

SELF-CENSORSHIP AND POLITICAL OPPRESSION

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## ABSTRACT

### SELF-CENSORSHIP AND POLITICAL OPPRESSION

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Self-awareness is a basic knowledge training an art therapist needs to acquire to be able to reflect on biases and blind spots. Self-censorship as a form of political distortion does not allow the content of unconsciousness to be integrated into the ego. One-sidedness of the ego will block the development of self fully. Active imagination is a Jungian method, and it promotes mending the relationship between one's ego and the unconscious. With the help of active imagination, the wall between ego and unconsciousness is lifted. Artistic expressions provide a form for the revealed contents of unconsciousness and facilitates the process of integration.

This research utilizes art-based heuristic methodology along with active imagination to address the following research question: How can “active imagination” help me explain my experience of self-censorship due to political oppression in Iran? How can “active imagination” help me develop my professional identity as an art therapist and to become a culturally competent art therapist? Combined with heuristic method, the art-based approach allowed me to redefine and reimagine the kind of art therapist I inspire to be.

*Keywords:* Active imagination, political oppression, self-censorship, liberation, self-awareness, art-based heuristic methodology,

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The nature versus nurture debate has always fascinated me. Personally, being on the nurture side, led me to study art therapy and help others undo some of their unfortunate nurturing. Art therapy for me was and still is about the agency one has on changing things we don't believe serve any function.

I migrated to Canada to study art therapy. Living my entire life in Iran, this change was a cultural shock for me. The change allowed me to see different points of views about religion, feminism, the relationship between the state and individual, and many other social issues. It also opened my eyes to the impact of my environment on me. Now living and studying in Canada meant freedom of expression. I was able to express things that were banned in Iran. Living in Iran, my political views on state and religion were not tolerated. Living as a secular in Iran, I could not express my opinion about religion and state. Islamic Republic of Iran executes the laws of Sharia as the result of Islamic revolution in 1979. A combination of clerical authority and popular sovereignty formed the outlines of the propaganda in the new regime (Abrahamian, 2018). This blend soon leaned towards authoritarianism of the clergy. The voices other than 'revolutionary voices' were being silenced. The media is still monitored by the regime. Censoring the information was one of the many ways to oppress the voice of opposition (Abrahamian, 2018).

As a secular individual, I was encouraged to silence the voice of discontent inside me. My conscious and unconscious attitude of self-censoring was juxtaposed in Canada. Now that I was able to express the banned issues, there somehow seemed to be a block, a lack of flow that inhibited expression of my reactions to the banned issues. As the result, a hypothesis was formed. What if something inside me is being repressed: repressed content, emotion, mental images that are stopped at the gate of my awareness? This block keeps me from being genuine when expressing myself. I decided to look into my unconsciousness and find the repressed and censored material in order to remove the block. I was searching inwards to study what are some of the things I repress unconsciously, without being aware of them in consciousness. Dreams were promising sources of information to unconsciousness as Freud (1965) said but they are not a reliable source of information. As I became fascinated with Jungian art therapy, I came across 'active imagination' (Jung & Chodorow, 1997), a playful technique to reach the corners of unconsciousness.

Now with active imagination as a tool to explore inward, I needed a theoretical framework that addressed the societal aspects of the question. It was my aim to know how my relationship with society and specifically with figures of authority shaped my psyche. While searching on the question of the research, I found the framework that explained and even answered my question: Critical psychology believes that work of a therapist is political and this ideology was aligned with my beliefs. Critical psychology (Martín-Baró et al., 1996; Watkins & Shulman, 2010) challenged the status quo while addressing the cultural issues of the less developed countries. The oppression of the masses by dictators and colonial mentality were addressed in the ideas of Paolo Freire (Freire, 1970). The idea of liberation sounded very true to me. It was my goal now to know the process of repression happening inside me and to acknowledge the impact of the dictator's oppression in the process. After all, I learned how to censor myself because the dictator would not tolerate my point of view. To free myself from this inner censor was my goal now.

I regard this research paper as an opportunity to know myself better as an art therapist. Jung (1997) suggested that therapists know themselves well and look inwards to discover their ego and unconsciousness well. He recommended using active imagination to do so (Jung & Chodorow, 1997). American Art Therapy (2013) standards of practice requires art therapists to maintain professional competence by ongoing self-evaluation in order to enhance their quality of work and the service they offer. To ensure the quality of service, I also needed to acknowledge that my environment in Montreal is multicultural and diverse in terms of ethnicity and national origins. As an immigrant, I lean towards other immigrants and refugees to offer help. Cultural competence is a recurrent theme in the field of psychotherapy in issues related to immigrants and refugees (Villalba, 2009).

Cultural humility begins with the art therapist's examination of their own cultural lens (Jackson, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to study my own assumptions and world-views in order to seek cultural humility. Creative self-reflection can alleviate possible suffering for those we serve if an art therapist engages in it through continuous practice (Jackson, 2020, p. 137). This research paper will provide a structured practice of self-reflection through active imagination. Reflecting on my experience of oppression can help me advocate for my clients who are suffering from political oppression.



## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The research seeks the essence of lived experience; what was it like for me to experience censorship and then internalized censorship under the authoritarian regime? The answer requires critical thinking in terms of how I look at the individual's relationship with their society.

State oppression refers to the state using its political authority to limit its citizens' freedom (Ratner, 2013). Martín-Baró was one of the first mental health clinicians to question the appropriate role of a therapist in the context of state repression (Alschuler, 2006). He believed that it is one of the therapist's roles to liberate patients from terrors of violence and state dictatorship.

The theoretical framework of this research paper draws on ideas of Paolo Freire and Carl Jung on matters of political consciousness and depth psychology, respectively. Freire's "pedagogy of oppressed" emphasizes freeing oneself of the dilemma of oppression to reach liberation and individuation (Alschuler, 2006; Watkins, 2002).

To avoid repetition and to clarify the vocabulary borrowed from pertinent literature, I will be taking a look at terminology in their sociopolitical context used in this research.

### **Definitions**

#### ***Dehumanization***

Freire's (1970) critique of dehumanization translates to denial of human capacity to be self-defining subjects creating history and culture as opposed to being objects of it. A byproduct of dehumanization is distortion that prevents individuals from realizing their freedom and agency leading them to believe they are lesser beings. Freire (1970) stated that dehumanization is the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed (Freire, 1970, p. 44; Glass, 2001).

#### ***Oppression***

Oppression refers to unjust relationships between people in a society: exploitation, discrimination, repression, and denial of human rights (Alschuster, 2006, p. 2).

#### ***Oppressor***

The ruling class that benefits from the oppression. The oppressor in Freire's theory (1970) sees colonial mentality gain power over the oppressed. In this research's context, terms like

“external dictator”, “authoritarian regime” and “censor” are used to describe the oppressor that imposes the oppression.

### ***Paternalism***

Restriction of the autonomy of the individual imposed by the oppressor with the assumption that the oppressor can make a better decision for the paternalized agent (Begon, 2016; Coons & Webber, 2013). Freire (1970) recognized the paternalistic attitude of the oppressor and believed that it cripples the oppressed from thinking critically about their relationship with the oppressor.

### ***Internalized Oppressor***

Individual interrupted by the ideology of the ruling class, now internalizes the deficits of the ideology of those in power (Freire, 1970). The resentment one feels towards incomplete self and their culture’s knowledge and sensibility leads to estrangement towards one’s community (Darder, 2018). The more the oppressed internalizes the attitudes and ways of the oppressor, the more estranged they become from themselves, from one another, and the world. Thus, the lived histories, wisdom, and knowledge of the oppressed become submerged in the consciousness of the oppressor, where the inauthentic worldview that drives our objectification and subjugation produces a state of ambiguity and disempowerment (Darder, 2018, p. 97).

The main dilemma of the oppressed is the duality of existence. The contradictory existence happens when the oppressed tries to embody the values and beliefs of the oppressor. The oppressor lives inside the mind of the oppressed and benefits from this conflict. This inner dictator lives in the shadow part of the psyche, inhibiting “the authentic self” from emerging (Alschuler, 2006).

### ***Individuation***

Individuation aims for recognition of a relationship with the Self, a center of organization and imagery apart from the ego's control (Jung, 1973). The method of individuation is an acute attention to "the exploration and experience of the archetypal symbols and figures in dreams, visions, active imagination, and everyday life" (Hocpke, 1989, p. 63).

### ***Transcendence***

According to Jung (1972), the transcendent function “arises from the union of the conscious and unconscious attitudes. It is called "transcendent" because it makes organically possible the transition from one attitude to the other, without loss of either one” (p. 588).

### **Censorship and Self-Censoring**

As stated in the Declaration of Human Rights from the United Nations, “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.” (Declaration of human rights, Article 19, 1948).

The freedom of expression and opinion is a basic human right; however, among nations, 42% of the population of the world is living under some forms of oppression including state oppression (Young, 2019). Authoritarian regimes assert control and power through limiting what should and should not be expressed. This paternalistic attitude of the state towards its citizens creates a block from the expression of opinions (Robinson & Tannenber, 2019). Ruling states in countries like China use massive surveillance to monitor and root out dissent (Robinson & Tannenber, 2019). Bar-Tal (2017) defines self-censorship as “the act of intentionally and voluntarily suppressing information from others when formal impediments are absent” (p. 37). It inhibits “free access to information, freedom of expression, and information flow” (Bar-Tal, 2017, p. 38). The role of self-censorship in societies is of vital importance as it blocks information that may illuminate various societal issues (Bar-Tal, 2017, p. 38).

Censorship by the state is considered a form of oppression. By following the dynamic between the oppressor or the authoritarian states and the oppressed, we can understand how ego internalizes censorship. Through intimidation, most authoritarian regimes implicate a certain amount of self-censorship among their citizens (Howard, 2010). Some governments claim that they keep track of people’s internet activity only to fight crimes such as the production and spread of child pornography or illegal gambling (Howard, 2010).

Cooke and Heilmann (2013) expand on the definition of self-censorship, classifying it into private self-censorship and public self-censorship. They suggested that public self-censorship refers to a range of individual reaction to public censorship regime (Cooke & Heilmann, 2013). The second type, private self-censorship, defines suppression by an agent of his or her attitude where public censor is absent or irrelevant (Cooke & Heilmann, 2013).

Private self-censorship is categorized into: (1) self-censorship by proxy, and (2) self-censorship by self-constraint (Cooke & Heilmann, 2013). Private self-censorship by proxy happens when an individual internalizes an external set of values (Cooke & Heilmann, 2013). Private self-censorship by self-constraint is the consequence of an individual's suppression of attitudes in the absence of an explicitly external or public influence, such as when an individual adopts a personal set of values that constrain the expression of their attitudes (Cooke & Heilmann, 2013).

Censorship by the state is considered a form of oppression. Through the process of self-censorship, values of the oppressor are internalized and become the values and myths of the oppressed (Freire, 1970; Howard, 2010).

### ***Dynamics of Self-Censoring***

To understand how we censor the forbidden content, we must first understand how psyche stores information. Jung (1972) stated that the psyche is comprised of consciousness and unconsciousness. The unconscious is said to be composed of all that has been forgotten, repressed, and perceived by the senses but not recognized by the conscious mind, all the future contents of the conscious that are germinating in the unconscious, and the contents of the psychoid system (Jung, 1972). The state of these contents when they are not related to the conscious ego is surmised to be much the same as when they are related (Jung, 1972, p. 588).

Interestingly, Freud's notion of censorship at his time is more compatible with political context in this research. He first introduces censorship by comparing it to political oppression in late nineteenth-century Russia (Boag, 2006). Freud likens the censor to a "watchman," barring access from one room containing "the unconscious" wishes to another, "the preconscious," where consciousness resides (Boag, 2006, p. 8). 'Scanning function' is another Freudian terminology for the concept of censor, and a significant part of its function is to scan the material of the experiential realm before it reaches consciousness (Boag, 2006, p. 8). The censored content stays inside the unconsciousness as long as it is incompatible with the consciousness. A split is then formed in the psyche. In discussing the aim of therapy, it is stated that the reconciliation of the conscious and the unconscious is not an attempt at a permanent cure but rather at a psychological readjustment (Jung, 1972, p. 558).

### *Society and Self-Censorship in Iran*

The reconciliation between consciousness and unconsciousness can become harder and harder as we learn to adjust to modern way of life (Alschuler, 2006). Our relationship with the society plays an important role in the dissociation of consciousness and unconsciousness (Jung, 1972). Each society carries its attitude of consciousness but some attitudes serve only the oppressor. The censorship happens in both democratic and undemocratic states; authoritarian governments use censorship as a strategic production of discourses that exert discipline and order over networks of communication and the construction of knowledge favorable to state power's stability (Jelen, 2017). While the restriction of content might be contrary to democracy, Islamic scholars believe that censorship can benefit the authenticity of a collective society and that unlimited liberty of expression can limit and debase as easily as it can enlighten and inform (Jelen, 2017; Watkins & Shulman, 2008). The Islamic Republic of Iran, like other ideologically charged states, maintains the sole ownership of media and manipulates the history of the past and even the news (Abrahamian, 2019; Brum, 2018). Censorship is a widely used method of oppression by Islamic state in Iran to silence the alternative voices (Arsan, 2016).

In the context of this research, censorship in Iran is framed and presented by religious propaganda and it is sustained by a vast network of distracting, obfuscating tactics like official lies, stupefying entertainment, banal art, superficial news, irrational philosophies, and organized religion (Ratner, 2015).

The constant regulation of information restricts expression and stimulates the internalization of censorship (Rahimi, 2015). Institutions implementing the censorship aim at brainwashing the individuals, believing that the oppressor's values and beliefs are superior to the object of the censor. The censor decides on which content is suitable for the censored based on censor's values. These values are the criteria which he justifies and controls the flow of expression (Teng, 2019).

The paradoxical power of religion in Iran holds significance in shaping these obituary values and guidelines. Religions like Islam and Catholicism are 'communal' practices and have the power of bringing people together and help liberate them through these communal rituals and customs. On the other hand, they abide by a more "authoritative text," meaning it leaves little to no individualism when it comes to individual moral freedom (Rahman, 1966). Religion can serve

as a double-edged sword. It can be used for as a weapon for the oppressor to slay the oppressed. It can also be an empowering force navigating the individuals to join forces and liberate their false self.

Comte de Gobineau (who served as a French diplomat in Persia between 1858 and 1863) wrote about what is called “Ketman” (Baehr, 2010), a Shiite stratagem resembling self-censorship defined as follows:

Ketman is the art of dissimulation, a tactic employed by Islamic dissidents to disguise their true feelings when faced by the powerful, be they the infidel or the Sunni mullah. By exercising the wiles of Ketman, the embattled agent manages to survive in a dangerous environment. His fervent devotion to official doctrine in the presence of others is a sham, but he takes pride in his own cunning. (p. 58)

While the negative impacts of self-censoring behavior were discussed above, Miłosz (1953) argues that this mechanism which is based on duplicity benefit the individual in saving small corners of their identities. The inhibition which self-censorship creates helps the person define themselves according to it. Ketman helps them practice two roles: The role that they play in public and the other is their true identity which they hold on to (Baehr, 2010).

### **Road to Liberation**

In the psyche's path to liberation, "Humanization," a term Freire (1970) uses, is becoming a person by overcoming inner divisions and then integrating and recognizing these inner divisions or complexes by ego. These complexes are characterized by distortions such as arbitrary values oppressor and oppressed believe in, which sustains the oppression and prevents liberation (Alschuler, 2006). Jung (1973) stated that healing the split in the human psyche comes from the withdrawal of shadow projections. Understanding of dark or repressed part of the psyche can provide clues to the distortion created by the oppressor. Repressed parts of the personality that have been repressed for the sake of the ego ideal (Hennelly, 1988; Whitmont, 1969).

Jung’s theory of opposites accounts for psychic energy (Jung, 1973). Within the psyche, because of the gradient between the opposites, there is a flow of psychic energy. Shadow versus ego an example of the opposites creating psychic energy. According to Jung (1973), being one-sided is a result of the ego’s constant repression. The energy belonging to the pair of opposites regresses into the unconsciousness. That energy then activates figures and complexes in the

unconscious that manifest as symptoms of the unresolved conflict. The symptoms are said to be neurotic when they disturb the person's functioning in everyday life (Jung, 1973). The self-regulatory function of the psyche produces symptoms, reduces one-sidedness, and restores a balance between opposites (Jung, 1973; Alschuler, 2006). The logical rationality of the ego has pushed emotion, intuition, and images into the shadows of the margin (Watkins, 2002). Analytic technique calls these marginalized ways of knowing into the consulting room, radically redistributing power from the oneness of the ego to the voices of many (Watkins, 2002). Watkins (2011) suggested mending this dissociation caused by repression and reintegrating the split requires knowing what is excluded or held at bay, to what intrudes unbidden, to the multiple voices and fragmented images that arise autonomously in psychic life (p. 68).

### **Active Imagination**

To reach liberation, self needs to help the censored contents to integrate with the ego. In the context of self-censorship, first, self is liberated when the wall between ego and unconsciousness is lifted (Watkins, 2000). When this happens, the content of the two sides meet, and the guards (censorship of ego) will not interact and will observe. The second refers to a bridge built between ego and unconsciousness (Schaverien, 2005).

Active imagination is a method developed by Jung (1973). It promotes mending the relationship between one's ego and the unconscious. This self-healing method is an alternative to the therapist's analytical encounter with the client. In the analytic encounter, the therapist mediates between the conscious attitude of the client and the client's content of unconsciousness expressed through a dream (Jung & Chodorow, 1997). The Jungian therapist seeks to interpret the compensatory content of a dream, to which the client may or may not assent (Alschuler, 2006). As an alternative, active imagination allows the client to have a dialogue with a figure of the unconscious found in a dream, without the mediation of a therapist (Alschuler, 2006; Jung & Chodorow, 1997; Watkins, 2002).

When the unconsciousness takes the lead, the ego takes the role of attentive inner witness. This role might require recording and scribing what is happening in the realm of unconsciousness (Jung & Chodorow, 1997). Jordan (2015) explains the process as the ego steps aside. Egos don't deal kindly with uninvited guests that slip past the sentry at the gate before their presence is even known. The censor stands at the gate. It is the ego's duty to decide which

guests are welcomed and which ones are not. The censor mimics the censors outside even when they are extinguished. By allowing the ego to stand in the corner and not be in charge, we will enable the unconsciousness to take control (Jordan, 2015).

To be active in the realm of unconsciousness, self needs to be able to detach oneself from the ego's control. To create this attitude, Jung (1997) discussed a need for a systemic exercise to illuminate critical attention and create a vacuum in unconsciousness.

Transcendence is the essential attitude for the opposites to be held in this process (Jung, 1973). There are several sources for this unconscious material, the most useful for the constructive method of therapy being spontaneous fantasies. The patient must give himself over to his mood and give form to his fantasies and other associations (Alschuler, 2006; Jung, 1973; Jung & Chodorow, 1997).

### ***Stages of Active Imagination***

Active imagination has two stages: first, letting the unconscious come up. This means allowing anything to arrive (anything is good enough) and second, coming to terms with the unconsciousness; Whatever moves, follow it; whatever moves, speaks, and shows itself is alive, and that's where the awareness must be brought to (Jung & Chodorow, 1997; Asheville Jung Center / Chiron Publications, 2010). In the second part of active imagination, consciousness takes the lead as the affects and images of unconsciousness flow into awareness (Jung & Chodorow, 1997). This part may begin with a spontaneous insight. This insight needs to be converted into an ethical obligation-to live it in real life (Jung & Chodorow, 1997)

### ***Art Therapy and Active Imagination***

Jung (1973) wrote about art as active imagination. He stated that a visible form of art enables the vague unconsciousness to become more apparent. He said that the hand knows how to solve a riddle with which the intellect has wrestled in vain (Jung 1973). Shaping the unknown, one actively dreams the dream and eventually integrates the incomprehensible into the sphere of the personality (Schaverien, 2005).

Watkins (2006) explained that Jung created the method to liberate himself from stagnation. An important aspect of Jung's fascination with this method lied in its spontaneity; there's a flow in the images appearing as if they have the lives of their own (Watkins, 2006). The transformation, Watkins (2006) argues, happens when the therapist learns how to create a safe



space for the flow, observe, and take an interest in the images appearing. On the other side, in the client's mind, the ego learns to decenter itself and let the unconsciousness take charge. The process of active imagination gradually moves the center of one's awareness from habitual identification with the ego, which is often one-sided, to a more central position where one is less severed from the various outposts of the personality (Watkins, 2006).

The conversation one has with their unconsciousness during active imagination allows the unconsciousness to rekindle its relationship with consciousness (Swann-Foster, 2017). Jungian art therapy achieves this goal in two ways. First, through the creative process and by having a conversation with the image: A dialogue is carried out with the forming and shaping of an image, even making alterations, like a living thing. Second, by dialoguing with the image once it has been created using art materials, as long as there is a dialectical interaction between the consciousness and unconsciousness (Jung & Chodorow, 1997; Asheville Jung Center / Chiron Publications, 2010; Swann-Foster, 2017). Active imagination is considered “catching hold” of the image and recording how the object of contemplation is altered by the process of giving it attention; feeling the sense of animation and psychic energy that are generated by the work (McNiff, 1998).

The art therapist might prompt the activation by asking questions such as "Can you listen for what it might have to say to you?" and "What do you have to say back?" (Swan-Foster, 2017, p. 195). These conversations allow the client to have initial interaction with their unconscious, embodied in art, and practice dialoguing internally with something other than their ego (Swann-Foster, 2017).

An art therapist's curious and attentive attitude is essential, as the attitude of a ‘good enough mother,’ as Winnicott (1973) mentioned. This relationship allows the client to project the unconsciousness material onto the therapist and use them as a vessel. The analyst might regard the whole of the patient's unconscious drama, enacted through the transference, as a form of active imagination even though the patient may not see it that way (Miller, 2004; Schaverien, 2005).

Bridging the gap between being an art therapy student and an art therapist is the essential outcome of this research and active imagination enabled me to do so. Although the safe space art therapist provides for the active imagination to occur, an art therapist's presence is unnecessary. Jung's idea behind the inward dialogues aimed mostly self-reflection when he most needed it (Jung

& Chodorow, 1997). He suggests applying this method for mental health professionals to realize their potential prejudice they bring to work (Jung & Chodorow, 1997; Swann-Foster, 2017).

To conclude, as political oppression grows with the rising population living under dictatorship, mental health professionals need to familiarize themselves with the political climate around them and their clients—the psychology of the oppressed addresses the issues of the psyche influenced by political oppression. Self-censorship used by authoritarian regimes to control the flow of information and maintain the status quo of oppression benefits the oppressor and stops the oppressed from achieving individuation and authenticity. Active imagination can be used as a tool for art therapists to explore the unconsciousness's margins and what is oppressed. Finally, self-reflection is essential for therapists to gain cultural humility. This Jungian method can help the therapist reflect on their biases and what is oppressed in their unconsciousness.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

#### **Heuristic Art-based Methodology**

The two principal questions that I seek to answer in this research are: How can “active imagination” help me explain my experience of self-censorship due to political oppression in Iran? How can “active imagination” help me develop my professional identity as an art therapist and to become a culturally competent art therapist?

To answer the question of the research I used Art-based and heuristic methodology. Combining the two paradigms created a partnership between thinking and feeling aspect of self. The two together allowed me to delve deep into my own depth and discover the censored and repressed content of my unconsciousness as well as discovering its relationship to my historic culture (McNiff, 2016). Art-based research (ABR) is a way to create knowledge using artistic means. The artistic forms such as images and poetry can help the author indicate what cannot be expressed simply with words. Direct engagement in art becomes the "site" for investigating research problems through direct perceptual evidence (Kapitan, 2018, p. 212). Constant reflection and action in art allowed me to remain open to uncertainty by imagining the 'what-ifs.' This state of uncertainty leads “intuitive responsiveness” and other ways of knowing to come to awareness. The improvisational aspect of the art-based research may clarify how the flow of information is expressed and embodied in art forms. This flow is particularly needed in this research since I am seeking to explore the nature of self-censorship and oppression endured in

my life. Repression and blocking the flow of undesired information is the nature of the two phenomena (Bar-Tal, 2017). Using the flow in art-based research enables me to bring information into awareness without interrupting the flow and therefore accepting the censored material hindered by cognitive ways of knowing into my awareness of ego.

To complement the art-based-research, heuristic method utilizes other ways of inquiry to self, necessary for describing an experience first-hand. It allows searching and studying, of being open to significant dimensions of experience, and pursuing knowledge through self-inquiry, full immersion into the phenomenon, and spontaneous observation of a self-dialogue from a first-person point of view (Moustakas, 1990). I will follow Mustakas (1990) 6 phases of heuristic inquiry. These phases include initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis.

### **Six Phases**

*Initial engagement* is dedicated to discovering a passionate concern relevant to the field of art therapy (Moustakas, 1990). The question of this research was formed by the social context of my political environment and its influences affecting my professional life as an art therapist. My experience with my clients pointed out a gap in knowledge, leaving me with a need to look for the answer. During the initial engagement phase, I gathered basic knowledge to formulate the research question using the Concordia University Library database. Primary and secondary searches lead to concise keywords and themes true to my experience. The literature review explored these central themes of the research and the relevant published studies. Terminology derived from the literature review helped me describe the research themes with more clarity and offered an external frame of reference.

The next stage, *immersion*, is explained by Moustakas (1990) as a stage that allows the researcher to live the question and grow in knowledge and understanding (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28).

I designed a series of instructions and rituals to immerse myself in the experience in question. A uniform structure which is repeated throughout these 30 days helped me stay grounded emotionally. The ritual included a few minutes of mindful meditation each session, which opened the gate to a space where it was safe to explore the realm of unconsciousness (Epstien, 2007). I practiced mindfulness meditation because the method was already familiar to

me and I felt confident that it would help me serve as transcendent function as Jung explained (Jung & Chodorow, 1997). The structure of the ritual included creating transcendence via five minutes of mediation, followed by setting the intention of the self-inquiry. Setting the intention simply was to ask myself: how did self-censorship created by political oppression affect my self-awareness? With the help of active imagination, I allowed the content of my unconsciousness to actively play the main role in the art-making process. In the process, dialogues with the images I created were either recorded or written down. The next step in this phase was to simply put the artwork down and allow the ego to participate in the conversation. Going back to the question of the research, I investigated what was felt and put it down in form of a response art or journaling. I performed these rituals for 30 days, during December of 2020. Accumulation of visual images, words, voice recordings, gathered poems, and journals took place in this period. As Moustakas (1990) states, anything could become the researcher's raw material during the immersion phase. Conversations about the question of the research with friends and family fueled some of the art-making in the process.

*Incubation* offers the researcher an opportunity to retreat from an intense focus on the question and detach themselves from involvement with it (Moustakas, 1990). Withdrawing from the ritual enabled the tacit dimension to occur internally and outside my realm of awareness and allows the emergence of an “intuitive” understanding (Moustakas, 1990).

The fourth stage of the research, *illumination*, opened up opportunities for me to cluster qualities into themes inherent in the question (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29). The back and forth conversation between my unconsciousness and the society led to discovering of a new frame of reference. The discovery of critical psychology helped me re-establish my relationship with the problem and to paint a clear image according to sociological aspect of the question.

*Explication* involves focusing and indwelling. To discover additional aspects of the question and establish a detailed yet holistic view of the subject, I used active imagination as an artistic inquiry. Corrections and nuanced details are added in this stage (Moustakas, 1990). When it came to reviewing the data, I took notes and identified the qualities and themes emerged from previous phases and even artworks created before the timeline of this research. The data were documented in chronological order. Memos highlighted ideas to form an order. Diagrams helped me have a more cohesive grasp of the distilled themes (Hesse-Biber, 2017)

Towards the end of the research, when I reached a better understanding of the major qualities and themes of the work, I created a painting to demonstrate and to crystallize the essence of the experience, again using active imagination.

### **Ethical Considerations**

To practice art therapy ethically, an art therapist should continue to gather knowledge about cultural diversity with regards to self and others. An art therapist needs to seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to individual's social locators (CATA, 2013). The question of the research concerns my historical and personal past. This includes my social locators such as religion, political stance, gender identity and national origin. I currently live inside the geographical borders of what as of 2021 is known as Canada. To establish my identity as an art therapist and an immigrant in Canada, I needed to go back and reflect on who I was in Iran and who I was in Canada as an art therapy student and finally whom I wish to become as a professional art therapist. It is important to keep in mind that the experience I seek to describe in this research is my personal experience therefore any generalization of the research finding should be avoided.

Another ethical consideration suggested by Patton (as cited by Kapitan, 2018) is safeguarding the author's mental health while she explores the research question. As the role of researcher/ participant, there were times when I needed to withhold from full self-disclosure. I continued to trust my intuition about the degree of information I feel safe to disclose. Moustakas (1990) guidelines for a heuristic research provided structured directions to develop a multi-dimensional description of my experience with self-censorship and political oppression. Artistic inquiry equipped my understanding with the force of my imagination, offering me solutions to regulate my emotions and to maintain a hopeful and observational state.

It is worthy to say that active imagination utilized in this research should be practiced with caution. Although it is an essential tool for young therapists to understand each other better, it should be safeguarded and should not be practiced alone (Jung & Chodorow, 1997). However, I need to point out that my training as an art therapy student provided the possibility of conducting the deep investigation to my unconsciousness. The clinical skills required to conduct active imagination prevent one from getting lost in the realm of unconsciousness (Jung & Chodorow, 1997).

## Validity and Reliability

I have drawn on Liberation Psychology to help me address the issue of validity in this research. Watkins and Shulman (2010) argued that the definition of validity in "correspondence with 'reality,' assessed by specific techniques" needs to be changed in the "context of a practice of research in which multiple, contradictory realities are recognized" (p. 295). *Contextual validity* concerns the fruitfulness of how the research effort and its questions are framed (Watkins & Shulman, 2010). The supervisors and academic experts in the Faculty of Creative Art Therapies at Concordia University reviewed and provided feedback for the proposal. This feedback provided insight on how the questions are framed, so that they are relevant and answering them provides an opportunity for the researcher's growth. *Interpretive validity* increases as people in a research community experience the freedom to discuss possible meanings of narratives and to propose alternate interpretations to one another (Watkins & Shulman, 2010). This type of validity is relevant to the topic of this research. This research explores my experience as an Iranian currently living in Canada, while my family resides in Iran. Talking about certain issues banned by the ruling regime in Iran could have drastic consequences for my family. The conscious withdrawal from talking about banned material impacts the interpretive validity of the research.

According to Watkins and Shulman (2010), another measure for validity is to articulate where they are standing to see what they perceive in the analysis of the transcript. Following heuristic methodology guidelines, I seek the essence of my experience as an Iranian secular woman who lived under an authoritarian regime ruled by Islamic laws. My upbringing and culture gave me insight into censorship and self-censorship, and biased opinions on issues like religion. As an art therapy student living in Montreal, my position enabled me to reflect on the topics mentioned from a different perspective. I acknowledge that my first language is Farsi, and English is my secondary language.

Finally, Watkins and Shulman (2010) specified that validation involves an explicit process of dialogue and "can only be achieved if there are appropriate communicative structures in place throughout the research and action" (p. 296). The Jungian method of active imagination allowed me to achieve this goal by having dialectical inward conversations with unconsciousness. Art-based inquiry accommodated active imagination to document these

internal dialogues. The symbolic, symbolic nature of Art created an outlet for this Jungian method (Kapitan, 2018).

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Phase One: Initial Engagement**

During the second year of my practicum, the practical and theoretical learning focused more on refugees and immigrants, a demographic I belong to. I only arrived in Canada at the start of the program. Like many other immigrants, I faced many problems in the process of assimilation. This fact informed the decision to work with the immigrant and refugee population. During my internship, issues like cultural and geopolitical differences were recurrent in art therapy with women at the Shield of Athena's shelter. Muslim women migrating to Canada and being oppressed by their domestic partners left them no choice but to leave their house to seek a safe shelter. What appeared as an insight in group supervision reflected my biases and hindsight. For example, I assumed that my Muslim client was being oppressed by her parents because they asked her to wear hijab. This preconceived notion was formed when, as a secular woman in Iran, I was forced to wear a veil despite my wish. Overidentifying with my clients and assuming their experience was brought to my attention by my supervisors.

When I reflected on it, I concluded that to be a culturally competent art therapist, one needs to bring their biases into awareness and act on them, and you need certain tools in order to achieve that. When I was reading an article on liminality and transformation of professional identity, I ran into active imagination (Jung & Chodorow, 1997): to reach a level of understanding which not only lies inside the intellectual realm of knowledge but also could provide access to material which has been pushed into unconsciousness.

The process of self-censorship, that is the suppression of ideas from my consciousness, is in many ways a mirror of the oppression of the Islamic regime in Iran. I realized plenty of information inaccessible to my consciousness was impacted by how I was raised and treated in that society. Censorship is often practiced in totalitarian government (Wozniuk & Peleg, 2019). Besides, the process of self-censoring was pretty much alive inside me even though I migrated to Canada, a 'freer' society in terms of handling the information accessible to the public. Heuristic research methodology helped me stay grounded and focused on the research question, as active imagination provides more spontaneity and flow as a balance.

## **Phase two: Immersion**

In the process of the research, I came upon the storytelling nature of human beings (Guttschal, 2012). This storytelling feature was so alive inside me, and I used it to create a harmonious narrative within the chaos in the realm of fantasy. The continuity of the storytelling allowed me to stay focused on the subject matter longer and maintain a linear focus. However, for the story to be told, one needs characters. My characters are borrowed from the real world, derived from my conversations with friends and family. After searching for “self-censorship” and “Iran” in the library database, I encountered the first character. Salman Rushdie is a British, first-generation immigrant who writes fictional stories. After writing the book *The Satanic Verses*, Ayatollah Khomeini (leader of Islamic Republic of Iran from 1978 to 1989) ordered a fatwa, a legal opinion or decree handed down by an Islamic religious leader (Merriam-Webster, 2021) decreeing his murder. He fictionalizes *The Satanic Verses* incident, happened during prophet Muhammad’s time. There were some assassination attempts to take Rushdie’s life, all of which failed. Of course, the battle of Salman Rushdie and Ayatollah Khomeini overshadowed the banned book itself.

The author's conflict for survival and the price he had to pay for expression evoked something in me. Therefore, I followed this obscure sensation and curiosity. The story was familiar to me as an individual who has experienced censorship and fear. At primary school, the propaganda videos were being played at school as part of our Islamic education. One of the videos was about Salman Rushdie's assassins, and the teacher explained the reason behind the fatwa. I remembered the way Rushdie was talked about: “He switched from one religion to another, what an infidel. He married and got divorced four times; he is promiscuous.” I did not like the man. My shadow absorbed Rushdie’s features. Later, when I came home and talked to my parents about that day's events, I was surprised: as an avid reader, my mother who had read the book thought it was well written and engaging, but she also warned me not to share this with others at school – 'Maybe it is better if you don't talk about it at school.' At the time, I did not ask her how she got a hold of the book since it was banned in Iran. Later, I found a xeroxed copy of *The Satanic Verses* that she had purchased. The consequences of the government finding out about it could be grave.

Mikhail Bulgakov is a Russian novelist who decided to include his reaction to censorship in his fictions. He wrote the novel *Master and Margarita* while living under Stalin's rule in the



Soviet Union. The book was published 26 years after Bulgakov's death. When it comes to putting the fictional characters of the book in their historical context, many scholars mention the role of oppression in the Stalinism era. The character, Woland, is the devil who comes to Moscow with his gang. The more Bulgakov describes Woland and his impact on the characters' lives, the more the character's resemblance to Stalin becomes clearer. This creative reaction to censorship ignited a sense of hope. Bulgakov used imagination and surreal storytelling techniques to express his take on the oppressive environment he lived in.

While I was still hesitant and doubtful about starting the process of art making, I sensed a sense of lethargy. By practicing mindful meditation, I observed this fear and decided to use it as the fuel for art making. The visualization of the external oppressor – Ayatollah Khomeini and Joseph Stalin, respectively – helped me detach myself from the inherent fear and attain a curious attitude towards the process of awareness.

To demonstrate the process better, I will go through Day 1 of this ritual. After mediation, I set my intentions simply by asking: What does self-censoring look like for me? I prepared art material and a large piece of paper (20" x 30"). I allowed my senses to take the lead. For example, figure 5 allowed me to touch the acrylic paint with my fingers. I played with the paint for 10 minutes before putting it down on the paper. I noticed my ego trying to take charge. I asked my ego to stay inactive and watch. Suddenly, there was no need to be productive, but rather an energy to be playful. When the sensations were not pleasant anymore, I used the paper instead to wipe my fingers. The result was a surprise. Two layers of paint generated images that were utterly surprising to me. I felt connected to the shapes and the colors. Their creation was so spontaneous that it did not leave any chance for censoring. The images were raw, and they came right out of my soul. With oil pastels, I added details. I believe that my ego participated only at the end process where I needed to assimilate the confronted material into ego. A bird with two heads (Figure 1). A spontaneous insight was formed. Their two heads were looking at each other and not looking away. Chaos or a split? Was it two things merging to two units parting but not so eager to do so? My journey with the image was not complete. It needed further exploration.

The next day, I set my intention on knowing more about the two birds (Figure 1). I mimicked the pointillist technique, painting with dots. The feeling of holding the pen and stabbing the paper felt satisfying so I followed it. With a marker in my hand, I allowed the

muscles to lead the way and shape the image. Again, like the day before, I sensed spontaneity originated in my openness to new experiences.

### Figure 1

*The Giant Bird*



Poetry holds a special place in Iranian cultural. In my family traditions, poets have always had a place in conversations when it came to resistance and speaking your truth. Among these figures, Ahmad Shamlou was prominent in my personal life. I grew up hearing Shamlou's haunting voice reciting his poems on cassettes since I was a child. My parents were very fond of him, and after all, we shared a last name. I decided to investigate this closeness I felt to him. Dwelling inside this feeling of closeness, I remembered a poem of Shamlou which my mother used to recite particularly in harder times.

دهانت را می بویند مبادا گفته باشی دوستت دارم  
دلت را می بویند مبادا شعله ای در آن نهان باشد  
روزگار غریبی است نازنین  
و عشق را کنار تیرک راهوند تازیانه می زنند

عشق را در پستوی خانه نهان باید کرد  
شوق را در پستوی خانه نهان باید کرد  
روزگار غریبی است نازنین  
و در این بن بست کج و پیچ سرما  
آتش را به سوخت بار سرود و شعر فروزان می دارند  
به اندیشیدن خطر مکن  
روزگار غریبی است نازنین  
آنکه بر در می کوید شباهنگام  
به گشتن چراغ آمده است  
نور را در پستوی خانه نهان باید کرد  
دهانت را می بویند مبادا گفته باشی دوستت دارم  
دلت را می بویند مبادا شعله ای در آن نهان باش  
روزگار غریبی است نازنین

The verse: "These are strange times, my darling," is being repeated as the poet asks to withhold from revealing, similar to Ketman, a long-serving reaction to cope with oppressive rulers (Baehr, 2010). Revealing love, any sparkle or joy, any light inside that is still burning could be harmful. He also asks us to see that this is not normal, and it is indeed bizarre and sad. The poet named this poem "In this Dead-end."<sup>1</sup> It was written in 1979, a year after the Islamic revolution, reflecting the repression of society. This poem bears significance for me, and it symbolizes the only form of rebellion I knew at the time. The darkness and melancholic air in his poem reflect the stagnation described in an oppressed society (Freire, 1970).

When it comes to adapting to the situation, Shamlou does not allow us to feel numb and carry on, not after depicting a gruesome image with his poetry citing his opinion about the status quo. The essence of this poem condemns passive individuals. Feeling guilty and having something to hide could mean tiptoeing and not being authentic within society. Feelings of fear, anxiety and staying alert come and go. One might not be able to regulate emotions, and the

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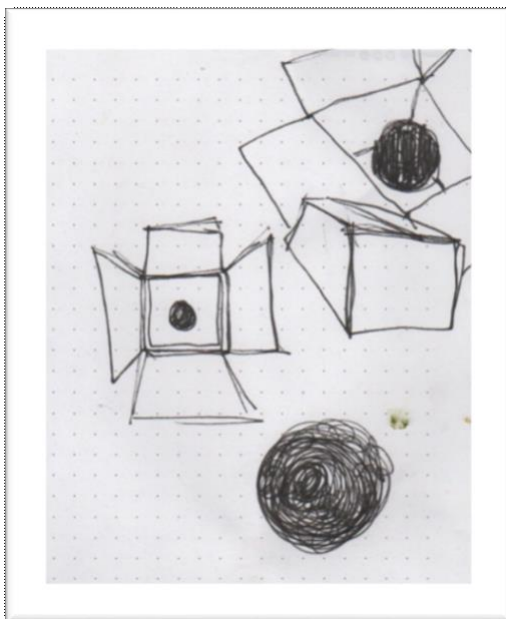
<sup>1</sup> The original Farsi publication of this poem can be found in *ترانه‌های کوچک غربت* (1980) and an English translation can be found in <http://shamlu.com/trama.htm>

accumulation of feelings could be burdensome. The person becomes isolated. Finding a like-minded companion is another challenge. Often the main source of repression, usually the state, offers a reward for those who bring disobeying of the law into their attention. All in all, the price someone pays for stating their opinion is great. The fear and anxiety I felt after this revelation validated my sense of fragility. A stable ground offered by artistic expression gave me assurance that I left some of the burden behind. I was now in Canada and I was exempt from being punished for expressing myself. The Western art materials I was using reminded myself that I was far from home.

Figure 2, created as the result of this mood, again reminded me of the days I mindlessly doodled in the margins of my science books at school. Doodles are not connected, per se. It did not tell a story but rather fragments of a voice. Silenced voices of people before me are alive inside me. It is the voice of a hero, someone with the courage to speak up even though the price is too high. But I was silent, because a censor was inside me encouraging me to stay silent. Not speaking up had two origins. The state (external censor) later solidified the censor within, sealing the lock. It resembled a statue in a puddle of cement. Figure 2 follows this mental image. The cement's hardened state and the statue captured in the hardened cement. It is just one big block of cement now. One object hides the other one. I cut the block in half to investigate the statue.

**Figure 2**

*Heavy Object.*



### Figure 3

*One object holding the other one.*

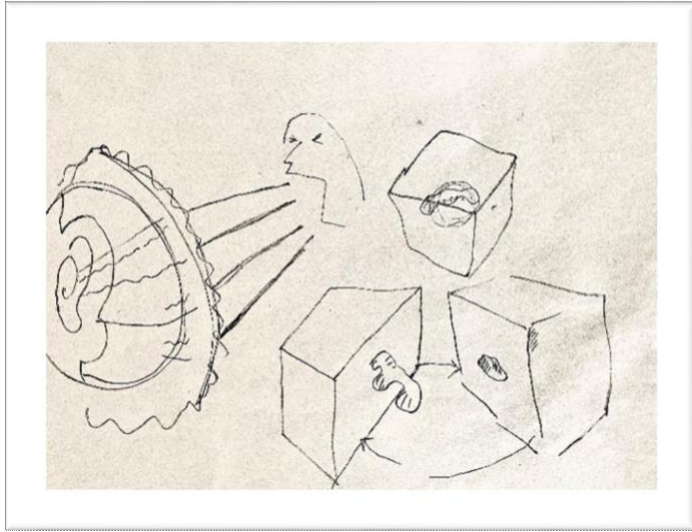


Figure 3 represents the element of fear, which is the motive for the censor to be activated, existing inside both objects. What happens if the coming information upsets the system? The equilibrium is the goal. The first object still exists. It weighs something, and the material is different. It is not cement.

As I read it frequently every day, *Poems* written by Hafiz<sup>2</sup> rang true to the nature of self-censorship. He often writes about staying true to oneself. He uses words like Sufi to describe someone who pursues the ways of sharia and Islam, but he drinks wine in private. Sufi is an example of an individual who uses Ketman as a defense mechanism to cope with his duality. Hafiz denounces such behavior and drinks wine in public to show he has no respect for sharia laws, and be a hypocrite deceiving people and appear as a good Muslim. I take wine in Hafiz's poetry as symbolism for something that is forbidden and should be censored. Here, I used the already existing symbol in the ego to explore its meaning in the realm of unconsciousness. Figure 4 is the process of active imagination cued by this symbolism.

غلام همت دردی کشان یک رنگم

نه آن گروه که ازرق لباس و دل سیهند

<sup>2</sup> Hāfez, also spelled Ḥāfiz, in full Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāfiz, (born 1325/26, Shīrāz, Iran—died 1389/90, Shīrāz), one of the finest lyric poets of Persia. Selected poem in the text is retrieved from Collection of Hafez's poems known as *Divan-e-Hafez*.

### **Phase Three: Incubation**

After a month of data inquiry, I retreated from the process of art making. In heuristic research, this allows a detachment from involvement in the research question (Moustakas, 1990). A distance from the ritual permitted me to come back to the questions of inquiry after the rest interval with fresh energy and a new angle. As Moustakas (1990) suggests, no conscious efforts were made to explore the essence of self-censorship.

### **Phase Four: Illumination**

The framework that psychology of liberation introduces brought a new perspective to my questions and gave me a radical direction for future political activism in the field of art therapy. It talked about social issues in the art therapy room and about the psychodynamics of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed, in the context of political oppression. Freire's (1970) theory in particular explained inner life of the oppressed when the oppressor is not present. He talked about how to address the false self and the true self; one follows the myths of the oppressor and the other one encourages an authentic conversation with the self and the community as an individual life with. Freire (1970) shined a light on not only my question of research but other obscure areas which were impacted by political oppression.

The next step for illumination of the research was to recognize my oppressor and its myths. The myths, however, were mostly aligned with the colonizer mentality. I realized that in order to hold on to my authentic self, I stood with the Western colonizer. My resistance to being oppressed was held in two parts: Shiite myths of the oppressor versus colonizer myths of the oppressor. In 1978, Islamic revolution of Iran united Iranians against imperialism especially the ideology promoted by the United States of America. Realizing that my inner oppressor owned colonized mentality was an 'aha' moment. In order to find a meaning out of the previous artwork, I collected all of the images I created so far and simply observed them. Objectively, I commented on the forms and their similarities. I wrote down my emotional reaction to them. I also put down the relationship the forms have with each other. In the next phase, I explored the

relationships and the new dynamics which were now contextualized by my take on critical psychology.

**Phase Five: Explication**

In this phase, I placed all the data in front of me. Each image (Figure 1 through Figure 11) had a title and a dialogue dedicated to it. I organized the data chronologically. The notes, memos, image and files came together. In front of me I had what I learned and already knew about "self-censorship." To further describe my experience of political oppression and self-censorship I needed to draw a connection between the components of research. Classifying the symbolic imagery and words based on their similarities identified the themes of the research. The themes and their connection to each other were based on my tacit knowledge about my experience. Components belonging to each theme had certain qualities which I could not explain at this point. Three distilled themes were: (1) Solid, (2) Liquid, and (3) Gas (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Three states of matter*

| <b>Gas</b>  | <b>Liquid</b>     | <b>Solid</b>                 |
|---|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Blood from a bike injury<br>Blood from menstruation | anxiety           | Cement                       |
| Phoenix   | fear              | wall                         |
| Authentic me  | confusion         | Censor (person)              |
| anger   | Two birds         | Blood (shed by the dictator) |
| Twister (whirlpool)                                 | submarine         | Intelligence                 |
| wine  | society           | Mandalas (all of them)       |
| My shadow   | The woman in veil | The master                   |
|   | The cow           | Small twister                |

**Figure 4**

*The external dictator*



**Figure 5**

*Two birds*



The evolution of this relationship between the dominant element and supplementary elements provided an insight. Self-censorship experience went hand in hand with being incarcerated and trapped between walls; stuck against a great wall; feeling surrounded by picket fences; stuck and glued to each other. An object trapped inside a much stronger material was a



particular symbolism representing this notion (Figure 1; Figure 2). The feelings associated with the depicted symbols were fear, confusion, and heaviness. As I go further, closer to the end of the data collection, there is the image of two birds (Figure 5). This is not a symbol of a two-headed eagle but rather two birds conjoined. The separation of the elements is slowly emerging; growing uncertainty about the false self. An object imprisoned inside another one is now transforming into two conjoint objects. At the very end, two elements (seen in Figure 6) are finally separated and now staring at each other. Although, there's still a print of one object is present in the second one.

### Figure 6

*Intelligence and authentic self.*



Finally, I saw the duality in my unconsciousness dissolving into a triangular relationship. I labeled each category: solid, liquid, and gas. The three states of matter describing the three constructs of my psyche. *Solid quality* represents what is hard to destroy and holds dominant features. The censor as well as the wall-separating ego and unconsciousness possess solid quality. *Gas quality* is the exact opposite of solid: it evaporates into the air and has little impact on its environment. I placed liquid in the middle. The bridge between my ego and unconsciousness has *liquid quality*, therefore the process of active imagination displayed on the paper attains liquid quality. My intuition guided me to these labels and I did not question the

validity of it, but I was curious to know more about these states and their relation to my research question.

### **Figure 7**

*Blood and fear.*

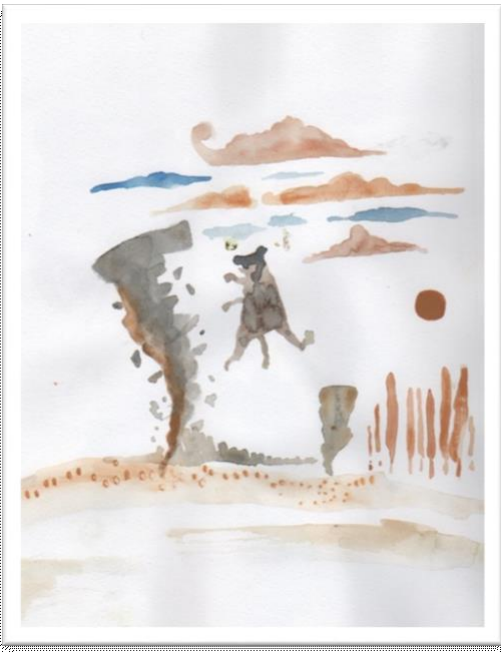


To further understand these themes and their relationship with each other, I created Figure 8. I set my intention and started exploring the three themes of solid, liquid, and gas and what they mean in the context of my research. I used active imagination to allow my unconsciousness to take the lead. With watercolor, I created random shapes and then assigned meanings to them with the help of my ego. My unconsciousness decided the relationship between the shapes. The roles were assigned. As I perfected the shapes, a voice was formed in my mind about the main element of the image, the twister. As the protagonist of the event, the twister had a background story and a personality. It took decisions, and I followed them. I only simply observed and painted. This is how my ego was participating. It was attentive and respectful. Sometimes I had to remind my ego that it is not in charge and not a know-it-all. This reminder was not a command to the ego but more a manner I decided to attain. As my ego always took charge, my shadow did now have the chance to have a voice. The twister now had a voice. I explored the gaseous state of the twister. A smaller twister in the distance is solid. It

defies my nature and the nature of surroundings. The act of this smaller twister resembled the dictator or an external oppressor.

### Figure 8

*The twisters and the cow.*



The setting of the image was calm, and no one was disturbed about the two twisters in the village. The reason behind the calm, I assumed, was that the smaller twister is leaving, and the big twister (my oppressed shadow) does not mean to hurt anyone but myself. A cow getting caught in the twister is evidence of the anxiety I feel by the twister's uncalm nature. The poor cow was the only thing that was being bothered. This cow has liquid quality. It is an unfortunate blend of solid and gas. It does not belong in the twister.

I made another painting the day after to answer more questions left for the twister (Figure 9). I admired the twister's courage and power. It had force, but it was not forceful. It had a peaceful nature despite its definition. I wanted to know now that the twister had a voice, what it wants to say. The process was spontaneous. I picked a color and stroked my brush against the paper; a wolf (figure 8) appeared. It looked like the genie from *One Thousand and One Nights*

<sup>3</sup>stories. It needed a lamp, so I painted a lamp. Then the bushes appeared. I noticed someone hiding behind them. A woman in a veil appeared. She was scared of the wolf popping out of the lamp. She must be the one who rubbed the lamp. She is the owner of the wolf genie now. Her curiosity has liquid quality making way for the genie (gas state) to appear.

**Figure 9**

*Wolf-genie, coming out of the lamp.*



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<sup>3</sup> The Thousand and One Nights, also called *The Arabian Nights*, Arabic *ألف ليلة وليلة*, collection of largely Middle Eastern and Indian stories of uncertain date and authorship.

**Figure 10**

*The two moons.*



The wolf-genie had gas quality. It was the twister but in a different shape. I decided to get to know the wolf. I created another image titled the two moons (Figure 10). The wolf is howling at the bright moon. Then another moon made itself known to me. This moon was dark, and it belonged to the wolf. Coming back to the painting, I realized this dark moon represented my shadow, and it belonged to the wolf. The wolf, as opposed to my ego, approved of the dark moon. The wolf and two moons' relationship planned an idea of how my ego should treat my shadow. An attitude was formed based on the relationship of the shadow and ego. The two bonded and opened a new opportunity for the liquid state to flow between the gaseous state and solid state. The third state helped the two opposites reunite again. This bridge, once associated with anxiety and fear, is not calm and confident. It is not afraid of what is hidden because what was hidden is now familiar.

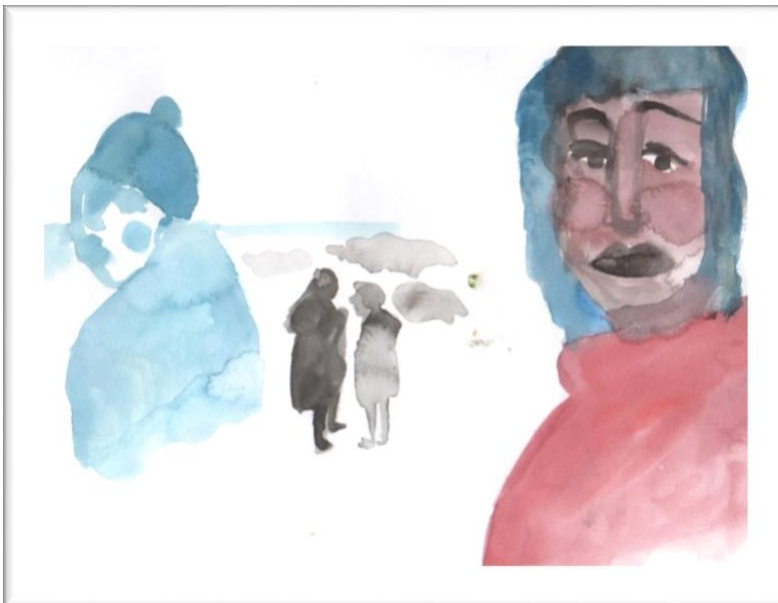
### **Phase Six: Creative Synthesis**

In this phase, I looked back at the images I made through the past 3 years, after migrating to Canada. The reason behind the retrospection was discovering footprints of my

unconsciousness and tracking its activities. The symbols which appeared in these creations have gas-like quality. They are usually born when I am talking on the phone with someone and doodling or during classes while listening to the professor. To replicate this method of mindless drawing, I called my friend on the phone and we talked about my research project. Figure 11 is the result.

**Figure 11**

*Three phases.*



Three different frames revealed themselves in one image. On the right side, my worried self appears to feel less entitled to power and anxiety. This, I believe, is the common result of the decentralization of the ego (Jung, 1959; Jung, 1964; Swann-Foster, 2017). In the far left is again another image of myself. This one is not as detailed as the image of my ego. It almost looks like a memory that is faded. This image represents my shadow and all that has been censored. For reaching and fetching something that is censored, I need to have access to this world.

In the center, the bridge between the two images appears. This image represents the connection that has now been built between the two sides: unconsciousness and ego. The symbol appears to be an old lady exchanging an object with a girl -who looks like a younger version of me.

Figure 11 symbolizes the process of liberation from distortions created by the external dictator. Self-censoring is the question guiding the research, and it is a form of distortion in my life. It created a block of access to my shadow where the censored content was kept. It generates a fog preventing a clear vision of the unconscious images.

In the liberation from the inner dictator and, therefore, self-censoring, "Humanization" was essential. "Humanization," as Freire (1970) explains, is becoming a person by overcoming inner divisions and distortions (Alschuler, 2006). The distortions, such as myths oppressor imposed on the oppressed, sustains the oppression and prevents liberation.

After engaging with elements of one's unconsciousness and questioning old myths, it is essential to convert these myths of unconsciousness into an ethical obligation (Hannah, 1981). This step happened in this research when I encountered "pedagogy of oppressed" (Freire, 1970) and psychology of liberation (Watkins & Shulman, 2010). The realm of new knowledge and uncertainty created a bridge. The oppressive myths carried from the past were now linked to my new identity as an art therapist. Myths hidden in my shadow are now more visible and could easily be accessed. As part of my training, I set my intention on becoming a more competent art therapist and to have an ethical practice. The assumptions and the myths imposed by my environment restrained me from being an authentic art therapy intern. My interaction with my clients were affected by distortions. In the future, the knowledge I gathered in this research will help me point out my biases and distortions. The techniques I have learned through the process of answering the question of the research will also provide me with the proper attitude and structure I will be needing as an art therapist.

### **Discussion**

Being able to lift the wall between my ego and my unconsciousness required initiating a dialogue between the two (Jung & Chodorow, 1997). Active imagination as a technique helped me lift the wall between my ego and unconsciousness and to know the repressed content of my unconsciousness better. It also provided me with the proper attitude to facilitated the conversations between my ego and unconsciousness. Through the self-referential, autonomous and egalitarian quality of images I was able to know my deepest self (McNiff, 2013). Anything created in A-B-R is considered expressive and self as subject a valuable subject when done with

discipline and thoughtful intention. Authentic art is appraised as a great value in A-B-R which is aligned with the question of the research (McNiff, 2013, p. 86).

People are all products of cultural conditioning; their values and beliefs represent an 'invisible veil' which operates outside the level of consciousness. As a result, people assume universality: that regardless of race, culture, ethnicity, or gender, everyone shares the nature of reality and truth. Cultural humility claims that this assumption is erroneous (Sue & Sue, 2008). The same assumption made by the oppressor looking at the mass as inanimate object rather than individuals (Freire, 1970). This research was an opportunity to understand these assumptions and their origins rooting in my culture, historic past and to understand the impact of my environment.

Autonomy of a person is intertwined with many social factors. An authentic individual makes decisions based on their own desires. Authenticity can be defined as "the unobstructed operation of one's true, or core, self in one's daily enterprise" (Kernis, 2003 as cited in Lakey et.al,2008). Within humanistic and existential psychology, individual differences in authenticity have been considered critically important to understanding well-being and freedom from psychopathology (May, 1981; Rogers, 1959, 1964, 1980; Yalom, 1980 as cited in Greenberg et. al, 2003). The definition of psychopathology keeps on evolving. Mental health professionals are trying to update their definition of what is a functional behavior and what is not. Some of the factors psychologist used to attribute to the nature of the individual is now simply explained as the result of a person's adaptation to their society (Shackelford & Ziegler-Hill, 2017).

In 2021, political oppression is more relevant than ever. Individual and institutional oppression need to be addressed by the art therapist and included in designing intervention with marginalized and oppressed clients (Kaiser, 2017; Talwar, 2017). Practicing cultural competence or cultural humility is strongly encouraged, especially for therapists who are treating culturally diverse clients (Sue & Sue, 2008). Jackson (2020) states that cultural humility begins with having knowledge and awareness of the ground on which we stand, making note of social and political movements including civil rights, immigration, diversity and destiny.

The reality which we live in is harsh. Politicians claiming to represent their people are less and less trusted even in democratic states. Controlling a citizenry by force or using forms of violence is one of the major factors contributing to growing immigrant and refugee populations in developed countries such as Canada (Castelli, 2018). Immigrants and refugees escape from



political violence to their destination land. However, violation of human rights leaves a deep impact on their psyche (World Immigration Report, 2020). A longitudinal study conducted by the government of Canada indicates that about 29% of immigrants reported having emotional problems and 16% reported high levels of stress. Refugees may be at a higher risk for suffering from the effects of various traumatic events (Robert et. al, 2013).

### **Limitations**

Hannah (1981) states that active imagination should not be undertaken without a firm relationship to someone who will understand, or at least sympathizes, for it sometimes leads into such cold and inhuman depths that human companionship is necessary to prevent us from becoming entirely frozen and lost (p. 12). The lack of access to human companions was reflected in the process of research. Due to low budgets and understaffed faculty, the research was conducted mostly alone. The research was also taking place during the COVID-19 Pandemic in 2020 and 2021. Lockdowns and online classes substituted for face-to-face human encounters. The meetings with the supervisor were online. The frustration caused by social isolation as the result of the virus outbreak affected my overall well-being.

The focus of the research was self-censorship; however, for safety issues regarding the safety of my family, I had to set limits to what could be shared in public. Islamic regime like other totalitarian states monitor the activities of their citizens. Even after leaving the country, the system tracks the online activities of their citizens. The threat is, however, to the relatives living inside the borders of Iran.

Personal growth and development of self are an essential part of training for future therapists. The need for a higher level of self-awareness in the future therapist leads to the acceptance of personal therapy and personal development as a mandatory requirement for the completion of many training programs. Personal therapy, whether individual or group, is concerned with a deep internal searching and working through unresolved conflicts aiming at personality changes (Malikiosi-Loizos, 2013).

### **Conclusion**

This research provided a structural opportunity for me to self-reflect on the impact of political oppression in Iran, particularly self-censorship. These blocked contents created one-sidedness of my ego and prevented me to authentically self-reflect and grow as a person and as

an art therapist. Imagination creates great opportunity for unconsciousness to surface and for unconscious material emerge into awareness (Swann-Foster, 2018). Active imagination, a term coined by Jung (1973), uses artistic expression to give form to the content of the unconsciousness. It is a great tool for uncovering and integrating the repressed images and emotions (Jung & Chodorow, 1997). With the help of this technique, I was able to bridge the gap between my ego and unconsciousness and monitor the repressive mechanism of self-censorship. Reflecting on the impacts of self-censorship was the first step to self-reflect and grow as a future art therapist. Deep ongoing self-search provided by heuristic methodology set an example for further investigation of my blind spot.

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