



# Iranian advertisements: A postcolonial semiotic reading

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## ABSTRACT

This paper is a postcolonial reading of a number of Iranian brands and logos to discover the influence of Western hegemony on the design of Iranian advertisements. The advertising's pivotal role in supporting the brands has made producers employ creative strategies. Benefiting from the tenets of semiotics, we aim to uncover the hidden meanings within different advertisements, brand names, and logos as the paragons of the products' identity and image. The brands and logos discussed in this study belong to different companies and categories (food, cosmetics, airline, clothing, and bank). The measures of their Westernization level is analyzed according to Homi K. Bhabha's definition of mimicry which signifies imitating some famous Western brands (iconic mimicry), using English language (linguistic mimicry), utilizing Western-looking models or celebrities, and displaying female bodies (visual mimicry), and resistance. The results show the effect of Western supremacy, the negotiations of Iranian and Western culture, and cases of resistance in Iranian advertisements.

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## Introduction

Different experts have applied diverse approaches like semiotics towards advertisement planning and analysis, because it shows how specific words, images, and colors form the vocabulary of persuasion in advertising (Beasley & Danesi, 2002, p. 26). A semiotic analysis also takes a systematic approach towards the investigation of different signs to discover whether they are culturally significant or they just imitate those of a more dominant culture.

This article is a postcolonial semiotic reading of some Iranian brands and logos to discuss their relationship with a major postcolonial term, mimicry, which was first introduced by Homi K. Bhabha. The reason behind this choice is that Iranian advertisements have not been extensively

analyzed and there is a dearth of literature related to the postcolonial reading of contemporary Iranian logos/brands. Hence, we aim to fill this grave gap. The semiotic analysis of the advertising logos of Iran governed by anti-colonial administration proves that the signs are not wholly relevant to anti-colonial stance. They may belong to the realm of Western signs which have been changed to a great extent to fit the Iranian context. It implies that Iran has also been under the influence of the West in this realm, because instead of resistance, logos and brands mostly negotiate with Western hegemony.

There have been many ups and downs in Iran's relationship with Western countries, specifically the USA. The anti-colonial Islamic Revolution (1979) made relations extremely hostile, leading to the occupation of the U.S. Embassy (1979–1981) and a dramatic 444-day-long hostage crisis, U. S. supporting Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein in Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988), and shooting down an Iranian passenger airline, which caused the death of all its 290 passengers (1988). The viewpoints of well-known Iranian politicians like Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–1989)

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and thinkers like Ali Shari'ati (1933–1977) and Jalal Al-Ahmad (1923–1969) also verify this anti-colonial attitude, because they rejected Western supremacy, wanted Iran to return to its true self, and showed their antagonism towards the increasing Western, specifically American, hegemony in Iran (Abbas, 2006, p. 3). However, after twelve years of negotiations, in 2013, during the presidency of the moderate Rouhani, Iran and world powers arrived at an agreement to lift international sanctions in exchange for curbs on Iran's nuclear program (Tharoor, 2015). Since then, the two countries have increased their trade volume to USD 30 billion by 2015 (Parsi, 2014, pp. 47–54).

The advertising omnipresence as a central feature of the modern culture and a window to the culture of consumers is an undisputable fact in today's world. The rise in the number of advertisements and the establishment of websites exclusively related to advertising like *Media Archive* or TV channels like *Bazaar*, both founded in 2012, have proven that Iran is not an exception in this regard and advertising has started to hold an important role.

In the global market, rapid technological progress in the broadcasting industry has further highlighted the influence of Western culture upon other cultures, specifically in developing countries. This concept of 'hegemonic culture' suggests that cultural values are appropriately forced by those in power as the dominant cultures upon other cultures. Although cultural values are assumed as major factors in determining consumer lifestyles or product choices, Western cultural values may often interfere and overcome those of a native culture (Cutler, Javalgi, & White, 1995, pp. 23–24). Advertising is also influential in the transition from Western cultural values to developing nations (Frith & Frith, 1989, p. 180). The influence of the Western hegemony links consumer culture to Bhabha's mimicry, the double enunciation, and a multifaceted policy of reorganization. This double-vision is well mirrored in how the advertisements both negotiate with and resist the Western hegemony.

This research has attempted to embrace an eclectic manner in selecting logos of different brands which are among the oldest or the most popular products in Iran. The first grouping of logos/brands (food, cosmetics) discusses the case of iconic mimicry in the imitation of the foreign, especially American companies. The second classification (airline) discusses a logo in which the inclusion of English language as a sign of linguistic mimicry is an indicator of prestige, modernity and international quality. The third group (clothing) analyzes the brands that benefit from the presence of Western-looking celebrities or models to consider how a brand applies visual mimicry to shape the image of ideal male or female beauty. All logos cover a history of 83 years (1933–2016) though most of the advertisements belong to the 2010s. The influence of Western hegemony and negotiations can be observed in all these subjects. The last logo (bank) is one of the rare cases that represents strong resistance to Western superiority.

In all these logos, excluding the last one, Western culture has influenced the design of Iranian logos extensively. Although Iran is an anti-colonial country and its producers might have done their best to design logos typical of the Iranian culture, they often behave like Westernized Easterners, and show diminutive interest in using their

country's customs whether consciously or unconsciously. They mostly prefer negotiation with rather than resistance to the Western hegemony.

## Literature Review

The literature has a gap in the postcolonial semiotic approach toward advertisements. "Trinidad and Tobago television advertising as third space: hybridity as resistance in the Caribbean Mediascape" focuses on the postcolonial reading of Caribbean advertisements and their resistance to Western hegemony; it claims that television advertising functions as a space of hybridity and plays a dominant role in the establishment of resistive identity (McFarlane-Alvarez, 2007). "The negotiation of U.S. advertising among Bengali immigrants: A journey in hybridity" scrutinizes the production of advertisements by Bengali migrants from East India and exhibits the hybrid existences of diasporic groups, placing themselves at the intersections of international and national aspects (Dutta-Bergman & Pal, 2005). "Mimicry and postcolonial advertising" proposes a comprehensive study of "emulation" as an ambivalent act and interprets it as postcolonial mimicry (Varman, Cayla, & Hari, 2011). Both "The semiotics of advertisements: Reading advertisements as a sign systems" (Bati, 2007) and "A semiotic reading of advertisements" (Lawlor, 1992) explain the sign system relations. They reveal the current product representations and its match or mismatch with the links that the receiver relates to the advertisements.

Bhabha's "Location of culture" (1994) as the most important source for this study inspects the dislocation of the colonizer's real cultural identity. It also discusses the most significant theories of Bhabha, like mimicry which he has defined as the imitation of the values of a colonial society. In "Of mimicry and man" (1984), Bhabha's analysis of mimicry is largely based on the Lacanian vision of mimicry as camouflage resulting in colonial ambivalence. He sees the colonizer as a snake in the grass who, speaks in "a tongue that is forked," and produces a mimetic representation that "emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 122). Huddart (2006) covers the most important ideas of Homi K. Bhabha, including 'ambivalence', 'mimicry', 'hybridity', and 'translation'. He employs series of contexts like art history, contemporary cinema, and canonical texts to explain the practical application of Bhabha's theories.

Literature related to Iranian advertisements is scarce. "Mixing English in Persian print advertising discourse" discusses the role and influence of English in magazine print advertising in Iran. It concludes that applying English stands for persuasion, reputation, modernity, globalization, top quality, fun, novelty, and creativity (Shooshtari & Allahbakhsh, 2013). "Sociolinguistic aspects of Persian advertising in post-revolutionary Iran" inspects the different types of socio-cultural values which have been reproduced and constructed in Persian advertisements in the post-revolutionary era (Amouzadeh & Tavangar, 2008). In spite of much research in the realm of semiotics and postcolonial studies, advertisements have remained a marginal area of inquiry in the realm of Iranian studies. The last two articles investigated merely some old print

advertisements in Iranian; thus, this study is trying to compensate for the gap.

## Methodology

This paper has selected a postcolonial semiotic approach to analyze a group of Iranian logos. This theory has been chosen mainly due to the lack of such analysis in the realm of Iranian advertisements. To reach this aim, this research will utilize Homi Bhabha's theory of mimicry as the imitation of the values or signs of a colonial society. This study also benefits from semiotics that embrace not only written language, but also television programs, films, photographs, and fashion. Logos are highlighted because they are the graphic emblems or symbols that aid instant public recognition and "entrench product image effectively" (Beasley & Danesi, 2002, p. 13); hence, this can be a reasonable justification why most of the advertisement designers try to use Westernized techniques in their designs.

The logos under scrutiny belong to various categories, including "Avazeh" as a known brand of edible products in Iran, "Sormeh" as a widespread cosmetic chain store, "Iran Air" as an international and the oldest airline in Iran, "Maral Leather" and "Novin Leather" as two of the most famous Iranian leather brands, and finally "Keshavarzi Bank" as a renowned Iranian bank. The logos cover a history of 83 years (1933–2016) and the advertising period covers almost a decade (2010–2016). Our analysis tries to shed light on the degree by which they resist or negotiate with Western ideology.

## Discussion: to Negotiate or to Resist, that is the Question

Easterners mostly reject their own traditions because they may seem non-modernized. Therefore, modernity in the East turns to be the mimicry of Western society that seems to be a measure of how much a society has become Westernized. In the context of Orientalist discourse, then, it is sensible to assume that the definition of modernity must be unquestionably superior. Shari'ati (1979) declares that modernization means modernization in consumption rather than scientific or intellectual improvement. Another reason for interest in the West is "Gharbzadegi", the Persian equivalent of "Westoxication". This term was popularized by the Iranian thinker, Jalal Ale-e Ahmad especially in "Iranian Education" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982b) and "Westoxication" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982a). He believed that when European and American-educated Persians returned to Iran upon the completion of their studies, they became, contrary to what would be expected, ineffective members of society, since they no longer identified with their native culture. Indeed, they were the "perfect examples of something severed from its roots, this the result of Gharbzadegi" (Al-e Ahmad, 1982b, p. 119). This can be applied to those designers and consumers who had their education in a Western country or who are familiar with Western culture.

The advertisers and consumers are vacillating between their own culture's traditional values and the Western culture's modern standards; that is why those values are both present in the designs. According to Bhabha, a colonial

subject perceives the world as divided between two hostile cultures which often leave the colonial subject in limbo, with neither of them providing a sense of belonging (Bressler, 2011, p. 331). This, again, refers to mimicry which is frequently invoked with reference to the "been-to," someone who has traveled to the West, and then returned "home," completely altered.

Therefore, the advertisement designers' technique parallels that of a colonized subject who desires to prove his/her worth by mimicking the colonial class. Mimicry can be defined as the desire for a renewed, identifiable Other, as a subject of alteration that is nearly the same, but not quite, leading to a noticeable similarity between the colonized and the colonizer (Huddart, 2006, p. 40). Bhabha argues that mimicry "does not merely 'rupture' the discourse, but becomes transformed into an uncertainty which fixes the colonial subject as a 'partial' presence" (as cited in Smith, 2013, p. 159). According to Bhabha, under colonialism, mimicry is seen as an opportunistic pattern of behavior: one copies the person in power, in the hope of having access to the same power. The significant point about Iran is that although it was not colonized directly, there were numerous regimes that were extremely loyal to the Western powers. Hence, it is not shocking that Iranian logos are somehow an imitation of Western ones.

However, mimicry is also the sign of an unfitting difference which coheres the prevailing role of colonial supremacy, strengthens observation, and forces an impending threat upon both "normalized knowledges and disciplinary powers" (p. 126). In postcolonial studies 'mimicry' is assumed as upsetting imitations that are typical of postcolonial cultures. It is a need to sever the bonds with 'self' in order to move towards 'other'. For Bhabha (1984, p. 129), the "menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority". This double-vision is well mirrored in how the advertisements both negotiate with and resist the Western hegemony.

To measure the extent to which the Western cultural influence has been visible in Iranian brands and logos, this study will analyze four different categories to see if they resist or negotiate with Western hegemony. The first group (food/cosmetics) will argue the degree by which the logos imitate and mimic those of the foreign, especially American companies. The second classification (airline) involves the logo in which the presence of English language is a measure of its linguistic mimicry and negotiation with Western hegemony. The third group (clothing) will discuss the brands in which the presence of Western-looking celebrities and models is regarded as their sign of visual mimicry and the negotiation with Western authority. The last logo (bank) is one of the exceptional instances which signifies the resistance to Western superiority.

### *The Iconic Mimicry: Brands/Logos*

The first group of examples involves those brands and logos which have intentionally or accidentally imitated Western ones and are assumed as instances of mimicry. "Avazeh" (Figure 1) is an Iranian brand of edible products. Although the company boasts about its 50 years of



Figure 1 Avazeh

experience, the logo was officially released in the early 2010s. This brand is tremendously popular owing to its extensive range of advertisements and also its diverse advantages such as high standards, healthiness, and prizes for consumers (see <http://avazeh.ir/>). In 2014, Avazeh became the most popular brand of rice in Iran by competing with almost 800 brands (see <http://avazeh.ir/fa/news/1393topbrand>).

In the Avazeh logo, the colors play the most essential role, since they are among the first and most dominant elements in semiotics and have the ability to create visual impressions in advertising and brand differentiation. They can also symbolize and trigger positive or negative emotions, and add impact to what is important for the viewer to see and understand (Myers, 2009, p. 117). In addition, they are able to communicate broader messaging and legibility of this messaging depends on how colors have been used in a brand's logo (Blakeman, 2011, pp. 95–97).

This logo utilizes red, white, yellow, and silver. These colors remind the viewers of "McDonald's" (Figure 2) as the world's largest chain fast food restaurants with international customers. Avazeh uses a similar technique to that of McDonald's in exploiting colors, because red is the most distinguishable color in both logos, white is used to signify the brand's name, and yellow is considered as the most visible color to the eye. This strategy refers to what Bhabha terms mimicry or the imitation of the values and signs of a colonial society. So, this feature is present when those belonging to a colonized society imitate the characteristics of a colonizer's culture. Those trying to copy the master,



Figure 2 McDonald

must deliberately overpower their own cultural identity; however, in some cases, colonial subjects are left so confused by their cultural encounter with a dominant foreign culture that there may not be a clear prior identity to suppress (Falakdin & Zarrinjooee, 2014, p. 2).

In fact, those responsible for planning a new design have just appropriated Western designs and this is why the West's presence is always felt. The logo of Avazeh has been Americanized because McDonald's was founded first in the United States in 1940. Iranian designers tried to recontextualize and culturally revise the logo as much as possible so that it would keep the natural flavor. The company's name, written in Persian letters, highlights the family' role in an Iranian household which is seen in the signification of the round shape of the logo and its association with food since in Persian, "round", "food plate", and "togetherness" are culturally respected and also pronounced similarly as "dowr", "dowri" and "dowr ham". They add an Iranian essence of resistance because the logo has been designed in a way such that the grains of rice resemble a family's members who have gathered together. That is how Avazeh negotiates and slightly resists with McDonald's.

The word–image relationship in the Avazeh logo chiefly negotiates with the Western hegemony, because it has imitated the logo of McDonald's through using the same colors, and the only sign of resistance is the use of Persian letters (Figure 1). Thus, unlike the image of the Avazeh logo which negotiates with Western hegemony, its wording implies resistance to Western supremacy.

This mild resistance is augmented when one notices the reaction of Iranian hardliners towards the West, especially toward the USA. The anti-colonial stance led to the closure of the Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) Halal restaurant in Tehran, the capital of Iran, due to the store being too American, just 24 h after its opening. This event has been widely covered by both Iranian (see [www.jamnews.ir](http://www.jamnews.ir) and [presstv.ir](http://presstv.ir)) and Western news agencies (see [bbc.com](http://bbc.com), [foxnews.com](http://foxnews.com), and [nbcnews.com](http://nbcnews.com)). They reported that this restaurant's decoration, logo, and symbols closely resembled the U.S. flag, and this was a desecration of the laws related to the country's foreign policies. American fast-food chains are powerful symbols of U.S. imperialism for many Iranians and thus, they should be absent in the country. Iran's highest authority, Ayatollah Khameneyi, has declared that brands like KFC and McDonald's provide their ingredients from the United States which means it is not halal; hence, this would never be allowed in Iran (see <http://foreignpolicy.com>). Thus, in the case of Avazeh, the anti-colonial resistance is mostly viewed in the news regarding the Western company rather than the Iranian advertisement itself.

Mimicry can also be found in the logo of a cosmetic chain store, named "Sormeh" (Figure 3) founded in 2007. This name resembles the American brand of cosmetics, "Sorme" (Figure 4) (see <http://www.sorme.com>). Not only the name but also the design of both logos are similar, suggesting that this brand's producers have considered both national and international methods. Attention to the transnational aspects is very important because in spite of Iran's producing cosmetics and beauty products using safe and standard materials, a large number of Iranians have a tendency to prefer foreign products. The other reason for





Figure 3 Sormeh

this mimicry goes back to the inclination of many Iranian girls and women to look like Western women.

For the Iranian consumer, this iconic mimicry is less noticeable than the Avazeh logo because Sorme is a familiar name in Iran and it evokes a cosmetic product that is highly natural and useful for the eyes. This imitation is advantageous for the Iranian product since in Persian, Sorme is pronounced like Sormeh which means kohl. Since mimicry (i.e. American brand), is not always a pure and slavish replica, it may entail cases of resistance by echoing the traditional values or the religious and cultural significance of “*sormeh*”. That is why the designers of this logo have unquestionably considered the fact that the dominant culture in Iran belongs to Muslims (more than 90%), where applying kohl, “*sormeh*”, is encouraged in Islamic tradition, “*Sunnah*”. The evidence of this claim is stated in hadith narrations that the Prophet Muhammad applied kohl and believed in its usefulness (Al-Jawziyah & Abdullah, 2003, p. 247). The word–image relationship in Sormeh is the instance of negotiation with Western hegemony, because its wording and design remind the consumers of its American equivalent. That is how the postcolonial mimicry brings the notion of negotiation with the West to the foreground.

The designers have employed trends from global culture in a way that respects religious traditions and this can be the tact behind the choice of such a name to negotiate with an American brand. As a result, the notions of mimicry and cultural negotiation imply the presence of other cultures' signs and models causing its advertisers to create a hybrid cultural identity—their own cultural identity and the other's cultural identity. Bhabha (1984, p. 12) states that



Figure 4 Sorme

mimicry is rooted in difference and denial. It is the sign of a double enunciation; a multifaceted policy of reorganization that “appropriates” the other. That is how mimicry is tightly connected to negotiation and resistance.

#### *Linguistic Mimicry: the Inclusion of English Language*

The second group of examples will discuss how the inclusion of English language in a logo can be considered as a case of linguistic mimicry. It seems that the use of English words and letters in logos to introduce the products, remind the consumers of concepts like “prestige, technology, innovation, creativity, modernity, and memorability”; it may also have a great “persuasive effect on customers and grabs [their] attention” (Shooshtari & Allahbakhsh, 2013, pp. 82–103). Actually, this policy refers to how the advertisers may often create images of an “Other” in their advertisements because depicting the Other (West) is an effective persuasive device, although it is important that the Other be seen positively in the target culture.

According to Smith (2002), consumers hold stereotyped images both of foreign countries and of their own country, which is certainly true. The stereotypical images are used as information cues when judging products originating from different countries. The stereotypes can also be linguistic like the use of English words in logos and brand names. English is undoubtedly the language of international communication; actually never before in history has a single language spread over so much of the world as English has done (Smith, 2002, p. 172). Using English-language elements and Western imagery in non-English-language advertising material can add positive connotations like modernity to the advertised products. In this case, the English language is the linguistic mimicry of Western society and a chief measure of how much a logo has become Westernized. Henceforth, the use of English language is a proof that the brand is highly superior. If English occurs in the headline, slogan, and especially the product name, it will be an attention-grabber and may evoke a positive image, because it has been proved that the name of the product is the most significant part of an advertisement in which English can be employed frequently (Gerritsen et al., 2007). Likewise, a consumer exposed to an advertisement which contains a foreign language, in a context where all other commercial messages are in his own language, will pay attention to the advertisements which are different from the familiar (Cutler et al., 1995, p. 30).

The designers, however, must apply caution in using English words, because if it is overused, the target culture may feel subjugated by it, believing that its own language is under threat and so they will not accept it. Amouzadeh and Tavangar (2008, p. 135) claim that the use of English language in Persian advertisements may also be interpreted as a kind of “language display” to encourage positive images such as the international status of the product, modernity, Europeanization, and dependability.

“Iran Air”, established in 1962, as “The Airline of the Islamic Republic of Iran” (Figure 5), is the oldest airline company in Iran and in the Middle East. According to its official website, after Iran National Airline was established, it was started under the acronym “Homa” (see <http://www.iran-air.>



Figure 5 Homa [The Airline of the Islamic Republic of Iran]

de/en/IranAir/Geschichte.aspx). Though the name is the mimicry of English language, the logo shows resistance. The Homa logo first appeared in a competition announcement in the *Kayhan* and *Ettelaat* newspapers (1961) whose judges were from the Iranian College of Fine Arts. Edward Zohrabian who was inspired by an image on top of one of the columns at Persepolis (6th century BC), the most famous historical site of Iran, won the competition. He drew the enduring logo of Iran Air motivated by a series of ancient Iranian subjects. His most significant inspiration was Homa, the Persian mythological bird. It has three separate characteristics: an eagle's head, a cow's ears and a horse's mane. Without legs (Figure 5), it never rests and lives its entire life flying invisibly high above the Earth.

In 2013, the logo was selected as the most beautiful in the whole airline industry by Skift (see <https://skift.com/2013/10/23/the-30-best-looking-airlines-logos-in-the-world/#1>). Hence, using English words in its logo is considered as an influential factor to communicate the message of internationality to the whole world. It is also believed that although

this company has tried hard to be internationally known and reputable, it has emphasized its national grace through the image on its logo which belongs to a bird, symbolizing Iranian culture and mythology and as a sign of resistance to Western hegemony. The word–image relationship in this logo mostly resists Western hegemony, because in spite of using the English language to write the company's name, it has used the image of a mythological bird and Persian calligraphy [*Nastaliq*] to translate the English line of “The Airline of the Islamic Republic of Iran”.

#### *Visual Mimicry: Western-looking Models and the Presence of Female Bodies*

The third category is connected to the mimicry in brands that take advantage of Western-looking models and superstars to negotiate with the Western hegemony. Celebrities are often viewed as the role models of the culture and thus are used in advertising to connect with consumers and draw their attention to the recommended brand. “Novin Leather” (established in 1991) is a famous leather brand in Iran which has been using Iranian celebrities like Bahram Radan and Reza Yazdani since 2010 in various poses as its models (Figure 6).

The company claims that it selected the name Novin Leather in 2003 with the purpose of retailing high-standard products according to international principles. The significance of the name lays in the meaning of “*Novin*” (modern), that can be assumed as a sign of negotiating with Western hegemony. This company has been exporting its products to different Middle Eastern and European countries, participating in various international exhibitions, and winning the plaque of honor for being among 100 top brands of Iran (see <http://ifpdirectory.com/listing/novin-leather-company/>). Also by the sponsorship of Iranian Rock singers, it tries to find a profitable market among the modernized youth. Because of the absence of Iranian traditional singers, Novin Leather prefers negotiation to resistance. Actually, this brand's employment of celebrities, specifically the Western-looking ones has turned it into a suitable example of mimicry. The celebrity model, Bahram Radan, has fair complexion, green eyes, and dark blond hair like the Westerners. Jean jacket and



Figure 6 Novin leather advertisements (2010–2016)

pants, typically signifying western culture, adds more to Radan's Westernized image. Therefore, the advertisers again have had Western supremacy in their mind.

"Maral Leather" (founded in 1995) has also used another design in which we can notice the existence of Western-looking models. Interestingly it uses a female model standing beside a male model while wearing boots, a red coat, and red lipstick (Figure 7). Although this woman has hijab as an essential feature of a Muslim woman and her face is not clearly shown, her hijab is not typically accepted in Iran. Besides, the presence of a woman near an unrelated man is not a welcome sight for traditional and Muslim Iranians. Her scarf represents the act of resistance against Western hegemony whereas her red coat, the color of the scarf, makeup, and the handsome male model are negotiating with West. In more recent advertisements, the negotiation is more obvious since women are depicted in a provocative pose with thicker make up and blond hair. This image of the new woman is definitely challenging Iranian tradition.

This portrayal of women provides the consumers with an ideal image of femininity which is more acceptable in the West. Since the application of traditional perspectives means being deprived of many rights and gender equality (Kian-Thiebaut, 2008, p. 86), it seems that Maral Leather depicts a man beside a woman to emphasize equality and attract the attention of its female consumers. Thus, this method in negotiating with the West is regarded as revolutionary in the patriarchal society. Shari'ati (1979) claims that the freedom of women was started in the West of which many Muslim thinkers are afraid because of its misleading consequences. He claims that in Eastern societies like Iran, the newly-educated class powerfully intensifies this crisis; thus, women act as one of the forces that increase this dangerous and catastrophic change (16). Shari'ati believes that "cultural imperialism" was the main reason of women's oppression. He declares that Muslim women can protect their honor by avoiding Western fashion and hegemony. To gain equal rights or work beside

men, women must observe hijab so that they can desexualize their bodies (as cited in Vakil, 2011, p. 70). That is why all provocative poses, make up, and bold colors are highly disparaged.

However, there are some points which can be regarded as the logos' resistance to Western dominance like the use of Persian language to write the brands' name, suggesting that national identity has not been forgotten completely by the designers. It means that these two brands have resisted Western supremacy in their choice of words. However, in Novin Leather the case of negotiation is augmented because, in addition to Persian, it uses English to highlight the international aspect of this brand. It seems as if Western paradigms are more adequate than Islamic standards to show what the advertisers have in mind. All the advertisements of this brand (2010–2016) are nearly the same in depicting women's dress code and the lack of any Iranian cultural item during its 22 years of experience (1995–2017). In all these cases, there is a tendency towards negotiation with Western hegemony and thus, the advertiser represents the circumstance of a post-colonial subject through whom mimicry imitates standard principles in the West.

#### *The Challenge: Resistance to Western Supremacy*

"Keshavarzi Bank" [*The Bank of Agriculture*], founded in 1933, is a governmental bank (Figure 8) that serves as the first and only specialized financial institution in Iran's agricultural sector (see <http://www.bki.ir/>). A postcolonial semiotic analysis of this bank's logo will reveal how all its signs indicate its resistance to Western hegemony. This logo is of great significance, since it is one of the rare cases that shows no instance of negotiation with Western dominance.

Colors play an important role in this logo to deliver the message of resistance. The main colors in this logo are green, gold, and white which have especial roles in Islam and particularly in Iran as a country where most of the



**Figure 7** Maral leather advertisements (2010–2016)





Figure 8 Keshavarzi bank [The bank of agriculture]

population are Muslims. The use of these colors which are sacred by Islam is related to this slogan, “Islamic Banking”. The same motto is used by many Iranian banks in their advertisements to deliver the message of resistance, but no bank has been as successful in delivering this message as “Keshavarzi Bank”.

The significance of these colors can be inferred from some verses in Holy Quran (2011). When finally reaching paradise in the afterlife, the Residents of Paradise “shall be given [ornaments] therein of bracelets of gold, and they shall wear green robes of fine silk and thick silk brocade interwoven with gold” (18:31), and they will be “reclining on green cushions and beautiful carpets” (55:76). Therefore, in an Islamic culture, green and gold are associated with paradise and eternal happiness. White is another dominant color which is perhaps the second-most associated color with Islam, representing peace and serenity. It is regarded as holy and sacred.

Another instance of resistance is represented in the iconic position of wheat at the center of the logo. Wheat, not only resists Western hegemony and modernization but also supports the bank’s claim in caring about the improvement of the agricultural state in Iran. Wheat is the most fundamental, widely used, and respected crop in Iran. Iranian tradition respects wheat and all of its products, especially bread. Furthermore, Qur’an justifies the religious significance of wheat (2:62). The act of resistance is amplified by the word–image relationship. Like Homa, Keshavarzi Bank exploits Persian calligraphy [*Nastaliq*] that is very typical of Iranian culture. It signifies that this bank is completely Iranian in its choice of words, image, and colors.

### Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Research

Applying postcolonial semiotics, the present study argued that the Iranian advertisements of different brands and logos (food, cosmetics, clothing, airline, and bank) negotiate with and resist the Western hegemony. The analyzed cases reveal some overlaps or crossovers though

the case of negotiation is more widespread than resistance. The significance of the first group was due to iconic mimicry of some of the world’s most famous logos like the similarity between “Avazeh”—“McDonald’s” and “Sormeh”—“Sorme”. The second group analyzed the importance of using English in the logos. The focus of this linguistic mimicry was more on the prestige, internationality, high quality, and technology as a marketing strategy represented in companies like “Iran Air”. The third group, focusing on visual mimicry, discussed the employment of Western-looking celebrities or models in the advertisements of clothing brands like “Novin Leather” and “Maral Leather”. The last case, “Keshavarzi Bank”, was a challenge to mimicry since it was mostly the representation of resistance to Western hegemony. It is concluded that although Iran is an anti-colonial country, it seems as if the consumer culture is mostly in favor of mimicry and negotiation with Western hegemony. Cases of resistance are also observed albeit, mildly. Therefore, all contradictory aspects (negotiation with and resistance to Western signs at the same time) present a postcolonial connotation, because the designers, the advertisements, and the consumers appear to be like postcolonial subjects although they may be unaware of this issue. This study will pave the way for future researchers to better analyze advertisements in a post-colonial setting.

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