Some photographs of the Bechers have a lot of common ground with Eijkelboom's work, however, Hilla and Bernd Becher made photographs of buildings, Eijkelboom of human beings.

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36 Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, "Introduction: Visualizing Anthropology," *Visualizing Anthropology*, ed. Anne Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2005), 1.

37 Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, "Introduction: Visualizing Anthropology," *Visualizing Anthropology*, ed. Anne Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2005), 3.

Photographer Diane Arbus (1923-1971) is in this way closer to Eijkelboom as she also takes photographs of people, for instance of 'identical twins' (figure 2.6). Arbus is famous for her photographs of marginalized people. One of her most famous photographs is the one of two almost identical girls. In her work she is playing with identity. The two girls are both wearing the same dresses with collars, tights and white headbands. However, if you take a closer look you see that their characteristics are not the least completely identical. According to Patricia Bosworth, Diane Arbus' biographer, the photograph of the two girls summarizes Arbus' vision as "she was involved in the question of identity. Who am I and who are you? The twin image expresses the crux of that vision: normality in freakishness and the freakishness in normality."[38] The normality in freakishness and freakishness in normality are very self-evident in this particular photograph of Arbus. Eijkelboom has a more subtle approach to express that same vision. The individual photographs in his series are completely normal, however as they are complemented by similar photographs, and presented as a series they almost get an absurd and humorous character. In doing this he creates an image which emphasizes this freakishness in normality.

Just like Diane Arbus, Eijkelboom is also involved in the question of identity through questioning individuality by investigating shared aspects. Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman states that "one thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns."[39] According to Bauman the problem of identity in the postmodern era is "how to avoid fixation and keep the options open."[40] As will be clear, Hans Eijkelboom is doing just the opposite by determining a shared cultural identity in his photographs. In doing this, he is not turning away from reality, particularly through exaggeration he is able to question certain aspects of cultural identity.

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38 "Diane Arbus' Identical Twins," *NPR*, accessed January 16, 2017, https://web.archive.org/web/20060519201714/http://www.npr.org/programs/morning/features/patc/twins/index.html.

39 Zygmunt Bauman, "From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London etc.: SAGE Publications, 1996), 19.

40 Zygmunt Bauman, "From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London etc.: SAGE Publications, 1996), 18.

Now, going back to the series made in the Bijlmerpark, we can identify a colored woman with a baby in every photo. Knowing that these photographs were taken in the Bijlmerpark in Amsterdam it is plausible that Eijkelboom took pictures of colored women. Without wanting to sound shallow or putting all people from the same neighborhood under the same heading, it is not deniable that in some parts of the Netherlands and specific the area of the Bijlmerpark live a lot of immigrants. What is interesting about these series it that we do not know if the main subject here was to depict women with a little child on their arm or colored women with a little child. [41] In this grid Eijkelboom creates an interplay between behavior and garments, both influencing each other and being compared and contrasted at the same time. Behavior becomes part of the appearances. There are many ways of carrying a child, however these women all carry their child to the side of their upper body. Here, specific similar behavior changes the ladies' physical appearance. Meanwhile, these ladies and children are not identical at all but, according to Eijkelboom, they all went through the same "everyday struggles" of finding themselves and their own way in society.[42] The specific details, both the diversity and the resemblances in a series of people who all look quite similar, characterize Hans Eijkelboom's work.

A lot of his photographs originate from The Netherlands, however, he also made series in other countries. While analyzing his photographs you become aware of the power of his post-photographic arrangements. When for instance seeing a series of women from Mumbai, I personally create an image in my head that all women over there look like this (figure 2.7). However, knowing how he portrayed the Dutch, it is probably just a series that is created by looking for similarities for a longer time. This again proves the difference in approach between Eijkelboom and Sander, as Sander just showed one stereotype to represent for instance a whole profession, Eijkelboom is able, through the way of presenting his photographs, to question stereotypes and a fixed cultural identity. He presents an image that is remarkable to the viewer since such an image does not present itself in real life, but is the product of a search for unity within diversity. The cultural identities, that radiate from his photographs are thus "constructed

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41 There is some uncertainty if the person on the photograph in the upper left is a woman. Whether the person is a man or a woman, the discussion remains the same; it is still about a colored person carrying a child, only the term women should be replaced with 'person'.

42 Hans Eijkelboom paraphrased in David Carrier, "Finding Your Way in Society: People of the Twenty-First Century," in *People of the Twenty-First Century,* ed. Hans Eijkelboom (London: Phaidon Press, 2014), last section.

through, not outside, difference."[43] According to Stuart Hall "this entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, (..) that the 'positive' meaning of any term – and thus its 'identity' – can be constructed."[44]

By arranging his photographs like this, Eijkelboom can transcend existing boundaries and create more meanings than when just one photograph is on display. This way of presenting is not new and applied by many, however, the approach and purpose are different. In the next section I will further elaborate on the power of mapping and the renewed meaning Eijkelboom creates with his small artistic archives.

2.3 An artistic archive

According to the Cambridge dictionary an archive is both "a collection of historical records relating to a place, organization, or family" and "a place where historical records are kept."[45] August Sander created an archive with photographs of people, categorized by profession or social position. In the first half of the 20th century, when Sander created his archive it was considered as a usable record. His series is divided into seven parts: The Farmer, The Skilled Tradesman, Woman, Classes and Professions, The Artists, The City, and The Last People. If you wanted (or want) information about the characteristics of a specific profession you could gather visual evidence from Sander's stereotypes.

Hans Eijkelboom explains in his book *People of the Twenty-First Century,* of which the title without a doubt refers to Sander's title *People of the 20th Century*, that Sander was an important source. Eijkelboom was fascinated by Sander's work and even made a project *Homage to August Sander* (1981). For this project he asked people on the street: "When you look at the world and acknowledge that not all people are the same, what are the primary divisions into groups or sorts that come to mind?"[46] After they answered, Eijkelboom and his subject searched

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43 Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London etc.: SAGE Publications, 1996), 4-5.

44 Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London etc.: SAGE Publications, 1996), 4-5.

45 *Cambridge Dictionary*, accessed January 19, 2017, http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/archive.

46 David Carrier, "Finding Your Way in Society: People of the Twenty-First Century," in *People of the Twenty-First Century,* ed. Hans Eijkelboom (London: Phaidon Press, 2014), last section.

for people who fitted the categories they came up with. The big difference between Sander and Eijkelboom is that Eijkelboom took Sander's approach to the streets, by "directly transcribing real scenes" and without his models knowing they were photographed, instead of depicting people in a stereotypical place while posing for the camera as Sander did. According to David Carrier, this was the moment Eijkelboom discovered his real subject "the crowd."[47]

Conversely, though, to Sander, Eijkelboom acts from an artistic standpoint creating his archive-like series. He uses arrangement techniques in the post-photographic stage, to show his stance towards contemporary culture and society, particularly the cultural identity of people based on their visual characteristics. By focusing on resemblances and arranging people as a whole, Eijkelboom is questioning individuality and at the same time problematizing the concept of diversity. With his work he is able to present an image of society that makes the viewer reflect on his or her own appearances. Due to on the one hand the realness of his work and on the other hand the awareness of the use of arranging techniques, Hans Eijkelboom might find himself within the ethnographic space.[48] A space that demands both techniques and thoughts from the anthropology and from the arts. As an artist he uses this space to choose who and what he photographs without being blamed for wrongfully depicturing reality and as a space in which the end result is not based on statistics and quantitative research, but is a product of qualitative artistic research. However, despite all these non-anthropological features, he also works in a space in which the artist deals with the visualization of contemporary culture and the depicturing of reality by photographing people while being a participant observer. He immerses himself into the population to gain a close image of that particular group of individuals and their practices, using his camera. A technique from the anthropology used for artistic practice. Dieter Roelstraete describes his work also as "faux-anthropological photo-expeditions."[49]

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47 David Carrier, "Finding Your Way in Society: People of the Twenty-First Century," in *People of the Twenty-First Century,* ed. Hans Eijkelboom (London: Phaidon Press, 2014), last section.

48 Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, "Introduction: Visualizing Anthropology," *Visualizing Anthropology*, ed. Anne Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2005), 1.

49 Dieter Roelstraete, "The Mass Ornament – Revisited: Reading From Hans Eijkelboom's Photo Notes," *Afterall: A Journal of Art*, Context, and Enquiry, no. 6 (2011) : 42, accessed January 12, 2017, http://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/659294.

In line with the cited anthropologists Anna Grimshaw and Amanda Ravetz, who argue for ethnography as a shared space of practice, social scientist Sarah Pink argues that ethnography should be seen as a process in which the ethnographer creates and represents information about society, culture and individuals. This information is based on his or her own experiences and created context and therefore it should not claim to make an objective and truthful representation of reality.[50] Eijkelboom remarks about his own work: "It was never my intention to be anthropological, but I could say about my work that if someone came from another planet and needed information about Earth, then they could look to the work of Hans Eijkelboom. It's strange, when I started out doing photography I was doing it only for myself, and now I've ended up doing it for aliens."[51] Yet, in saying this, Eijkelboom kind of ignores his own influential part in the creation of the final result. By using these arrangement techniques in particular, the viewer gets confronted with an image that is created and subjective and therefore it needs to be looked at with a critical eye, which is hard as there is a natural faith in the truthfulness of photographs. In fact, we should wonder if Eijkelboom is doing it for aliens? Does he confirm existing stereotypes, or does he bring them up for discussion by exaggerating certain aspects? In contemporaneity it is not unusual to interrogate certain ideas through magnifying them. The work of famous American photographer Cindy Sherman (1954) for instance, also revolves around this play of exaggeration. In a way she created postmodern versions of Sander's stereotypes. In most of her photographs she depicts herself in some sort of costume, at times more obvious than others. For instance, she made series of society portraits (fig. 2.8). But unlike Sander and more in line with Diane Arbus, she magnifies certain aspects, stereotypes, that give her photographs a way more sarcastic undertone. Her portraiture forces the viewer to reconsider stereotypes, as she uses them to transmit cultural cliché's. She made many variations of the self-portrait in which she is able to "simultaneously construct and critique its apparent subject." In this manner Sherman's photographs function, "in part, as a sign for the subjective nature of all human intelligence and the unstable nature of visual perception."[52]

If the works of Sander, Eijkelboom and Sherman are compared it stands out that August Sander portrays people in a familiar environment with garments that refer to the profession or

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50 Sarah Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography* (London: Sage, 2007), 22.

51 Ananda Pellerin, "Hans Eijkelboom on Photography for Aliens," *AnOther*, October 27, 2014, http://origin.anothermag.com/art-photography/4045/hans-eijkelboom-on-photography-for-aliens.

52 "Cindy Sherman: American Photographer," *The Art Story: Modern Art Insight*, accessed January 30, 2017, http://www.theartstory.org/artist-sherman-cindy.htm.

social status of that person to present one obvious stereotype; Hans Eijkelboom actively searches for certain external characteristics to show unity within diversity and Cindy Sherman transforms herself into another person by exaggerating certain features. They have in common that they deal with the depiction of stereotypes through exaggeration and archiving/ arranging. In doing this, Eijkelboom and Sherman are able to bring certain questions revolving around identity up for discussion. August Sander was able to show stereotypes due to particular garments that were widespread accepted. Now, living in the 21st century, things are no longer accepted that self-evident, indeed, people are constantly questioning and reframing identity. Maybe we can even say that because of globalization Hans Eijkelboom and Cindy Sherman cannot simply follow Sander's approach, since a more postmodern method is demanded. A method in which the artist creates an artistic archive by questioning the features of the traditional archive. At the same time they suggest through exaggeration the confirmation of the existence of some stereotypes in a time in which fixed cultural identities are supposed to have disappeared.

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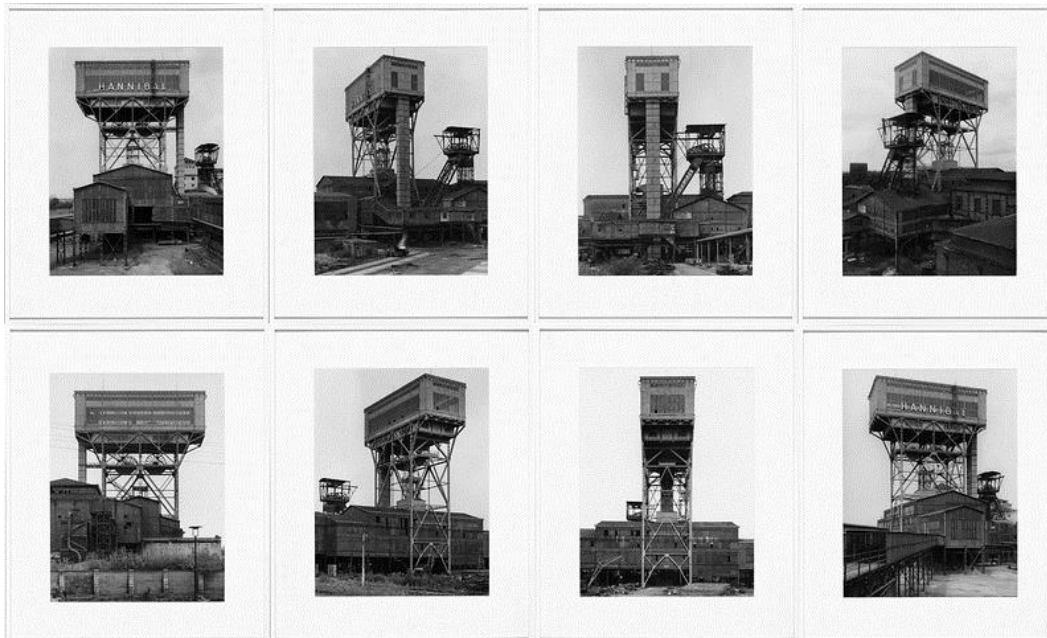

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Chapter 3. Jimmy Nelson's interplay between fiction and reality

The politics of space and borders is a blurred field, as nowadays the border is more an imaginary concept than a fixed fact. Others are creating borders for you: you are one of us or you are the other. Even though we might accept that this assumption is true and the borders are blurry, there is always a certain feeling of shared (cultural) background. Thanks to, among others, globalization, we are able to get an insight in the cultural heritage of formerly unknown people. The debates concerning cultural heritage and identity are nowadays lively and happening on an international scale, as cultural heritage and identity are both affecting each other and interacting with each other. In the previous chapters we have seen that photography is often considered to be an objective medium which is able to produce a truthful reproduction of reality. However, at the same time, there are many different ways to influence the final result of a photograph and besides that, we should not underestimate the role of the photographer, who plays a big part in the realization of the photograph by always bringing a certain kind of subjectivity along. Hans Eijkelboom's influence was mainly noticeable in the process of selecting his subjects beforehand and in the arrangements he made afterwards. His series demonstrates that photography can be manipulated and still have an ethnographic character. In a similar yet also different vein British photographer and journalist Jimmy Nelson's (1967) work raises questions about the role of photography and its ability to create identities.

Jimmy Nelson's *Before They Pass Away* (2013) is a project of photographs depicting mostly indigenous people in what seems their natural environment. Nelson travelled around the world for three years to accomplish this task. During these travels he tried to become absorbed by the different cultures so he could photograph them as they would like it. He wanted to win a certain feeling of trust; aiming at providing the depicted people a voice. Like Hans Eijkelboom, Nelson acted as a participant observer as they are photographing their subjects in their natural habitat. However, contrary to Eijkelboom, who is not noticed by his subjects, Jimmy Nelson tries to get absorbed by the particular tribe in as short amount of time as possible. Besides that, he makes no secret of the fact he wants to photograph the people. He is creating, instead of just making, a photograph in dialogue with his models. Therefore, I am wondering in what manner does this dialogue influence the realization of the final photograph and what cultural identity is eventually conveyed through his photographs? Furthermore, how does Nelson's approach, a collaboration between artist and model, relate to postmodern ideas on cultural identity? This chapter explores the issues of Jimmy Nelson's absorption in limited time and the results of this process. His photographs are not shown out of context as with Eijkelboom, however a number of

objects ín the photographs are taken out of their original context. These objects are used as means to exaggerate stereotypes and question cultural identity. I will analyze two photographs in which this exaggeration is very clear and emphasize the 'fake' character of his work. In section 3.2 I aim to demonstrate according to the heuristic approach of Holland et al., who emphasize the role of the 'other' in constructing identity, how identities could be constructed and how this relates to Nelson's photographs. The fragmented character of identity is stressed in postmodernism, therefore, I will finally discuss how Nelson's work responds to the premises of postmodernism described by Joel Einsinger and Lucy Soutter.

Nelson took photographs of many different peoples from various cultures. On his website he categorizes them by place. Here, because of the variety of his work, I have decided to focus on the photographs he took in Goroka. Later on I will discuss some more photographs he took in The Netherlands by comparing and contrasting them to the photographs of the tribes of Goroka, the capital of the Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea and home to multiple indigenous groups. Nelson's website gives the following information about these groups:

> The indigenous population of the world's second largest island is one of the most heterogeneous in the world. The harsh terrain and historic inter-tribal warfare has led to village isolation and the proliferation of distinct languages. A number of different groups are scattered across the highland plateau. (..) Indigenous warfare is common and men go through great effort to impress the enemy with make-up and ornaments.[53]

It is directly clear what is meant by make-up and ornaments (figure 3.1). These men are all excessively covered in head ornaments, feathers, necklaces and other decoration such as arm ornaments and painting on their legs. They are quite angry looking, as they all face the camera with a seemingly firm attitude. From the positions of the men radiates a certain feeling of depth, having a foreground and background all in proportion, which is similar in classic portraiture. This photograph does not create the illusion the picture was taken without any preparation; it appears that almost all Nelson's work is staged. In the following parts I will go more deeply into the different ways Jimmy Nelson's work is perceived and how perception has been influenced.

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53 "Goroka," *Jimmy Nelson*, accessed January 26, 2017, http://www.beforethey.com/culture/goroka.

3.1 Photography's compositional creativity

In the early decades after the invention of photography, photographs were seen as records of reality, as "being mechanically produced and thus free of the selective discriminations of the human eye and hand." For that reason photography was "often regarded as falling outside the realm of art, as its assumed power of accurate, dispassionate recording appeared to displace the artist's compositional creativity."[54] This manner of thinking is dated since the 'compositional creativity' of the artist is now accepted as playing an influential role. Many photographers increasingly questioned the so called truthful features of photography. Pictorial photography, a style that controlled the late 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, is a movement in which the meaning of the photograph changed, since "for the Pictorialists a photograph, like a drawing, painting, or engraving, rather than recording reality, was a way of projecting oneself into the realm of the imagination."[55] Today it is impossible to even look at art photography without considering this 'compositional creativity'.

As in almost Nelson's photographs it is clear what is meant with 'compositional creativity'. In figure 3.1, for instance, the men have similar positions and are all facing the camera, which is probably the work of the photographer. When considering the bigger whole, Nelson is very consistent as his influence is visible in every photograph. The photographs, which are eventually shown in the book *Before They Pass Away,* are similar in many points as they all show people facing the camera or in any case, posing for the camera. On his website Nelson also places photographs which did not make the cut, and were for instance just shot during festivities without the people in the photograph posing for his camera. Here, it is interesting to briefly discuss one of these works, as it literally shows the paradox and stresses the fictional character of his work. *Men Performing During the Goroka Show* (figure 3.2), which shows almost entirely men who are excessively dressed, is one of these 'not staged' photographs. The people in the photograph are not posing for the camera; they seem to wait until something is going to happen. At first sight you may think that these men are going into battle as they are carrying weapons such as arches, arrows and spears. The opposite is true, they are just performing during the Goroka Show, a three days during event for entertainment to show their music, dance and

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54 Derrick Price and Liz Wells, "Thinking about Photography: Debates, Historically and Now," in *Photography: A critical Introduction*, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2004), 13.

55 Francis Ribemont, "Foreword to the French Edition," in *Impressionist Camera: Pictorial Photography in Europe, 1888–1918,* ed. Patrick Daum (London: Merrell Publishers, 2006), 8-9.

culture, but also a competition to see which district is the best organized. If you take a closer look you will see people sitting behind a fence. The background is slightly blurry, however it is clear that these people do not look the same as the men in de foreground. A woman in a striped t-shirt is sitting in the upper left corner, while under the dressed up people are no women. Another man, wearing a pale orange t-shirt, can be distinguished between the excessively dressed men on the left and right in front of him another white t-shirt is visible. By presenting also these 'not staged' photographs on his website, Nelson is able to show the viewers in a delicate way that the people he portrayed for *Before They Pass Away* do not actually look like this in daily life (anymore).

I saw Jimmy Nelson's photographs for the first time during the exhibition 'HAIL THE PEOPLE!' (LEVE DE MENS) at the National Museum of Ethnology (Museum Volkenkunde), Leiden. Nelson's final photographs are clustered in a book, but also often exhibited. From the 11th of April until the 7th of September 2014 Jimmy Nelson's photographs of indigenous people were exhibited in Leiden where he was able to show the viewer a wide range of photographs which he took while travelling around the world for some years. His photographs are not just snapshots, but well thought pictures that sometimes needed a lot of preparation and time before they were taken. Visiting the exhibition is more an experience than just a visit, as according to the museum website: "High definition, wall-sized images, accompanied by videos and the sounds of the local surroundings, transform this exhibition into a visual spectacle."[56]

The photographs made for the exhibition 'HAIL THE PEOPLE!', depict a reality that was at the moment the picture was taken, Nelson's and the photographed people's reality. When first confronted with the enormous photographs of Jimmy Nelson you may wonder where these people live and where such beautiful landscapes still exist. The feeling you might experience and the intensity that emerges from his photographs can be very overwhelming. The 'realness' of the photographs is at first sight very explicit. However, the exhibition does not leave the visitors under that impression. When visiting the exhibition you are made aware of this 'fake reality', as the museum is demanding a critical engagement of the visitors through the text signs, that are encouraging the viewer to think for and about themselves and 'the other' in the photograph. On one of the signs that is called 'Picturing reality?' the viewer is made aware of his or her own observations. The sign is telling the viewer that even though photographs are suggesting a certain degree of 'realness', the 'who and what' that is presented in the photograph is Jimmy Nelson's choice. Actually, he is the one who has chosen in what kind of setting the photo is taken and

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56 "HAIL THE PEOPLE," *Exhibitions and Events*, accessed January 17, 2017, http://www.beforethey.com/exhibitions-events/20/rijksmuseum-volkenkunde.

what intended feeling should be evoked by the photograph. However he did not just frame the setting by choosing it and telling the people where to stand, he went a step further by 'staging' the setting, as he did not just take a photograph of reality, he asked the models to look and dress themselves as how they see their cultural identity. The sign implicates that an artificial or artistic image of reality appeals to people's imagination and therefore creates a whole new reality, a fake reality constructed by the viewer when observing the photograph.

The videos on display confirm this fake reality and reveal that almost everything in nearly every picture is staged. Of course the people and the landscapes are real, but Nelson gave the depicted people beforehand the choice to wear what they wanted and he explains that it mostly took hours to shoot that one perfect photograph. In one of the video's a situation is described where the chief is wearing a costume that was hanging in the local museum, a costume that once belonged to the chief of the tribe and was not worn for a long time. Thus, cultural heritage plays a big role in Jimmy Nelson's photographs. In addition we might say that cultural heritage is often the equivalent for a cultural identity in his work. However, Nelson does express concerns about this cultural identity. His photographs are collected in the book *Before They Pass Away*, a title that suggests these tribes only still being here for a short amount of time. In an interview with De Volkskrant, Jimmy Nelson is asked about his title and to what extent he thinks these cultures are considered critically endangered. He responds by saying that he is under the impression these tribes will not disappear, though he is worried about the authenticity of their cultures. Particular striking is that he believes that the tribes he photographed see themselves as primitive and want to be more developed. Nelson points out that many of them see the Western world as an example of modern, prosperous life everybody desires, an attitude which he is concerned about.[57] By photographing people in the clothes and costumes they wished, Nelson might wanted to show the people he depicted that they should cherish and honor their cultures. At the same time he questions the whole aspect of having a cultural identity. Nelson says that he tries to get absorbed by the people so he could capture their real identity, however there is also a lot of space for arrangements, both from the side of the portrayed ones and from that of Jimmy Nelson.

Cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz is questioning the absorption as an outsider. In ""From the Native's Point of View": On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding" he is

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57 Anna van den Breemer, "Fotograaf Jimmy Nelson: 'Wij zijn vergeten hoe we moeten leven'," *De Volkskrant*, last modified November 4, 2013, http://www.volkskrant.nl/opinie/fotograaf-jimmy-nelson-wij-zijn-vergeten-hoe-we-moeten-leven~a3536540/.

analyzing the work of British anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski and points out that a profound question was ignored namely, "if anthropological understanding does not stem, as we have been taught to believe, from some sort of extraordinary sensibility, an almost preternatural capacity to think, feel, and perceive like a native (..), then how is anthropological knowledge of the way natives think, feel, and perceive possible?"[58]

With this question in mind I want to bring up something a friend of mine said some time ago after he visited the art exhibition 'HAIL THE PEOPLE!' in Museum Volkenkunde. He told me that in first instance he was blown away by the beauty of Jimmy Nelson's photographs, however after reading the signs he was somewhat disappointed. He was under the impression that Jimmy Nelson photographed life how it appeared to him, not that he gave the depicted people an instruction beforehand and staged the whole setting in a way. So because of him knowing about the staging, his perception of the artworks changed.

Returning to the concerns raised by Clifford Geertz, it seems that the 'problem' is here with the viewer. Jimmy Nelson does not try to hide his approach, pretend to capture a true reality or offer anthropological knowledge, he wants to depicture the people based on how they see their own cultural identity. Nelson does try to empathize with these tribes as much as possible, however, he lets his models participate in the final result. And when it finally comes to showing his photographs to the public, he deliberately lets the viewer know how his photographs were established. In doing this he is questioning cultural identity by creating a combination of- and an interplay between fiction and reality.

3.2 Cultural Identity Developed out of Collaboration

Contrary to Eijkelboom, Nelson gave the people a voice. With active participation from both sides, that of the artist and of the portrayed people, they are together presenting an image that appeals to a lot of people's imagination. Jimmy Nelson is creating a certain cultural identity by presenting clichés and stereotypes, which makes us wonder; what insights in the cultures of these people does that provide?

Figure 3.3 is a good example of magnifying clichés. When taking a closer look, there are all kinds of objects that are quite strange in this composition. Due to the faces of the men -they all look angry and full of fighting spirit- and the arches and arrows we may easily say that these man are fighting a battle. But why is a wooden guitar needed in a battle? And is it necessary to

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58 Clifford Geertz, ""From the Native's Point of View": On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding," *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 28, no.1 (1974) : 27, accessed January 20, 2017, http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3822971.pdf.

bring an important document in a photo frame? Different objects are shown that are related to the peoples' background and can help to determine a certain cultural identity. However, at the same time all these objects are gathered for the photograph and shown out of their original context. Like Eijkelboom, Nelson is presenting an image which represents things or people outside their initial context. Eijkelboom shows his photographs in comparison with other similar photographs to emphasize similarities that are least striking when seen apart but together present an image that questions individuality and at the same time creates a shared identity. Nelson however applies a more interactive approach in which he gave the depicted people the choice to show objects they associate with their culture. In that manner they are kind of constructing their own cultural identity by presenting an image and showing objects that appeal to them.

This method is described in the book *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* as the heuristic approach. On the first page of chapter one the authors define identity as following: "People tell others who they are, but even more important, they tell themselves and then try to act as though they are who they say they are. These self-understandings, especially those with strong emotional resonance for the teller, are what we refer to as identities."[59] From this point of view identities are subject to an ongoing process, a process that is also visible in the realization of Jimmy Nelson's photographs. Holland et al. explain that "this vision (the identity-making processes) emphasizes that identities are improvised- in the flow of activity within specific social situations- from the cultural recourses at hand. Thus persons and, to a lesser extent, groups are caught in the tensions between past histories that have settled in them and the present discourses and images that attract them or somehow impinge upon them."[60] In addition, in the contemporary globalizing world, the division between the local and the global is also not that absolute anymore and longstanding cultures are vanishing and merging with others. This, plus the above mentioned tension between histories that have become part of individuals and groups and contemporary influences that appeal to them, have given rise to the problem of describing or imaging peoples' true cultural identity. Jimmy Nelson mainly photographs individuals and groups from small tribes, as a result most other people do not have insight in these cultures. However, there is an exception: some works he made in collaboration with Museum Volkenkunde.

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59 Dorothy Holland et al., *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* (Cambridge, MA etc.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 3.

60 Dorothy Holland et al., *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds* (Cambridge, MA etc.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 4.

Jimmy Nelson looks like he could be Dutch and in fact he can also speak Dutch, so in The Netherlands it is quite self-evident that Nelson is not (totally) perceived as socially and culturally different. The works specially made for the exhibition in Leiden contain people from Marken, a small peninsula in the Markermeer, and Terschelling, a small island in the North Sea, who are portrayed as the 'cultural other' while in real life they are not seen by Dutch people as other. After seeing these photographs as a Dutch citizen, you get confirmed in your doubt about the 'realness' of Nelson's other photographs. People from Marken (figure 3.4) and Terschelling (figure 3.5) are maybe well-known for their history of folklore costumes, however, nowadays they are not wearing these costumes any longer in daily life, perhaps only as an exception for tourists or on national holidays. In the short videos that are on display, one of the fishermen is actually moaning that his suit is way too tight since he has not worn it for many years. Such verdicts are really interesting because they change the way of interpreting the photograph and confirm the improvised character of the models' cultural identity. By showing photographs of Dutch people amongst people from other, mostly indigenous (and for many people unknown) cultures, Nelson shows the paradoxes between fiction and reality. He is constructing an image through strongly magnifying clichés from the inside and is thereby able to question these clichés and the concept of having a fixed cultural identity.

3.3 A Postmodern Construct

In the beginning of this chapter I argued that we should always consider a certain 'compositional creativity' when looking at and reviewing (art)photography. Besides that, Nelson's approach is explored and what turned out was that through exaggeration and arranging, Nelson was able to show paradoxes and at the same time explore and question the notion of cultural identity. Knowing this we can examine the process of arranging further and in addition explore what history and ideas are hidden behind it.

Art historian Joel Eisinger points out that "the very concept of photography as art necessitated that a given photograph exploit the medium's transforming capacity and embody the subjective vision of the photographer."[61] Every photograph is in some sense subjective, though it is possible to distinguish scales of subjectivity. Besides that, photography adjusts to ideas accompanying different time periods. When concerning the contemporary debates and reference books concerning photography, the modernist view followed by the postmodernist view are

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61 Joel Eisinger, *Trace & Transformation* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 3.

mostly used and cited. In the arts, different movements are following up and overlapping each other constantly. During the modernist period, which roughly took place from the late 19th until the mid-20th century, artists broke with the past and went looking for other forms of expression. After the 1960s a reaction against modernism arose, postmodernism, a movement with an anti-authoritarian style and no fixed definition of what art should be as its central points. Since these movements comprise almost the entire 20th century they are often used when exploring certain aspects of the history of photography. The main difference between these two lies in the essence of the photographs. First it is important to realize that "modernist theory maintained a distinction between art photographs and other kinds of photographs. Just as not all writing is literature, not all photography is art." Since "the status of the photograph in modernist theory lies in the visual properties of the photograph itself", it was the task of art critics to make a distinction between art and non-art photographs. Besides, a part of the modernist theory is that the "photograph carries within it a meaning that the photographer had put there."[62] Conversely, postmodernists are putting the circumstances during the realization of the photograph, its presentation, and the viewer's own experience first. These secondary practices inevitable shape what one sees in any photograph. "Therefore, in postmodernism the meanings of photographs and the very status of photographs as art arise from the relation of photographs to their cultural context."[63] Exactly the realization of the final image, how it is presented and the perception of the viewer are central to Nelson's work and therefore we might conclude that his work follows the ideas of the postmodern tradition.

Art historian and critic Lucy Soutter, elaborates further on this matter in her book *Why Art Photography* as she is writing about values and meaning in contemporary photography and art. She claims that the purpose and meaning of photography has changed over the years. Just reading photographs literally, is unfulfilling as photographs "communicate meaning in all sorts of different ways, with subject matter being only the most obvious."[64] She introduces three different turns in photography that have led to the contemporary use of hybrid genres since the beginning of the 20th century. She points out that usually a photograph or artwork has a main theme, a main genre, but nowadays "in our current era of eclecticism, many photographers (..)

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62 Joel Eisinger, *Trace & Transformation* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 4.

63 Joel Eisinger, *Trace & Transformation* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995), 5.

64 Lucy Soutter, *Why Art Photography?* (London: Routledge, 2013), 13.

employ hybrid forms of recognizable genres, working against the grain of their original purpose and meaning."[65] In the previous chapter we have seen that Hans Eijkelboom took portrait photography to the streets. In traditional portraiture, painting or photography, the whole context was staged and the portrayed person was always aware of being photographed, Eijkelboom however, acted as the invisible participant observer to make his series. There are certain features of documentary photography and ethnographic photography recognizable in his work, however above all, it is placed in the genre of street photography. This shows that not one clear genre can be identified which covers all his work. The same applies to Jimmy Nelson's work. Yet, when Soutter's analysis will be applied on Nelson's work, it might give a better insight in how to analyze his work.

Lucy Soutter introduces three turns in photography that have led to the way photography is currently used. First she discusses the "Duchampian turn" that refers to Marcel Duchamp, who questioned the whole notion of art by putting his famous *Fountain* (1917), a porcelain urinal, in a museum. She explains that Duchamp's contribution to photography is that "it allows for the possibility that any photographic image, no matter how insignificant or visually uninspiring, can be assigned art value within an art context through the intention of the artist."[66] This 'what is art?' discussion is still very lively, furthermore, today's tendency is that everything has the possibility to be art. Soutter ends the part on the Duchampian turn with a small summary in which she states that "art photography may rely heavily on external narratives: it can sustain contradictory interpretation and ethics: and the resulting ambiguities are part of the point."[67] As an example she analyses the portrait *Tim* made by Katy Grannan (1969) in a similar way that can be applied to Nelson's work. First, Soutter talks about the similarities in composition between Grannan's work and paintings from the past. Likewise, even though Jimmy Nelson's photographs contain a lot of contemporary elements, the composition remains very traditional. His use of diagonals in almost every photograph and the static composition, have roots in a very long art history. Additionally she points out that if a photograph is part of a bigger whole, we should always take a look at the whole series. Thus, if we take the broader context and the approach of Jimmy Nelson into consideration and we look at his work as one series, Soutter's

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65 Lucy Soutter, *Why Art Photography?* (London: Routledge, 2013), 13.

66 Lucy Soutter, *Why Art Photography?* (London: Routledge, 2013), 18.

67 Lucy Soutter, *Why Art Photography?* (London: Routledge, 2013), 22.

"blurring of genres" should make more sense.[68] The blurring of genres is a contemporary phenomenon in which the artist plays with genres, with objects and composition to encourage the viewer to think for themselves. In addition, Nelson is also playing with different genres as his photographs almost look like documentary photography, but if you consider the broader context you realize that it is everything but that, and it is often actually a form of composed portraiture photography.

The second shift she cites is the 'Conceptual shift', which main focus lies on art forms and the underlying ideas. She also emphasizes that even though an art work, the final result, is not conceptual, the background story can be. She calls the background story of Grannan conceptual since it relies on external narratives that can be traced back to the conceptual shift.[69] Although Jimmy Nelson's work does not directly fit in the realm of conceptual art, he does demand a similar critical attitude from the viewer as he is encouraging the intellect of his viewers to think for themselves and to question so-called realities. Besides that, like in conceptual art "the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair."[70]

The third and last shift she cites is called 'Postmodern textuality'. Postmodernism goes hand in hand with a "loss of belief in the truth or unique value of the photograph."[71] Soutter explains the difference between modernism and postmodernism as following: "If modernism prizes singular images that reflect the world with great beauty of penetrating truthfulness, postmodernism rests on the idea that reality is constructed and unstable."[72] Nelson's photographs show such a constructed reality as he asked the depicted people to show aspects of their culture which they are most proud of. This results in a final photograph which combines 'hidden' objects that refer to modern life, like watches, sunglasses, rivals and ties, with clothes and garments that refer to older times and are sometimes seen as cultural heritage, which again emphasizes the constructed

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68 Lucy Soutter, *Why Art Photography?* (London: Routledge, 2013), 20.

69 Lucy Soutter, *Why Art Photography?* (London: Routledge, 2013), 22.

70 Sol Lewitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (1967) : 79-83, reprinted in *Sol LeWitt: A Retrospective, ed.* Gary Garrels (San Fransisco: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, 2000), 369.

71 Lucy Soutter, *Why Art Photography?* (London: Routledge, 2013), 25.

72 Lucy Soutter, *Why Art Photography?* (London: Routledge, 2013), 25.

and unstable reality represented through Nelson's final work. This constructed reality shows striking contrasts, however it also refers to the development of cultural identity since identity is constructed out of influences across many places and times. All these influences, over the course of time, have contributed to a cultural identity which is not stable and constantly reaffirming itself. Nelson's photographs contribute to the visualization of this unstable identity. Due to the dialogue between Nelson and his models, he is able to respond to the structural elements of postmodernism by creating instead of making a photograph together with the subjects. As a result, the final image becomes an interplay between the artist and the subject, between fiction and reality and emphasizes the constructed character of cultural identity.

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Chapter 4. The role of cultural history in Shadi Ghadirian's photographs

Some might say that we owe our identities to what we wear, to what subgroup we belong or to the country we live in. Another creator of identity can be what happened in the past. Shadi Ghadirian combines elements from past and present in her *Qajar Series* (1998). In the previous chapter we have already seen that Nelson's models often selected certain clothes or brought garments that were related to the history of their tribes. Such behavior demonstrates that people might feel more connected with their cultural heritage and old standards than with the current ones, or in any case, it shows what image they want to present to others. In the creation or reproduction of cultural identity both Eijkelboom and Nelson presented a constructed cultural identity. Eijkelboom created cultural identity out of coincidences, Nelson in cooperation with his models, Shadi Ghadirian however, does not deal with external influences as she is photographing a staged setting, completely installed by herself. In doing this she is not so much acting as an outsider as Hans Eijkelboom and Jimmy Nelson did, indeed it looks like she is acting from the inside in the process of creating cultural identity. Being a woman herself she is dealing with issues addressing racism and sexism, which are definitely often named and concerned in the realization of the cultural identity of certain groups.

Shadi Ghadirian (1974), fully Shadifarin Ghadirian, lives and works in Teheran. In her work she is dealing with the perception of women living in an Islamic state. She draws from her own experiences, while photographing other women living in a state in which "a principal tenet of the Islamic Republic's cultural philosophy was that art must be in the service of Islam and the revolution."[73] The presence of the State is visible in varied aspects of contemporary Iranian life, also in artistic practices. Scholar, Hamid Keshmirshekan, whose focus lies on the history of modern and contemporary art from the Middle East, states that the State of Iran had a certain "resistance against the secular norms of cultural globalization, or as the authorities put it, "Westernization"."[74] This resistance might stem from a fear for "global forces of postmodernity"

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73 Hamid Keshmirshekan, "Reclaiming Cultural Space: The Artist's Performativity versus the State's Expectations in Contemporary Iran," in *Performing the Iranian State: Visual Culture and Representations of Iranian Identity*, ed. Staci Gem Scheiwiller (London: Anthem Press, 2013), 146.

74 Hamid Keshmirshekan, "Reclaiming Cultural Space: The Artist's Performativity versus the State's Expectations in Contemporary Iran," in *Performing the Iranian State: Visual Culture and Representations of Iranian Identity*, ed. Staci Gem Scheiwiller (London: Anthem Press, 2013), 150.

that threaten the margins of the Islamic State of Iran. Then, the reaction that follows is, according to Stuart Hall, that the State regulates strict rules and retreats and protects their own exclusivist and defensive territory.[75] Living and performing in such a regulated state involves certain restrictions for artistic practice. This chapter explores in what manner Shadi Ghadirian deals with and reacts to these restrictions in the process of creating cultural identity. My argument is geared towards several aspects that affect the perception of the constructed character of the cultural identity of Ghadirian's models. First, the power of staged photography as the artist is then able to put her own meanings in the photographs. And second, the influence of postmodern thoughts on the construction of identity; Anthony Elliot, Paul du Gay and Stuart Hall all emphasize the fragmented character of identity in postmodern times. I will refer in my analysis to the similarities and contrasts between Qajar portraiture and Ghadirian's portraits and discuss how these nowadays are intertwined.

4.1 Staged Photography

Issues of repression, mainly caused by rules based on religion, are central to the work of Shadi Ghadirian, but at the same time also gender issues are addressed. The strict Iranian regime affects her work in a way we might say that it turns out to be the most important source of inspiration for Ghadirian's photographs. By presenting Iranian women the way she does she is reacting against the reigning political standards.

Shadi Gadirian makes portraits inspired by early images from the Qajar dynasty. She takes photographs of women in a setting that has similar elements as portraiture photographs taking during the Qajar years. If we take a closer look at her photographs the first thing that stands out is the presence of women, more specific the lack of men in every photograph (figure 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4). These figures show only three of her works, however every photograph of her *Qajar Series* lacks the presence of male figures. These women, mostly one woman but sometimes two, are both posing for the camera and gazing into it, which is also recognizable in Qajar portraiture (figure 4.5 and 4.6). The backdrop in Ghadirian's photographs is obviously not real but artificial, either painted or covered with wallpaper. Melissa Heer concludes about her backdrop that it is likely constructed to "make the scene appear more realistic like an actual Qajar period studio portrait set," however, "ironically, it is also the most obviously artificial

75 Stuart Hall, "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity," in *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony D. King (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.), 36.

feature of the photograph."[76] This artificiality could be interpreted as a tool to mock with the position of women in Iran today, as the Qajar dynasty is long over, however existing norms still refer to it. She places the women in a setting that refers to the past but is not exactly the same, which again might refer to the role of women in Iran which is of course not precisely the same as during the Qajar years, however women's rights are antiquated and outdated since there is still inequality between men and women. Women are treated, concerning certain regulations, as they live in the past. This backdrop might refer to this treatment.

Another reference to Qajar portraiture could be the presence of the monobrow, eyebrows that form one interrupted line of hair. During the Qajar period "the paragon of female beauty was [amongst others] embodied in a woman with a thick monobrow", and if they did not have one they used make-up to connect their eyebrows.[77] Although I cannot say with certainty if it is a reference to Qajar portraiture, it looks like this striking feature is also noticeable with a lot of women in Ghadirian's portraits and since having a monobrow is no longer the paragon of female beauty we might conclude that it refers to the older photographs. The last similarity between Qajar portraiture and Ghadirian's photographs is the color. Both photographs are in sepia which give them an antiqued look. It would be perfectly reasonable if someone who saw Shadi Ghadirian's work, would thought it dated from a whole other period if it was not for the foreign, not fitting object she includes in every photograph. By staging the whole photograph she is able to include objects that are wrenched from their original context. Furthermore, the objects seem to be out of place in her photographs, however at the same time, because of their presence the photograph radiates a different feeling. Such a feeling, partly realized by the presence of contrasting objects, is best achieved by a staged photograph, in which the artist can put meaning instead of searching for it in accidental photographs.

Like Ghadirian, more artists are rebelling against the regime, political standards, racism or gender inequality. Another example of a female artist who reacts to such issues is African-American photographer Lorna Simpson, who deals with the representation of African-American women by revealing and subverting conventional representations often associated with gender and race. The focus of her series consisting of polaroid photographs, *Stereo Styles* (1988) (fig.

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76 Melissa Heer, "Restaging Time: Photography, Performance and Anachronism in Shadi Ghadirian's Qajar Series" *Iranian Studies* 45, no. 4 (2012) : 540, accessed February 8, 2017, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00210862.2012.673829?needAccess=true.

77 "Photographs of Qajar Women," *Museum of Islamic Art*, accessed February 24, 2017, http://www.mia.org.qa/en/qajar-women/qajar-photography.

4.1), lies on hairstyles and its ability to symbolize the entire race as hair can refer to a certain social status or position. Quite similar to Lorna Simpson, who uses hair as a means to represent and at the same time question the African-American culture, Ghadirian uses objects or techniques to represent and question an Iranian identity and to show that she disagrees with the government's role against artists and women.

In chapter two I mentioned Cindy Sherman who is, by exaggeration, able to bring up and question stereotypes often associated with the social position of women. Like Sherman, Simpson tries to counteract this process of stereotyping and objectification to which both women and African Americans are subject, exactly by accentuating it. According to American philosopher Martha Nussbaum seven notions are involved in the idea of "treating as an object." Two of these seven can also be applied to the work of Shadi Ghadirian, namely the one she calls "denial of autonomy" in which "the objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination" and the one named "inertness" where "the objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency, and perhaps also in activity."[78] Indeed, residents of Iran are limited in their autonomy as they cannot fully act without political interference. That will cause a lack of agency as well as restrictions in activity. Ghadirian responds to those restrictions by creating arranged images associated with exactly these actions or objects that are prohibited by the Iranian government.

4.2 The construction of Iranian identity

By presenting women in traditional hijab and juxtapose a traditional setting with a magic transistor radio, a bike or a can of coca cola in it, Ghadirian is able to challenge and subvert existing norms. Thereby, she, according to Ellen Feldman, "(..) resurrects a traditional form of portrait photography popular in the Qajar dynasty in mid-nineteenth-century Iran."[79] However, is she actually only juxtaposing past and present or are there also other underlying thoughts? To answer this question and form a better understanding of Shadi Ghadirian's *Qajar Series*, it is necessary to know something about Qajar art, art made during the Qajar dynasty which lasted from 1786 until 1925. During this period, photography "became a useful political tool and means

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78 Martha C. Nussbaum, "Objectification," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 24, no. 4 (1995) : 249-291, accessed February 13, 2017, http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2961930.pdf.

79 Ellen Feldman, "Foreign Objects. Photographs by Shadi Ghadirian," *Women's Review of Books* 27, no. 3 (2010) : 18, accessed February 16, 2017, https://www.wcwonline.org/images/stories/womensreviewofbooks/foreignobjects.pdf.

of recording information."[80] Photographer Aqa Reza (1843-84) produced portraits of Qajar notables which are in poses, costumes and props of the sitters related to European photographic conventions.[81] This illustrates that 'The West' was already a source of inspiration for photographers during the Qajar dynasty. Therefore, we might not solely associate The West with 'contemporary' and set it against the Qajar dynasty which is connected to 'traditional'. Layla S. Diba states that photography "responded to Iranian aspirations towards modernity and new definitions of identity."[82] In a similar vein, Donna Stein cites that "the literature describing the life and times of the Qajar period (1986-1925) shows late nineteenth-century Iranian society in transition, adapting to modern and foreign ideas and technology."[83] She describes that native Iranian photographers, unlike European photographers, did not have an example to rely on for inspiration as they did not have the "same naturalistic pictorial tradition." That resulted in a Western oriented approach, since Iranian photographers studied European prototypes and subsequently developed a new constructed Iranian identity, conveyed by their photographs.[84] Portrait photography created during the Qajar dynasty might therefore be based on assumptions and "prototypes, borrowed from fictional Orientalist constructions of the Middle East by foreign travelers, painters and photographers."[85] Thus, it is not just Ghadirian who is able to show influences of globalization, so were photographers during the Qajar dynasty. The realization of

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80 Layla S. Diba, "Qajar Photography and its Relationship to Iranian Art: A Reassessment," *History of Photography* 37, no. 1 (2013) : 86, accessed February 16, 2017, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03087298.2012.716227?needAccess=true.

81 Layla S. Diba, "Qajar Photography and its Relationship to Iranian Art: A Reassessment," *History of Photography* 37, no. 1 (2013) : 89, accessed February 16, 2017, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03087298.2012.716227?needAccess=true.

82 Layla S. Diba, "Qajar Photography and its Relationship to Iranian Art: A Reassessment," *History of Photography* 37, no. 1 (2013) : 91, accessed February 16, 2017, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03087298.2012.716227?needAccess=true.

83 Donna Stein, "The Photographic Source for a Qajar Painting," in *Performing the Iranian State: Visual Culture and Representations of Iranian Identity*, ed. by Staci Gem Scheiwiller (London: Anthem Press, 2013), 23.

84 Donna Stein, "The Photographic Source for a Qajar Painting," in *Performing the Iranian State: Visual Culture and Representations of Iranian Identity*, ed. by Staci Gem Scheiwiller (London: Anthem Press, 2013), 24-25.

85 Donna Stein, "The Photographic Source for a Qajar Painting," in *Performing the Iranian State: Visual Culture and Representations of Iranian Identity*, ed. by Staci Gem Scheiwiller (London: Anthem Press, 2013), 24.

Iranian portraiture photography, possibly portraiture in general, is to a great extent based on influences from other cultures and disciplines.

The above is sketched since it demonstrates that we must be cautious with quickly taken assumptions. Ghadirian's interplay does not simply show contrasts between past and present, furthermore, it does not implicate that objects or settings associated with Iranian culture are traditional and Western looking objects are contemporary. On the contrary, Iranian portraiture knows a long history of Western influences and besides that, the objects we call 'Western Looking', or 'Foreign Objects' are not so foreign at all. They are available to Iranian citizens, however not to all, and it is exactly this specific prohibition towards some citizens, in this case women, to which Ghadirian reacts.

Without concerning the contemporary discourse that is embedded in this postmodern, globalizing world, it is not possible to write about cultural identity as it is always subject to it. The current flow of destructing and then again constructing cultural identity in art is an iterative phenomenon as it is subject to an externally driven, fragmented character in post-modern society. Therefore, cultural identity is built from different elements which eventually will form a coherent whole, nevertheless unstable and subject to change. In the introduction to *Identity in Question*, Anthony Elliot and Paul du Gay state the following:

> Postmodernism seemed to mix transformations in identity and culture in equal measure. If there was pulsating desire and frenetic depthlessness to postmodern identity, there was also cultural dispersal, discord and disillusionment. In this, postmodernism made a fetish out of difference, thereby underwriting the plural, multiple and fragmented texture of human experience in an age of intensive computerization and hi-tech. Yet it was ironic that postmodern thought should be so mad with desire for difference, given that its own tendency was to actually totalize the eclipse of identity.[86]

Similar to postmodernism, in which people at the same time wanted to totalize the eclipse of identity and emphasize the desire for difference, the Iranian identity is constructed by Ghadirian as the government tries to totalize one national identity, however its citizens are reacting against this by accentuating differences. During postmodernism, boundaries are being negotiated and people are no longer absolute individuals, the postmodern person has not one permanent but

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86 Anthony Elliot and Paul du Gay, introduction to *Identity in Question*, ed. Anthony Elliot and Paul du Gay (London etc.: SAGE Publications, 2009), XIII.

many selves. As a consequence the representation of cultural identity becomes more complicated. For, how to represent a cultural identity when each individual also consists of multiple fragmented mini-identities? Ghadirian makes this struggle visible by showing contrasting images and objects. She presents these objects out of their original context which relates to "the postmodern idea that we inhabit a world of dislocated signs, a world in which the appearance of things has been separated from authentic originals."[87]

Ghadirian's reality is one in which she is not allowed to drink coca cola or ride a bike. Feldman calls it "a clash of realities", which might implicate that there are different realities on display, who all contribute in the formation of a cultural identity.[88] As Stuart Hall points out: "Identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions."[89] This is exactly what Ghadirian conveys with her multiple layer photographs. According to Hall national culture seeks to unify its members, however different they may be in terms of class, gender or race, into one cultural identity. Then he is asking if national identity can be considered as "a unifying identity of this kind, which cancels or subsumes cultural difference?"[90] There is not one valid answer to this question, however concerning Shadi Ghadirian's work we might conclude that the Iranian state does try to put restrictions on its citizens so it would be able to project one coherent identity. However, at the same time Iranian citizens are reacting against this identity by 'breaking the rules'; Ghadirian is rebelling against the rules by letting her models pose with forbidden objects.

4.3 Opening up new spaces

In Gadhirian's *Qajar Series* cultural context is created through the interplay between past and present. She acts as an artist who goes "back to the past with a view towards opening up a new

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87 Derrick Price and Liz Wells, "Thinking about Photography: Debates, Historically and Now," in *Photography: A critical Introduction*, ed. Liz Wells (London: Routledge, 2004), 21.

88 Ellen Feldman, "Foreign Objects. Photographs by Shadi Ghadirian," *Women's Review of Books* 27, no. 3 (2010) : 18, accessed February 16, 2017, https://www.wcwonline.org/images/stories/womensreviewofbooks/foreignobjects.pdf.

89 Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity?," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London etc.: SAGE Publications, 1996), 4.

90 Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity," in *Modernity and its Futures*, ed. Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew (Cambridge: Polity Press in association with the Open University, 1992), 296.

space of working."[91] She plays with identity as something that is not fixed, but can be negotiated and created. This new space of working is in her case a working area in which she has a certain artistic status so she 'allows' herself to undermine rules and laws that are valid in Iran. Ghadirian's photographs relate to new ways of thinking about the complex reality in which we live.[92] In her *Qajar Series* she included objects that are forbidden to some Iranian people like beer cans, CD players or televisions. The project shows women choked by constraints, both trapped between past and present and bounded by restrictions enforced by the Iranian state or religion. On most photographs the model looks straight into the camera as if she is telling the viewer she is not scared but trapped between rules of the country, almost always created by men. Ghadirian is acting against Iranian standards by exaggerating certain aspects in her photographs. She places both the women and the object in the center of the photograph, which creates a subtle interplay between the different styles. The objects are not presented as utilitarian objects, since the women are not using them, on the contrary, they are posing with them whereby she provides the women and the objects with equal value.

In her *Qajar Series* Ghadirian reacts to being stereotyped, to a "given identity", connoted by foreign expectations.[93] Hamid Keshmirshekan points out that in the process of being unique, artists are "usually expected to represent their given identities as safe havens." He continues by saying that there is a group of artists reacting against this given identity since they believe that "practicing art that ensures their uniqueness and differentiates them from their Western counterparts has, in many cases, resulted in some sort of blockage, making them produce monolithic art."[94] Shadi Ghadirian is indeed showing a given identity, by presenting women wearing a traditional hijab with covers their entire body. However, she is doing it with a nod, since she is not just showing women wearing a hijab, there is also an element in the photograph that causes friction. In addition she is creating a metaphor for the strict rules that are valid to

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91 Lucy Soutter, *Why Art Photography?* (London: Routledge, 2013), 26.

92 Lucy Soutter, *Why Art Photography?* (London: Routledge, 2013), 53.

93 Hamid Keshmirshekan, "Reclaiming Cultural Space: The Artist's Performativity versus the State's Expectations in Contemporary Iran," in *Performing the Iranian State: Visual Culture and Representations of Iranian Identity*, ed. Staci Gem Scheiwiller (London: Anthem Press, 2013), 151.

94 Hamid Keshmirshekan, "Reclaiming Cultural Space: The Artist's Performativity versus the State's Expectations in Contemporary Iran," in *Performing the Iranian State: Visual Culture and Representations of Iranian Identity*, ed. Staci Gem Scheiwiller (London: Anthem Press, 2013), 151.

Iranian women, showing the oppressed freedom of choice by letting the women pose with 'forbidden' objects. Thereby she is able to challenge to concept of identity and contribute to a more fragmented cultural identity, in this series, created from past and present.

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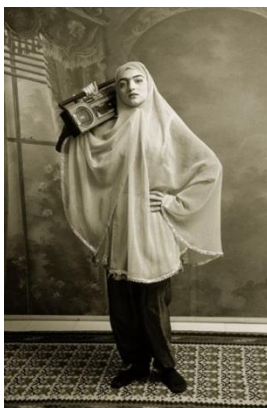
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Conclusion

By juxtaposing Hans Eijkelboom's *People of the 21st Century*, Jimmy Nelson's *Before They Pass Away* and Shadi Ghadirian's *Qajar Series* I have aimed to offer insights into the different ways these photographers represent reality and create cultural identity. On some points their strategies overlap since they are all dealing with the visualization of people and aspects associated with specific cultures. Moreover, they all use arrangement techniques to show their stance towards society. Within these similarities, however, are also striking differences visible.

This research emphasizes the constructed, unstable character of cultural identity in the contemporary world. Various influences, such as globalization and the 'other' have impact on the formation of cultural identity. This ensures an identity which is continuous under construction and is, as all dynamic processes, subject to change. For that reason the visualization of cultural identity is problematic and photographers must think outside of traditional frameworks which, in this research, is achieved through altering the final appearance of their photographs by making arrangements in pre- or post-photographic stages. Exactly through these arrangements all three photographers are able to exaggerate certain aspects of culture and present an image that is representing reality at best since the present postmodern reality is both unstable and constructed. Questioning cultural identity by exaggerating stereotypes is used as a strategy to show what is right beneath the surface. Eijkelboom, Nelson and Ghadirian use arrangement techniques, albeit in different ways, to blow up certain aspects of culture.

By making photographs of people with similar garments or behavior and presenting them out of context, as a series, Hans Eijkelboom is able to stress resemblances in cultural expression. By suggesting that people look the same he confirms existing stereotypes, however at the same time he presents an image which does not present itself like this in reality, therefore he also undermines a single cultural identity through exaggeration of some stereotypes. Jimmy Nelson lets his models collaborate in the creation and visualization of cultural identity. This dialogue ensures photographs with a mix of attributes and clothes, both referring to the past and the present. Through their interplay, both the models and the photographer become constitutive factors in creating a cultural identity. Together they are able, by showing contrasting objects out of their original context, to emphasize the constructedness of reality. In Shadi Ghadirian's photographs it are not just objects that refer to the past, it is the whole setting which refers to a traditional style of portraiture photography. Ghadirian's photographs stress the continuous reworking of the supposed opposition between past and present. Her photographs demand the viewer to look beyond and think critically about their own beliefs as the multiple realities in her

work cannot be reduced to one singular, fixed cultural identity since the construction of cultural identity is an ongoing process.

All discussed photographs cause friction as the conflation of contrasting features can confuse the viewer. Through arrangements techniques Eijkelboom, Nelson and Ghadirian construct their own narrative, in which the viewer is encouraged to question and (re)construct the concept of cultural identity. What in first instance seems to be a paradox, an arranged photograph rendering reality, turns out to be a postmodern way of giving insight in and access to reality.

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