‘Do not say they are dead’ : the political use of mystical and religious concepts in the Persian poetry of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88)

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To the loving memory of my father and mother

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PREFACE

Casting a glance into the past, I remember the years of the Iran-Iraq war, when many youth, my age or younger, instead of studying and growing up with the hope of building a better and brighter future, faced the ugly face of life: war, destruction, assassination, and revenge. These events were covered under the beauty of words such as self-sacrifice, spiritual perfection, annihilation (of the self in God) and martyrdom by the leaders of the Islamic Republic and the war poets. During eight years of war (1980-88), I heard nothing from the media but the songs and music that inspired young and old men to give up their lives for a higher cause. I remember the parents who encouraged their sons to go to the military front to support the Islamic Revolution. Old men waited in recruitment lines, in the hope of being accepted and traveling to the military front, believing that if they were so lucky as to die a martyr's death, the Shiite saints such as the third Imam Hosein would be their host in the hereafter.[1] Television channels broadcast the news of the fight of chivalrous, fearless, and selfless youth against the infidel Iraqi enemy. Youths of eleven and younger talked about their experiences on the front line, to encourage others to go to the battlefield. Mohammad Hosein Fahmide (1967-1980), who blew himself up under an Iraqi tank was introduced to the youth as a model of self-sacrifice. Television showed the battlefield, the ruined cities near the borders and the soldiers killed on the front line to remind Iranians of their responsibility toward the martyrs. Dead soldiers were brought back to their cities and venerated as role models for the community. Their unwashed bodies would be buried in the Zahrā Paradise (*Behesht-e Zahrā*) of their hometown. It was common, when a reporter asked the martyrs' parents how they felt about their son's martyrdom, for them to say that they were happy, because they had offered their son as a sacrifice in the path of imam Hosein. One added, "I wish I had another son and had sacrificed him for the cause of the Revolution and the Imam (meaning Ayatollah Khomeini)." Paintings of the martyrs decorated the walls

[1] During the Iran-Iraq war, the state's propaganda machine led the Iranians to believe that death on the military front is martyrdom.

of my town, Kerman, and, no doubt, of other cities. However, watching the TV reports of the military front and reading similar stories in the newspapers always led me to questions, such as why a young man would be delighted to go to the battlefield, and why are the martyrs' family happy when their sons are killed? What motivations lead them to sacrifice their lives? Are these actions a matter of faith in God, or are they the results of obedience and respect for the Shiite Islam?

Years passed, until in 2009 an opportunity was offered for me to begin my PhD in the Leiden Institute for Area Studies at Leiden University. I would be working within a larger project, 'Of Poetry and Politics: Classical Poetic Concepts in the New Politics of Twentieth-Century Iran,' led by Dr. Ali-Asghar Seyed-Gohrab. My part was to research the war poetry and the use and misuse of classical metaphors and motifs by the war poets. This gave me the opportunity to understand why, in spite of daunting odds, the soldiers were delighted to be on the front line.

I owe a great deal to the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) whose financial support made this research possible. To Dr. Ali-Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, my teacher and supervisor, I owe a special debt and gratitude. He was involved in the project from the beginning and guided it to maturation. His persistent and tireless supervision was a safe haven for a young scholar like me. My special thanks go to Prof. Petra Sijpesteijn of Leiden University, have read and commented on various versions of the manuscript. To Sen McGlinn, I would like to express my thankfulness for proof reading the manuscript, and for his fruitful comments.

Finally, I am happy to acknowledge my debt to my husband Mahyar Kavoosi. He selflessly supported me through all my endeavors. Without his support, I could not have achieved what I have.

NOTES ON TRANSLITERATIONS, FOOTNOTES AND DATES

In the translation of the poems, I have tried to remain faithful to the original text. In several cases where an English translation of a text existed and I benefited from the translation, I have mentioned the source in the footnote. The title of the Persian books and poems are followed by their English translation for the first time afterwards the Persian title is used. For the Qur'ānic verses, I have consulted the *Koran Interpreted* translated by A.J. Arberry.

Arabic and Persian titles, names of authors and individuals, technical terms, poems and other writings are transliterated using the table below. In secondary sources, the original transliteration system is maintained as this will be more convenient for the reader in finding the underlying source(s). Where the word beloved is used with capital B in this dissertation, it refers to God. The dates of poets, mystics and historical figures are identified by Common Era dates whereas contemporary poets still alive do not receive a date after their names.

In footnotes, I give the first bibliographical reference in full, using shorter bibliographical information in subsequent references. In the case of Persian publications, Islamic solar dates are followed by Common Era dates separated by a dash. In the body of the text, dates are in the Common Era. Whenever I refer to the war, I am referring to the Iran-Iraq war, as I have limited my attention to Iran's war poetry. The same applies for the word revolution. Whenever I use the word revolution, it refers to the Revolution of 1979. If there is a reference to other revolutions I clarify it using date.

SYSTEM OF TRANSLATION

CONSONANTS

ء	’	غ	gh
ب	b	ف	f
پ	p	ق	q
ت	t	ک	k
ث	th	گ	g
ج	j	ل	l
چ	ch	م	m
ح	h	ن	n
خ	kh	ه	h
د	d	و	v
ذ	z	ی	y
ر	r		
ز	z		
ژ	zh		
س	s		
ش	sh		
ص	s		
ض	z		
ط	t		
ظ	z		
ع	‘		

VOWELS

Long	ا	ā
	و	u
	ی	i
Short	ـَ	a
	ـُ	o
	ـِ	e
Diphthongs	وَ	ow
	یَ	ey

INTRODUCTION

The Iran-Iraq war began on September 22, 1980 when Iraq attacked the border towns of Iran. The war lasted for eight years. The Iran-Iraq war is the longest conventional battle since World War II. It is estimated that on both sides there is about one million dead and three million wounded, thousands of prisoners, millions of homeless, and many cities were badly damaged.[2] On July 17, 1988, Iran accepted the United Nations Security Council Resolution 598. Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, compared accepting the Resolution to "drinking poison".[3] The Resolution asked two countries to observe ceasefire and return to their homeland.[4] The fight was legitimized by defining it as conflict between Islam and blasphemy, and aimed to overthrow and to punish the Baath party in Baghdad. The roots of this conflict are not clear. Some scholars say that it was the result of a personal conflict between Saddam Hosein (1937-2006) and Ayatollah Khomeini (1902-1998). Some researchers trace the reason for the war back to antiquity and the relationship between their predecessors. For several historians it is a conflict of Arabs versus Persians rooted in the Muslim invasion of Iran. For others, it is the result of a struggle between the Sunni Ottomans and the Shiite Safavids in the sixteenth century.[5] Finding the historical roots of the conflict, and geo-political issues ended to the war are beyond the scope of this study to examine.

The chief aim of this study is to explore how classical Persian poetry and the Persian mysticism that is interwoven with the poetry have been used in the new politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially during the Iran-Iraq war. By employing mystical ideals the poets inflamed longing for self-annihilation in the soldiers. As a result of fundamental

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[2] E. Ghareeb, "The Roots of Crisis: Iraq and Iran," in *The Persian Gulf War: Lessons for Strugedy, Law and Diplomacy*, ed. Ch. C. Joyner, New York, Westport, Connecticut, London: Greenwood Press, 1990, pp. 21-23.

[3] Ibid, p. 21.

[4] *Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs,* Supplement. no.7, vol. VI, Articles 92-105 and 108-111 of the Charter, Covering the period 1 January 1985 to 31 December 1988, New York: United Nations, 2004, p. 95, no. 321.

[5] E. Ghareeb, "The Roots of Crisis: Iraq and Iran," in *The Persian Gulf War*, p. 23.

change of the mystical motifs to political concepts motivated the Iranian public to the battlefield. These themes were used in other political situations, i.e., to support the revolutionaries in Constitutional Revolution 1906-11, and the Islamic Revolution of 1979. This study is important because it shows that poetry has been a motivating factor for many Iranians especially during the Iran-Iraq war. Young people read poetry for entertainment. Several of them participated in official poetry nights or in small non-official gatherings to recite their poems. Writing and presenting one's ideas and thoughts eloquently is admired among Iranians. It is taken for granted in a political situation that one has the ability to present his thoughts, and will benefit from the opportunity to assimilate his thoughts and to show his skill in writing poetry. I am not claiming that war poets lacked political backgrounds. Many poets during the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war wrote in order to motivate the community for the Islamic ideals. My study will show how, during the war, both the celebrated poets i.e. 'Ali Musavi Garmārudi (b. 1320), or Qeysar Aminpur (1959-2007), and comparatively unknown poets i.e., Samad Parviz, and Shahāb, used classical mystical and religious metaphors in their poems.

In an Iranian context, ideals and concepts are transmitted through poetry quicker and easier than prose. The Iranian public is receptive to poetry, in which classical motifs are put in new political contexts and provide the opportunity for Iranians to compare themselves with mystical figures such as Hosein Mansur Hallāj (857-922), or religious figures such as imam Hosein and his companions (626-680). This comparison will lead Iranians to believe that they are able to emulate the historic act of self-sacrifice and give their lives for a higher cause.

To my knowledge, there is no scholarly work that shows how Iran's literary tradition is applied in war poetry in modern Iran, and how poets inspired a sense of self-sacrifice in Iranian youth. A significant point of this work is that it provides the reader with the opportunity to journey between both classical texts and modern poetry. Thus, they will see the differences between mystical attitudes toward asceticism and self-mortification versus those of war poets, and the mystical concept of spiritual elevation versus martyrdom. This work illustrates to what extent mystical motifs are fundamentally changed for political purposes.

METHODOLOGY

In selecting martial poems, I have limited myself to those composed during the war between Iran and Iraq (1980-88). In several cases, I have given examples from poems composed after the war, because they show how the mystical themes, propagated during the war, were received afterwards. To distinguish these poems, I have inserted the year of composition, if applicable, beside them.

To show how extensively Persian poetry is used in modern Iran, I have paid more attention to the metaphors and motifs that are central to classical texts, and are popular in war poetry. It may be said that it is the poem, which transmits ideals, beliefs and attitudes that lead to specific actions/reactions by the audience such as happiness, anger, or revenge. For example, the narrative of imam Hosein's death in war poetry reminds Shiites of Iran of the hardships that Hosein and his family endured. On the military front, when a soldier compares himself to imam Hosein he can believe that he is able to patiently tolerate the war and its afflictions, and is responsible for avenging the blood of imam Hosein with the blood of his murderers' heirs. For this study the message itself is more important than the narrator who is conveying it. On many occasions most Iranians are repeating a poem, an anecdote or a proverb without paying attention to who the speaker/ writer is.

In this study my objectives are: 1) to illustrate how poetry is used as a political tool in modern twentieth-century Iran; 2) to analyze the mystical and religious motifs and concepts of classical Persian literature and their influence on Iranian self-sacrifice in the fight against the Iraqi enemy, I address both the famous classical figures and the war poets. I have taken the classical texts as foreground for the war poems to illustrate how the mystical meanings of various motifs were fundamentally changed and found new meaning in war poetry, encouraging the act of self-sacrifice.

For the motifs and concepts, I have chosen those popularly employed by the Iranian mystics to express the superiority of self-purification to the mundane desires. For the Qur'ānic verses, *hadith* and historical narratives, I have relied on the mystical treatises used by mystics to justify their ideas. In this process, first I read the war poems and selected sections with mystical and religious themes; secondly, I studied the classical texts and mystical treatises; then, I looked up the Qur'ānic verses, *hadith* and historical narratives that

are mentioned in both treatise and poem. Afterwards, I referred to the mystics' treatises as the foreground of my study, and explained how a mystical motif applied to the war poetry, found a new political meaning. There are several references that indicate how the clerics in their sermons used several mystical and religious themes. Later, the themes were transformed into slogans repeated in rallies or after congregational prayers by Iranian public during and after the war.

For this study, I have relied on classical mystical works such as *Hadiqat al-haqiqa va shari'at al-tariqa* ('The Garden of Truth and the Holy Law of the Path') by Sanā'i Ghaznavi (ca. 1087- 1130) as standard texts for the mystical motifs and concepts used by the war poets. Sanā'i elaborated on the doctrines of Sufism and his work is a source on ascetic doctrines and mystical thought, which has become a standard work inspiring many mystic writers.[6] I have made several references to *Elāhi-nāme* ('The Divine Book') by Farid al-Din 'Attār Neyshāburi (ca. 1145-1221), in which 'Attār elaborates on mystic love. This concept was widely used by the war poets. In his *Manteq al-Teyr* ('Conference of the Birds'), 'Attār uses allegorical language to illustrate the progress of a mystic in the path towards Union with the Beloved.[7] *Kolliyyāt-e Shams Tabrizi* by Jalāl al-Din Rumi (1207-1273) is the most famous mystical work that I have used here. In it I found several mystical themes and motifs, which are employed by the war poets. Persian war poets make a wide range of references to these works.

From the mystic Ahmad Ghazāli (d. 1126), I have borrowed the concepts, which he elaborated on in his treatise on love entitled *Savāneh*, which discusses the secret of profound love, its divine source, and the hardships that a lover has to endure in the path of spiritual perfection. On the importance of this book, Ritter writes that *Savāneh* inspired 'Attār to compose his *Manteq al-Teyr*.[8] I have also drawn on *Kashf al-Mahjub* ('Revelation of the Veiled') by the mystic Hojviri (d.ca.1072). This is a useful source for information on the mystical tenets, doctrines and practices of the early Islamic mystics.[9]

To my knowledge, the use of classical mystical and religious themes in modern

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[6] A.J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam,* London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1979, p. 107.
[7] Ibid.
[8] H. Ritter, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2) under al- Ghazālī.
[9] H. Hosain, & H. Masse, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Hudjwīrī.

political context is very new. In many countries poetry has functioned differently. For instance, during the years of the Iran-Iraq war, the Iraqi poets used Bedouin themes to encourage the Iraqi soldiers to fight against Iran. Because many of the poets participated in the war, they on the one hand, relied on the themes such as death, destruction, and sorrow.[10] On the other hand, the poets focused on Pan-Arabism[11] to unify people to fight against Iran. To cite another example, poetry in the form of ode was used in France to convey revolutionary ideals. During the years of French Revolution, the poets composed Romantic odes and recited it in the revolutionary festivals (1789-99).[12]

[10] E.A. Ghareeb, with the assistance of B. K. Dougherty, *Historical Dictionary of Iraq*, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2004, p. 184.
[11] Ibid., p.73.
[12] A. Esterhammer, "The Romantic Ode: History, Language, Performance," in *Histoire Comparee des Litteratures de Langues Europeennes: Romantic Poetry*, ed. A. Esterhammer, Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2002, p. 144.

CHAPTER ONE

LTERARY TRADITION BEFORE THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION 1979

Classical Persian poetry is a living tradition. Aspects of this poetic tradition appear in all areas of Persian culture: in music, architecture, material culture, etc. Iranians' lives are interwoven with poetry. People with various educational backgrounds i.e., intellectuals, university students read several couplets a day. They recite poems to give a piece of advice, to show their sympathy, to express their viewpoints or their emotional feelings. Poems are also abundantly broadcast from radio stations or television channels. Poetry is part of Iranian life. This study will discuss the main role of classical and religious concepts in the poetry that lead to popular Iranian participation in the war.

The Islamic Revolution changed not only the political system, but also Persian culture and literature in various respects. In the field of literature, a new literary movement began, seeking to erase the ideals and conventions of the Persian poetry from immediately before the Islamic Revolution, much of which had been inspired by the West. In this process of changing literary values from secular and Western-inspired conventions to religious and revolutionary values, the new leaders and supporters of the Republic found that poetry could also be used to mobilize the population in support of political ideas.

This was not the first time that Persian poetry had been used for a political purpose: examples abound in the thousand-year history of Persian poetry. The most obvious parallel is with the literary movement of the Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911), when poetry was used to awaken the Iranians. With the crumbling of the Qājār court, poets no longer wrote for a courtly audience, they turned their attention to ordinary people, choosing subjects closer to the heart of the crowd, informing them of Western political philosophy, modern education and the place of women in society, equality between all individuals and

many other topical issues.[13] The Constitutional poetry involved a thematic change. Poets adopted "non-poetic" themes that had not been popular in Persian poetry before this period. It could be said that they used poetry in the service of ordinary people rather than to serve the ruling authorities. The most common themes have been summarized as follows: "criticism of the Persian ruling class and the prevailing social, economic, and political order; praise of democracy and defense of civil and human rights; anticlerical and anti-religious sentiments; attitudes both favorable and hostile to Islam; xenophobic feelings especially against Arabs and Turks."[14] In this period, poets referred to the 'motherland' (*vatan*) as the beloved. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Iranian intellectuals presented a new identity for the Iranians to unify them and to prepare them for the challenges of the world. They integrated new terms such as *vatan, mihan* (native land) and *sarzamin* (country). These words played a major role in motivating the oppositional movements and in consolidating the state.[15] In the following pages I refer to several examples to show how the word *vatan* is used during the Revolution to condemn the Pahlavi monarch for making *vatan* to a ruined place.[16] During the war, the poets such as Simin Behbahāni (b. 1927) employed the word *vatan* in her poems to give a sense of nationality to the reader.[17] One poet of the constituitional period (1906-11), Adib al-Mamālek Farāhāni (1860-1917), addresses old-fashioned poets who praise the beloved, and asks them to write about their country:

tā key ey shā'er-e sokhan pardāz
mikoni vasf-e delbar-e tannāz
daftari por koni ze mowhumāt

[13] M.A. Jazayery, "Recent Persian Literature: Observations on Themes and Tendencies, " in *Iran: Review of National Literature*, eds. A. Paolucci, & J. Haidari, vol. II, no. I, New York: St. John's University Press, 1971, pp. 13-14.
[14] S. Soroudi, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Constitutional Revolution, vii The Constitutional Movement in Literature.
[15] R. Ch. Elling, *Minorities in Iran: Nationalism and Ethnicity after Khomeini*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 122-23.
[16] See page 38 in this study.
[17] For S. Behbahāni's poem see pp. 53-55 in the present study.

ke manam shā'er-e sokhan-pardāz
…
gar havā-ye sokhan bovad be sarat
az vatan ba'd az in sokhan gu bāz
havas-e 'eshq-bāzi ar dāri
bā vatan ham qomār-e 'eshq bebāz
az vatan nist delbari behtar
be vatan del bedeh ze ru-ye niyāz …[18]

O eloquent poet! For how long will you describe
The coquettish one who captures your heart,
Filling a book with imaginary things
To show how eloquent you are? …
If you desire to speak
From now on, you should speak about the motherland.
If your mind is on the play of love
Play with the homeland the game of love
There is no beloved better than the motherland
Give your heart to the motherland because of your need.

In the above poem, the poet raises the nationalist issue of praising the motherland. She is the only beloved worth being praised. The revolutionary poets ask other poets to join the protest and to fight against the Qājār ruler by using their pen. The poet implies that following the classical tradition and praising a beautiful beloved would not lead to a better life. One should gamble his life for the sake of one's motherland.

Another poet of the Constitutional period, Farrokhi Yazdi (1889- 1939) uses the motif of the 'path of love' (*rāh-e 'eshq*) in a *ghazal* to liken death in the cause of freedom

[18] M. Nur-Mohammadkhān, *Fekr-e āzādi dar adabiyyāt-e mashrute-ye Iran*, Eslām-ābād: Markaz-e tahqiqāt-e fārsi-ye Irān va Pākestān, 1383/2004, pp. 118 and 181.

to death for the sake of love:

> *… dardā ke khun-e pāk-e shahidān-e rāh-e ʻeshq*
> *yek jo dar in diyār nadārad bahā hanuz*[19] …
>
> Alas that the pure blood of the martyrs of the path of love
> does not have the value even of one barley grain in this country

In this poem, the youth who gives his life for the principles of the Constitutional Revolution, such as freedom and a codified law, is compared to a lover who sacrifices his life in the path of love. Using the motif of the path of love in the context of the revolution is a way of saying that one killed for the cause of freedom and equality is a martyr of love. The poet complains that the martyr's blood is not honored (i.e. because he is forgotten).

In this period there is a clear interaction between poetry and politics. While poets use classical imagery and metaphors in their *ghazals* and *qasides*, they treat current socio-political subjects. Poetry was not only a means to communicate with the masses; it also had a therapeutic function, especially when discussing religious themes. In her work *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution 1906-1911,* Janet Afary explains how, during the Revolution, religious rituals such as taʻziye found new political meanings. Imam Hosein's battle against the Umayyad troops and his death at Karbalā in 680 was introduced as the struggle of justice (imam Hosein) against evil (Umayyad caliph). In the years of the Revolution, the masses were reminded that they were historically responsible to defend the ʻ*olamā* (religious scholars) and the nationalist leaders. In 1906, when Iranians took asylum in the British legation in Tehran, they had a *rowze-khāni* (reciting the events of Karbalā) every night, and people cried out and beat their heads to show their grief.[20] The *rowze-khāni* reminded the one who took sanctuary in the embassy of the conflict between

[19] *Divān-e Farrokhi Yazdi*, *ghazaliyāt va qasāed va qataʻāt va robāʻiyyāt va fathnāme*, ed. H. Makki, Tehran: Moʻassese-ye enteshārāt-e Amir Kabir, 1357/1947, p. 150.

[20] J. Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, and the Origin of Feminism*, New York: Colombia University Press, 1996, pp. 55-56.

Muslims and infidels. The revolutionaries invoked religious principles to motivate the public to stand against both the foreign economic intervention and the Iranian government. For instance, their conflict with the British, because of its political intervention, was transformed into a confrontation between Muslims and infidels.[21]

The use of Persian literature and religious stories as sources of inspiration continued in later periods. The political change during late 1920s encouraged the poets to add several new themes to their literary works. Political themes were less prominent, to be replaced by themes of progress, such as "the advantages of education, the status of women, and the plight of the poor."[22] The poets of this period praised the motherland and encouraged the Iranians to be proud of it. They wrote to praise the king, and the outcome of modernization and social changes which resulted in the establishment of the University of Tehran, and the like.[23]

The close relationship between poetry and politics continued during the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979). In the first decades of Rezā Shāh's rule (1925-1941), several poets were praised as national icons and they became important in the life of Iranians. The state used the poet Ferdowsi (ca. 940-1025) and his *Shāhnāme* ('Epic of the Kings,' completed 1010) to cement a new identity for Persians, an identity freed from Arabic and Islamic components. The Pahlavis wished to revive pre-Islamic Iran, basing themselves more on pre-Islamic Persian culture than on the Islamic period. Rezā Shāh chose the surname Pahlavi to reanimate "the imperial glory of pre-Islamic Iran." The names of the months reverted from Arabic to Old Persian names, in 1925; the Persian solar calendar was used instead of the Arabic lunar calendar. The Pahlavi modernization program was mingled with secularization. New branches of education such as pre-Islamic history were added to the education system. The Pahlavi secular theory was propagated by a new system of education from the 1930s onwards.[24] The semi-official Society for National Monuments (*Anjoman-e*

[21] Ibid., p. 31. For the literary changes in prose and its effect on the progress of Constitutional Revolution see Hassan Kamshad, *Modern Persian Prose Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966.
[22] M.A. Jazayery, "Resent Persian Literature: Observations on Themes and Tendencies, " p. 15.
[23] Ibid., p. 15-16.
[24] S.A. Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 68.

āsār-e melli) decided to commemorate the millennium of Ferdowsi's birth. In 1922, a group of statesmen and cultural figures established the society. In the year of Rezā Shāh's coronation, 1926, the Society decided to build a site on Ferdowsi's grave. To encourage a sense of nationhood and unity, and to understand the value of their culture and language, Society asked people to participate as a national duty. For this purpose, they sent the students of one school to the neighborhoods to gather donations. Iran had a "sponsored national lottery" to raise funds. Participation in the lottery was described as a national duty.[25] An international conference held in 1934 was, in part, celebrating Ferdowsi's millennium.

Rezā Shāh gave a speech in Ferdowsi's mausoleum and a documentary film was made about Ferdowsi's life by the filmmaker Abdol-Hosein Sepantā (1907-1969). The above-mentioned activities encouraged the Iranian publics to participate in the occasion.[26] To promote the image of Ferdowsi as a national icon, several articles were published in Persian newspapers and journals such as *Irānshahr* and *Kāveh*. These articles used topics such as the status of Ferdowsi in the life of Iranians, and the necessity of preserving his tomb to raise awareness of a national identity in Iranians. The architect Karim Tāherzāde recommended building memorial site at Ferdowsi's grave.[27] All the efforts: the film, the conference, publishing articles and building memorial site were parts of constructing a modern secular national culture. The state used a common history by referring to common national symbols to unify the Iranian public.[28]

In the years of Mohammad Rezā Shāh's reign (1941-1979), a line of genealogy

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[25] A. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State 1870-1940*, Washington: The University of Washington Press, 2008, pp. 124-25.

[26] A. Marashi, "The nation's Poet: Ferdowsi and the Iranian National Imagination," in *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, ed. T. Atābaki, London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009, pp. 99-100. For more information about nationalism in Iran in the Qājār and Pahlavi period see A. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power and the State, 1870-1940*, Washington: The University of Washington Press, 2008.

[27] Ibid., pp. 100-101. For further information on the use of historiography and the use of Iranian memory in constructing 'national identity' see contributions of T. Atabaki, M. Tavakoli-Targhi, A. Amanat, O. Bast, and K. Scot Aghaie, in *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, ed. T. Atabaki, London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2009.

[28] A. Marashi, *Nationalizing Iran: Culture, Power, and the State,* p. 132.

cemented the Pahlavi kings to the mythical kings who feature in the *Shāhnāme*. The Pahlavi monarch drew on this new genealogy to legitimize his authority. For instance, the early Iranian king Cyrus the Great (ca. 600-529), who established the first great Empire, was commemorated by the Pahlavi government in the 1970s. The Pahlavi monarch intended to persuade his audience that he was going to glorify Iran and revive Iran's glorious past. For further political aims, poetry was used to remind Iranians of their pre-Islamic Persian heritage, a choice that the Pahlavi regime consciously made to minimize the role of religion in the public and cultural spheres.

Following the 1979 Revolution, the Islamic Republic tried to promote religious roots and principles in place of the pre-Islamic Persian culture propagated during the Pahlavi regime.[29] The state gave a new explanation to the mythical concepts of the *Shāhnāme.* In the early 1980s, the Islamic Republic began an effort to control literary discourses in the cities of Qom, Mashhad and Isfahan. The state hired writers interested in using their talents in service of the Revolution by teaching creative writing and poetry. Following these workshops, young participants began to publish their works in journals and anthologies. With government support, a large, new body of literary works relating to political Islam, the Revolution and the war were published.[30]

Yet the ideas and concepts elaborated in the *Shāhnāme* became a source of inspiration for the new leaders of the Islamic Revolution, especially due to the dualistic rhetoric of the revolutionary leaders who spoke of the revolution as a movement of 'light against darkness' (*enqlāb-e nur 'alayh-e zolmat*). The *Shāhnāme* depicts a battle of light (*nur*) against darkness (*tāriki*), good against evil, represented by demons coming from non-Iranians (*anirān*). During the war with Iraq, the word Satan (*Sheytān*) was popularly used to show the evil nature of the Iraqi authority who fought to uproot the Islamic Revolution. Iraq and its supporters were called Satan, and the United States of America was called the Great Satan (*sheytān-e bozorg*). The concepts remind the crowd of the battle between the cosmic

[29] S. Vakili, *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, New York: Continuum, 2011, p. 25.

[30] A. Karimi-Hakkak, "Introduction: Iran's Literature 1977-1997," in *Iranian Studies*, vol. 30, no.3/4, selection from the literature of Iran, 1977-1997, (Summer-Autumn, 1997), p. 205.

forces of good (i.e. Iran) versus evil (i.e. *anirān*) in the *Shāhnāme*, and the victory of the former. This account was so popular that references are made to it in travel-books such as *Drinking Arak off an Ayatollah's Beard* by Nicholas Jubber. He says that in the years of the Iran-Iraq war, the leaders of the Islamic Republic promoted the *Shāhnāme* as Iranians' national icon by having it recited at the military front.[31] The *Shāhnāme* taught the soldiers that they should fight bravely and exact revenge on their enemy.[32]

In early 20th century, the use of poetry for a political aim was not limited to Persian epics such as the *Shāhnāme.* Several poets started to change classical Persian poetic forms to fit a modern mould. This modernization was modeled on Western poetry and was introduced by Nimā Yushij through the 1950s. The 'new poetry' (*she'r-e now*) was born. In his poems, Nimā used new metaphors and imagery to illuminate social and political issues.[33]

While poets were experimenting with new forms of poetry, the Shāh endeavored to modernize Iran not only by reviving Iranians' cultural heritage, but also by implementing cultural programs. One such program was the Fifth Development Plan (1973-1977). Notions such as "return to one's roots" and "the rediscovery of past culture and heritage" were part of the cultural policy of the time. Especially since Iran was benefiting from a Western-styled industrial civilization, it needed to rely on Iranian cultural traditions to give the population a sense of solidarity. For this purpose, the Pahlavi regime gave priority to works such as establishing museums and popularizing architecture and decorative arts. Policies promoted the "recognition (*shenāsā'i*) of Iran's past culture" by fostering cultural events such as festivals. In particular, the Pahlavi regime celebrated the 2500th anniversary of the founding of the Persian monarchy. The main aim of this festival was to strengthen the identity of the country and unify the Iranian nation.[34]

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[31] N. Jubber, *Drinking Arak off an Ayatollah's Beard: A Journey Through the Inside-Out Worlds of Iran and Afghanistan*, Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2010, p. 140.
[32] bid., p.141.
[33] N. Rahimieh, "Iranian American Literature," in *New Immigrant Literatures in the United States: A Sourcebook to our Multicultural Literary Heritage*, ed. A. Shama Knippling, Westport & Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996, p. 114.
[34] N. Nabavi, "The Discourse of 'Authentic Culture' in Iran in the 1960s and the 1970s," in *Intellectual Trends in Twentieth Century Iran: A Critical Survey*, ed. Negin Nabavi, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2003,

In this period, voices of protest were raised and the poets asked the Iranians to unite and overthrow the Shāh. Hamid Mosaddeq (1940-1998) writes: 'he who wants / I and you not to be us/ may his home be destroyed … if I sit/ if you sit/ who will rise/ all should fight against the enemy.'[35] The poet's question inspired the young men to protest against the Pahlavi monarch. In this poem the verb 'to rise' (*barkhāstan*) means to stand up, and an uproar. Voices of protest became stronger and several Iranian intellectuals such as Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad (1923-1969) spoke about "cultural invasion" (*hojum-e farhangi*) and westoxication, referring to Western cultural imperialism. The country was called to awareness of the increasing influence of Western culture and, as a traditional society, to resist Western moral and cultural influence.[36]

During the Pahlavi period, most notably the 1960s and the 1970s, poets used religious metaphors and motifs to mobilize the community to protest the authority of the Shāh. These poets believed that religious themes were vital in promoting protests against the Shāh and the influence of Western culture. *Kasi ke mesl-e hich kas nist* ('Someone who is not like anyone'), a famous poem of the time by Forugh Farrokhzād (1935-1967) is an impressive example, which I will use to show how the poets of twentieth-century Iran received Shiite concepts, and used them in a historical context. In her dream, the poet has seen a just savior who distributes bread, symbolizing nutrition, among people. She distinguishes between him and other people by calling him 'one who is not like anyone else' (*kasi ke mesl-e hichkas nist*), and waiting hopefully and watching for the savior to return.[37] In Shiite tradition, one, in his lifetime, should be waiting for the return of the twelfth imam, Mahdi. The image of 'one who is not like anyone else' may refer to the Mahdi, occulted in 873. According to the Shiite tradition, before the Last Day, he will return to establish justice and punish oppressors.[38] In her poem, Farrokhzād is waiting for a

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p. 98.

[35] A. Makāreminiyā, *Barrasi-ye she'r-e defā'-e moqaddas*, Tehran: Tarfand, 1384/2005, p. 39.

[36] N. Nabavi, "The Discourse of 'Authentic Culture'*,* p. 98.

[37] A. Karimi-Hakkak, "Revolutionary Posturing: Iranian Writers and the Iranian Revolution of 1979," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 23, no. 4, (Nov., 1991), p. 512.

[38] For further information about the occultation of the Mahdi, see W. Madelung, in *The Encyclopaedia of*

savior who not only distributes bread but also shares the National Garden (*bāgh-e melli*), medicine, and cola.[39] No one can prevent him from returning.[40] Farrokhzād is waiting for a messiah, and Ayatollah Khomeini may be seen as a typical messiah who was coming to overthrow the Pahlavi monarch, Mohammad Rezā Shāh, and establish an ideal system of justice. It was claimed that after the Revolution the victorious state would distribute all natural sources (i.e. oil) among Iranians. In her poem, Farrokhzād uses several religious symbols. For instance, she asserts that the savior is able to light the electric bulb of God, the green bulb (*lāmp-e Allāh ke sabz bud*), on the sky of the *Meftāhiyān* mosque.[41] The Arabic word *Miftāh* literally means 'key'. The suffix '*ān*' in Persian indicates the person responsible for a task (i.e. to open a door). Thus the word Meftāhiyān refers to one who has a key to open the closed doors. Lighting the bulb of God and opening all doors implies that she is waiting for one who will re-establish the mosques. In that historical context, the word savior might refer to Ayatollah Khomeini, who many Iranians thought would remove the oppression of the Pahlavi regime. It is worth mentioning that in the Shiite tradition, the Mahdi, after his return, is expected to reside in a mosque and to punish the evildoers.

It is significant that in her poem Farrokhzād relies on religious terminology and symbolism. These poems became extremely popular among Iranian intellectuals. In fact, in 1977, literary gatherings were organized to voice dissatisfaction against censorship and political pressure. One of the events that influenced, and possibly hastened, the Revolution in Iran was a literary gathering called The Poetry Nights (*dah shab*) held by the Writers' Associations of Iran in Tehran.[42] In these gatherings, to inspire the audience to stand up against the regime, poets such as Simin Dāneshvar (1921-2012), Mehdi Akhvān-e Thāleth (1928-1990), and 'Ali Musavi Garmārudi drew on literary motifs familiar to their audience, such as shedding blood, self-sacrifice, and the execution of the mystic martyr of Islam,

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Islam (2), under al-Mahdī.

[39] The word cola refers to Coca-Cola. A carbonated beverage made by Coca-Cola Company based in Atlanta, Georgia.

[40] F. Farrokhzād, *Divān-e ash'ār-e Forugh Farrokhzād*, with an introduction by B. Jalāli, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Morvārid, 1371/1992, p. 461.

[41] Ibid., p. 458.

[42] K. Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000, p. 17.

Hosein Mansur Hallāj. For instance, in his poem entitled *Mansur manam manam manam Mansur* ('I am Mansur, I am, I am, Mansur'), the leftist activist poet, Mansur Owji (b. 1937) refers to Hallāj in his revolutionary poem to politicize the mystic's life and death. He likens himself (i.e. any potential protestor) to Hallāj to assert that Hallāj sacrificed his life for a higher cause, meaning divine love. Thus the revolutionaries, like him, should offer their lives for their cause: the revolution.[43] He identifies their possible death as spiritual elevation.

It would be beyond the scope of this introduction to refer to the various ways in which poetry was used in a political context. What is important in general and for this book in particular is to see that the relationship between poetry and politics was very close in 20th century Iran. In every period of Iran's recent history, poetry has been used as a way of communicating certain ideals, whether nationalistic, religious, or progressive, to the crowd.

During the 1978-79 Revolution, poetry was used as a means through which poets awakened Iranians to participate in demonstrations against the Shāh. Despite all the hopeful voices, very soon the voice of hopelessness was becoming a recurrent theme in the poetry and prose written in this period. Although the state tried to unite the intellectuals, and push them toward conformity, as Karimi-Hakkak states, they resisted this compulsory union. The following poem by Shams Langerudi (b. 1950) shows the resistance.[44]

bar-mikhizim va mineshinim
bar-mikhizim va mineshinim
va in bāzi-ye bi rahm
tā hafr-e marg zir-e qadam hāmān
hamchenān edāme dārad…[45]

We rise and fall

[43] *Dah shab*, collected by N. Mo'azzen, Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1357/1978, pp. 29-31; for another example see the poem *Tekrār* ('Repetition') by M. 'A. Bahmani, Ibid., p. 113.
[44] K. Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran,* pp. 110-11.
[45] Ibid.

We rise and fall
And this mercilessness game
Continues in this manner
Until death comes digging under our steps …

During the Revolution, the rising (*bar-khāstan*) refers to a conventional rhetoric of protest and resistance against the Pahlavi regime. But in Langarudi's poem because each rising ends in a fall, the process yields death and destruction.

After the Revolution, and during the war between Iran and Iraq, a new type of poetry came into being which aimed at mobilizing Iranians to support the war against Saddām Hosein.

CLASSICAL SHIITE AND MYSTIC PARADIGMS IN THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

During the war, the stories of Karbalā and imam Hosein's martyrdom were recounted by the leaders of the Islamic Republic and the war poets to propagate the necessity of self-sacrifice for the cause of religion. The narrative of Karbalā was re-told on the battlefield, comparing the soldiers to imam Hosein's companions and supporters. The ruler of Iraq was likened to the Umayyad Caliph, Yazid (r. 680-683), who was called an infidel because, at his orders, the prophet's grandson, imam Hosein was killed in Karbalā. Thus the Iranian soldiers saw themselves as true Muslims fighting against Iraqi infidels to avenge imam Hosein's blood. The Iraq authority, Saddām Hosein was turned into an archetypical tyrant, like Yazid, and his soldiers were called corrupted unbelievers because they reiterated the Umayyad soldiers' act and killed Iranians. To propagate this view, the Islamic Republic made extensive use of theological concepts such as the opposition between the will of God and evil. Iranians were called the representatives of the divine will and justice on earth and the Iraqi soldiers were compared to evil and its accomplices.

To encourage the youth to sacrifice their lives on the front line, the leaders of the Revolution retold narratives in their Friday sermons, on radio and television and in

newspapers. In these stories, the mothers of imam Hosein's companions are represented as supporting the struggle. They encouraged their sons to compete in laying down their lives for the cause of imam Hosein and to become a martyr of Islam. Such narratives motivated the parents to send their children to the battlefield, believing that they would be sacrificing their lives in the path of Islam. The soldiers were promised that in paradise they would be companions of the Master of the Martyrs (*Seyed al-Shohadā*).[46] Companionship with imam Hosein in paradise is an abiding hope for the Shiite Muslim. Not only does a martyr receive this blessing, he also has a chance to intercede on behalf of his family.

In the war poetry, imam Hosein was compared to the Islamic mystic martyr Mansur Hallāj, whom the mystics said was killed because he revealed his excessive love for God. In mystical literature, he is the symbol of union between a lover and the Beloved. Drawing a comparison between imam Hosein and Hallāj leads the audience to believe that the former's death united him with the Beloved. The Shiite soldier, a believer and follower of imam Hosein, assumes when on the front that he is offering his life in the path of love to obtain the same spiritual station that imam Hosein attained: union with the beloved. The soldier is allowed to put himself in the cycle of history and make the same sacrifice that imam Hosein and Hallāj did.

Ayatollah Khomeini, who returned to Iran in 1979 as the spiritual leader, or imam, took up political leadership as well. He was called the leader of the Islamic Revolution. His connection to the prophet Mohammad's family was indicated by his name: Ruhollāh Musavi Khomeini. He was introduced as a descendent of the seventh imam, Musā al-Kāzem (745-799). He, presenting himself to be fighting like the twelve Shiite imams, was fighting for the oppressed and downtrodden. In his sermons, he emphasized the rights of the poor and needy people, taken away by the wealthy. In accordance with Ayatollah Khomeini's views, the polarity of the oppressed versus the oppressor was used during the war. The Shiites of Iraq were called 'the oppressed nation' (*mellat-e mazlum-e 'Arāq*) because they were living in the power of a tyrant: Saddam Hosein. The Iranian soldiers,

[46] *Seyed al-shohadā* is one of the titles of imam Hosein.

taking the role of the companions of the prophet and the followers of the Shiite imams, fought against the Iraqi power in the hope of making the oppressed free and establishing a just authority. For this goal, they offered their lives. The Iranian soldiers believed they were fighting to preserve the right of the oppressed lovers of the prophet's family (i.e. the Shiites of Iraq) and to rescue them from the tyrannies imposed upon them by Saddam Hosein.[47] In return, they would achieve spiritual progress, and rewards in the hereafter.

To identify the fight as a mystical journey, mystical words such as self-purification, self-mortification, patience, and resignation are used in the war poetry and the sermons of the leaders of the Islamic Republic. Those words found a new, political, meaning. For instance, the war with Iraq was presented as the final spiritual stage at which the soldier-lover is united with the Beloved. Iranians, even illiterate people, are familiar with mystical words and expressions, which transcend the borders of time and space. They came to believe that their participation in the battle and enduring hardships at the front would purify their souls and draw them close to God. Several verses in the Qur'ān ask a Muslim to remain patient when suffering affliction or misery. One of the verses (39:10) reads: "… the steadfast (*sāberun*) will be paid their wages in full, beyond counting."[48] Patient submission to God's will is one of the most important virtues of the Muslims. It shows one's willingness to accept what God has decreed.[49] The soldier's contentment with his fate positions him within the order that is identified by the divine law. As long as he patiently follows the path of obedience, and to the extent that he is satisfied with the portion God allots to him, he may meet the Beloved and unite with Him in the hereafter. On this assumption, the soldier accepts his fate, fights to offer his life and expects to achieve a spiritual elevation that will unite him with the Beloved.

The war poets used mystical motifs associated with the concept of love, such as the school of love, the pen of love and the prayer of love to assert that fighting on the military front and self-sacrifice is a spiritual path through which one may attain spiritual ascent into

[47] K. Babayan, *Mystics, Monarchs and Messiahs; The Cultural Landscape of Early Modern Iran*, Cambridge, Mass: Distributed for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University by Harvard University Press, 2002, p. 141.
[48] D. Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, Cambridge, UK & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 128.
[49] Ibid.

union with the Beloved. When the metaphors are placed in a political context, they inspire the soldiers to compare themselves to a lover whose enthusiasm and devotion for attaining spiritual perfection leads him to lay down his life. On the battlefield, the Iraqi soldier is called the enemy of God, who is the Beloved, thus the soldier fights against the enemy to become an ideal lover: one who offers his life for the sake of the Beloved.

The war poets made many references to the Muslim mystics to introduce them as a spiritual model whose way of life should be emulated, and as heroes whose acts of self-sacrifice have to be imitated. In literary texts, mystics are compared to an ideal lover who denies the world, its desires and his own life. In fact it is not the mystic path that is celebrated in the war poetry, but the mystic's death, which is lauded to motivate the soldier to lay down his life. The life and death of the first mystic martyr of Islam, Mansur Hallāj is an especially common theme. He was executed at the order of the 'Abbāsid Caliph al-Moqtader (r. 908-932), who was Sunni, Arab, and based in Baghdad. In the years of the war it was said that Iraq is the enemy of the mystic Hallāj (representing Iranians). The soldier compares himself to the mystic who spends his whole life to achieve unity with the Beloved. The soldiers believed that, by comparison, the war offered a short cut to paradise.

ANTI-WESTERN POETIC RHETORIC AFTER THE REVOLUTION (1979)

After the Revolution, several issues emerged. Does Islamic theology meet the needs of modern Iran? Can it confront the "Western" schools of thought? Such questions led the victorious Revolutionaries to confront the secular intellectuals, mainly liberal and leftist, who had been the first groups to oppose the Pahlavi regime. The Islamic revolutionary leaders seized power from other parties who had been active before and during the revolution. The newly established Islamic Republic called such parties who demanded their share "westoxicated, alienated and imitating." Their presence was declared to be of no vital importance for the Islamic Revolution. However intellectuals who agreed with the political

and cultural stance of the Islamic revolutionaries were allowed to stay in Iran.[50] Soon after the Revolution, in 1980, Iran's neighbor, Iraq, attacked Iranian territory. This rallied the population in support of the revolution. At the beginning of the war, two new genres emerged in Persian literature. The first was the 'literature of resistance' (*adabiyyāt-e moqāvemat*), which glorifies death for the sake of Islam in what was called the 'Imposed War' (*jang-e tahmili*) against Iraq. The other genre was protest against "the excesses of the Revolution" which limited freedom of speech in the name of religion.[51] Some popular poems and works of fiction, such as Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad's fiction, may be classified as 'literature of resistance' because they had a major influence on the development of protests against the Pahlavi monarch, Mohammad Rezā Shāh.[52]

Although before the Revolution, poets and poetry conveyed anti-regime sentiments after the Revolution for a short period of time poetry was condemned. Later on, poetry was recognized as a tool that could influence the Iranians to lay down their lives for the cause of the Islamic Revolution. This shift in attitude toward poetry happened because the leaders of the Islamic Republic quickly realized that poetry has a prominent role in the life of Iranians. Writers committed to the Islamic Republic such as Hosein Razmju (b. 1932) and many others had claimed that writing poems is a valueless job. He asserts, "In addition to a handful of literary works which are epic, mystical and narrative masterpieces, there are others written to praise and glorify a selfish king, a proud ruler, those who hold wealth and the power of decision. The poets celebrate wine, wine drinking, and making love to women and male servants…, those poets use poetry as a means to legitimize the tyrant kings, and introduce them as lovers of literature and the arts…"[53] Hosein Razmju goes on to say, "… at this time, there is no one funnier, more useless, inefficacious, and malapropos, than

[50] M. Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996, p.157.
[51] I. Stumpel, "Religion in Contemporary Persian Prose," in *Religious Perspectives in Modern Muslim and Jews Literature*, eds. G. Abramson & H. Kilpatrick, New York: Rutledge, 2006, p. 416.
[52] H. Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, New York: New York University Press, 1993, p. 94.
[53] H. Razmju, *She'r-e kohan-e fārsi dar tarāzu-ye naqd-e akhlāq-e eslāmi*, vol. 1, Mashhad: Mo'assase-ye chāp va enteshārāt-e Āstān-e Qods-e Razavi, 1366/ 1988, p. 70.

poets."[54] In the sixth chapter of his *She'r-e kohan-e fārsi dar tarāzu-ye naqd-e akhlāq-e eslāmi* ('Classical Persian Literature Weighed against Islamic Morality'), Hosein Razmju elaborates on poetry from an Islamic point of view. He holds that in Islam, poetry is praised if the poet glorifies divine subjects (*omur-e khodā'i*), and combines them with the elements of commitment and eternity. To offer a new concept from poetry in line with Islamic traditions, the author gives several examples of the prophet Mohammad's attitude toward poetry. During the war, he asked the poets to make fun of the enemy, and recite their poems to motivate the fighters to break the enemy's resistance. According to Hosein Razmju, as a result, "because of the blessing they received from the Qur'ān and the tradition, among the prophet's companions, a group of poets defended Islam before his eyes."[55] On this basis, Hosein Razmju says that the leaders of the Islamic Republic use their influence on Iranians and ask poets to write about the war to inspire the crowd to support the soldiers on the battlefield.

In a collection of seminary lectures called *Seminār-e barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi* ('Seminar for Exploring the Literature of the Islamic Revolution') held in 1994 in Tehran, Hedayatollāh Behbudi (b. 1960) writes that there are several reasons for the development of the 'literature of resistance' during the war. The author asserts that the genre originates among the ordinary people. He points out that because Iran had been governed by autocratic regimes, this form of literature had not emerged previously. Behbudi holds that (1) Iranian revolutionaries, who overthrew the Pahlavi regime, founded this genre. (2) Social changes played an inevitable role in constructing the 'literature of resistance'. Among the social changes, Behbudi refers to Iran's Revolution, and Iraq's military attack on Iran (1980). (3) The intellectual leaders (*rahbarān-e fekri*) who influence a community are an important element because they participate in establishing the 'literature of resistance'. Conservatives such as Mohsen Makhmalbaf (b. 1957) who during the war as a filmmaker and fiction writer tried to propagate and export the principles prescribed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, but later changed his attitude toward the Islamic

[54] Ibid., p. 73.
[55] Ibid., pp. 86-87.

Revolution, have asserted that before the Revolution, the literature of Iran was controlled by the ideals of the Pahlavi monarch. Thus, poets propagated irreligious norms. For instance, they supported the official unveiling and treated veiling as a factor that hindered Iranians' progress and promoted cultural backwardness. In addition, the Western cultural influence that was perceived by many as an onslaught inspired Iranian poets. Thus, they followed Western patterns of poetry. Behbudi provides an example from Sādeq Hedāyat (1903-1951) who was unsuccessful in pursuing his education abroad. He became disappointed and after several years, he committed suicide. His literary works are dominated by disappointment and hopelessness.[56] Behbudi asserts that Hedāyat's negative view of life is inspired by Western culture. He disseminated negative attitudes of French writers such as the uselessness of life, and choosing suicide as a solution.[57] For Behbudi, the poetry of resistance, by contrast, originated from Iranian oral literature. He cites a slogan chanted by protesters against the Pahlavi regime:

ey Shāh-e khā'en āvāre gardi
khāk-e vatan rā virāne kardi
koshti javānān-e vatan, Allāh-o Akbar
kardi hezārān dar kafan, Allāh-o Akbar…[58]

O traitor king! May you be homeless
You have laid waste to the soil of the homeland
You have killed the youths of the homeland, God is the Greatest
You have wrapped thousands of youths in shrouds, God is the Greatest.

[56] About Sādeq Hedāyat and his literary works see: H. Katouzian, *Sadeq Hedayat: The Life and Legend of an Iranian Writer*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2002.

[57] M.K. Kohdu'i, "Barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e takhdiri, bihadaf va mote'ahed dar dowrān-e mo'āser va tahavvol-e ānhā dar dowre-ye enqelāb-e eslāmi" in *Majmu'e-ye maqālāt-e seminār-e barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*, Tehran: Samt, 1373/1994, pp. 480-81.

[58] H. Behbudi, "Adabiyyāt-e enqelāb," in *Majmu'e-ye maqālāt-e seminār-e barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*, Tehran: Samt, 1373/1994, p. 80.

This form of poetry was used in protests. After the Revolution, the 'literature of resistance' was recited at the end of congregational prayers. During the war years, the following slogan was used in this way: "God is the Greatest, God is the Greatest, Khomeini is the leader, death to 'those who are against the absolute supremacy and guardianship of the *jurisprudent'* (*velāyat-e faqih*), and praise be to the fighters for Islam, greetings to the martyrs, death to America, death to Israel."[59] Many slogans used during the war referred to the martyrdom of imam Hosein, linking the war with his fight against Yazid's troops. Imam Hosein, 'the master of martyrs', has a very high rank in Shiite Islam. For Iranians, the war was not conducted simply to repel the Iraqi invasion; they hoped to occupy Karbalā, the major holy city of the Shiites located in Iraq, and to avenge the blood of imam Hosein.

Another slogan that was popular during 1980s is:

jang jang tā piruzi
War, war until victory
mijangim, mimirim, sāzesh nemipazirim
We fight, we die, and we do not accept conformity
Hosein, Hosein sho'ār-e māst
Our slogan is Hosein, Hosein
Shahādat eftekhār-e mast[60]
Martyrdom is our pride.

In sum, Iranians' ideals are pictured in the 'literature of resistance'. On the one hand, the 'literature of resistance' reflects Iranians' desire to overthrow the Pahlavi Regime, and replace it with new power structures called 'revolutionary authority.' On the other hand, the

[59] Ibid. The concept of *velāyat-e faqih* was developed by Ayatollah Khomeini in his book *Islamic Government*. He asserts that to institutionalize the authority of the jurists, the leadership should be offered to a supreme jurist. Several leading Islamic scholars condemned the notion as 'innovation.' For further information see A. M. Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921: The Pahlavis and after*, London & New York: Longman, 2003, pp. 225-6.

[60] H. Behbudi, "Adabiyyāt-e enqelāb," p. 81.

literature illustrates Iranian's desire for self-sacrifice to rescue the country from the enemy's invasion. A scholar of Persian literature, Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak asserts that the 'literature of resistance' did not attract the attention of critics, but in the 1980s it was used as a political tool to restrict the influence of leftists, so that they could not gain power in the Islamic state.[61]

After the Islamic Revolution, writers who supported the Islamic state propagated its ideologies. In return, the state provided them with the opportunity to participate in social activities in regular and religious schools, Islamic associations, and mosques. These writers constructed a new body of literature called the 'literature of the Islamic Revolution' (*Adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*) through which they showed Iranians' opposition to the Pahlavi regime, and the tragedies of the Iran-Iraq war. The poets and writers created revolutionary-Islamic motifs that drew parallels between the war and the concepts and motifs used by classical mystics to express their spiritual state. Among the poets who developed the mystical motifs in the war context were Teymur Gorgin, Musavi Garmārudi (b. 1941) and Tāhere Saffārzāde (b. 1936). Gholām-'Ali Haddād-'Ādel (b.1945), a member of the Islamic Republic Party who has served in many governmental posts, asserts that the 'literature of the Islamic Revolution' not only depicts the physical world it also concerns the metaphysical world. It deals with concepts such as 'the world of Unseen' ('*Ālam-e gheyb*) and 'the world of Witness' ('*Ālam-e shahādat*) and it is filled with mystical concepts. It is worth noting that mysticism in the 'literature of the Islamic Revolution' does not entail abandoning society, as one sees in mystical literature, rather it seeks to establish a better society.[62] Haddād-'Ādel combines the mystical concept of 'the world of Witness,' a reference to a mystic's encounter with God, with Iran's political situation. In medieval mystical treatises, the concept is only used to show one's spiritual progress without making any reference to one's social or political situation. During the war, these concepts were used to offer a spiritual dimension to the war. The soldiers came to believe that they were mystics who on their path to union had to be ready to offer their lives.

[61] K. Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran*, p. 134.

[62] Gh.'A. Haddād-'Ādel, "Sokhani pirāmun-e māhiyyat-e adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi," in *Majmu'e-ye maqālāt-e seminār-e barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*, Tehran: Samt, 1373/1994, p. 348.

Haddād-ʻĀdel describes the path of mystics as quietist, whereas in the 'literature of the Islamic Revolution' genre, there is no room for solitude and mysticism. He implies that mystics are apathetic people who have no useful occupation, but benefit from other groups. During the war, the acts of prayer, fasting, contemplation in solitude and renouncing society were remodeled in anʻactive mysticism,' in which the 'mystic' is one who participates in the fight and offers his life. Another characteristic of this literary genre is that it is committed to moral and social values, and to defending oppressed groups. It reflects protest of the crowd against tyranny, and is people-oriented (*mardom-sālār*). Haddād-ʻĀdel adds that *Adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi* pays attention to man, but it is different from the Western concept of Humanism in which literary genre man is not the focal point. The higher truths are derived from the fountain of revelation and monotheism. God is the main goal of the poet who is committed to the principles of the Islamic Revolution. These poets choose their path to God through society and community (literally, the poets are leading the community to self-sacrifice through the path of religion. Thus, they will receive their rewards in the Hereafter).

Love is another characteristic of *Adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi* according to Haddād-ʻĀdel. He makes a distinction between love and sex, and refers to the latter as a characteristic of Western literature and Iran's pre-Revolutionary literature. He adds that the poets and writers of the period after the Islamic Revolution are world-oriented, and are not contaminated by Westoxication (*gharbzadegi*): they are aware of oppressed peoples such as Africans and Palestinians, and the hardships they endure. These poets and writers do not conform to Western literature. Although *Adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi* values masterpieces of Persian classical literature, such as the *Shāhnāme* ('Book of Kings', completed 1010) by Ferdowsi and the works of Saʻdi (ca. 1210-1292), "we" (Haddād-ʻĀdel refers to himself as a participant in the Cultural Revolution (e*nqelāb-e farhangi')*[63] "reserve the right to

[63] In 1980, after the Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini appointed a Council of the Cultural Revolution (*Komite-ye enqelāb-e farhangi*) to revise university books and diminish the non-Islamic content. This continued for three years, during which the universities were closed and many professors and students could never return to their work. See N. R. Keddie & Yann Richard, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2003, p. 250.

criticize these works from Islamic and moral perspectives."[64] The Cultural Revolution may be identified as a revolutionary movement in the arena of scholarship against any secular viewpoint, based on the norms and principles of the Islamic Revolution. For instance, any scholarship related to the fields of social sciences, or incorporating Western, nationalist, or colonialist viewpoints was considered irreligious. To control all political activity, the new Islamic Republic closed all universities, and fired many employees.[65]

Haddād-ʻĀdel says that the 'literature of the Islamic Revolution' is understandable for all Iranians and anyone who speaks Persian. This makes this literary genre different from pre-revolution literary works, which used a language ordinary people did not understand, setting the intellectuals apart from the rest of the society.[66]

Among the fiction writers of the post-revolutionary period are Mohammad Nurizade (b. 1949), Mehdi Shojāʻi, and Mohsen Makhmalbāf. An important aspect of the literary works of this period is the emphasis on the fundamental role of the clerics in guiding people and implementing Islamic faith in the community. Authors assert that the clergy are God's representatives, performing God's will on earth. God rewards good deeds, nourishes the poor and cures people's illnesses and when necessary He tests people's faith with severe hardships such as war. The state offered awards to those who wrote about Islamic art and culture, or established an institution to promote Islamic ideology, or introduced Islamic art and culture to other nations. All these activities were organized under the authority of the Council for Cultural Revolution of the Islamic Republic. To receive support from the Council, commitment to the revolution became an inevitable factor in the literary works of the time.[67]

The literary works of Makhmalbāf, a famous filmmaker, cultivated the principles of the Islamic state among Iranians, was among the supporters of the Islamic state. Several of

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[64] Gh.ʻA. Haddād-ʻĀdel, "Sokhani pirāmun-e māhiyyat-e adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi," pp. 349-351.
[65] N. Fāzeli, *Politics of Culture in Iran: Anthropology, Politics, and Society in the Twentieth Century*, London & New York: Routledge, 2006, p.135.
[66] Gh.ʻA. Haddād-ʻĀdel, "Sokhani pirāmun-e māhiyyat-e adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi," pp. 351-52.
[67] K. Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran*, pp. 111-112. For further information about fiction in Persian literature see S. Behbahānī and EIr, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Fiction, ii (a) Historical Background of Modern Fiction.

his works of fiction, such as *Bāgh-e bolur* ('The Crystal Garden') and *Ma rā bebus* ('Kiss me'), define the ideology of the Islamic state.[68] In *Bāgh-e bolur* he illustrates the hardships that martyrs' families were enduring while supporting the Revolution and its values. In this work there are references to a young man disabled by war. The characters of the work are living in a large house belonging to a wealthy man who left the country after the Revolution. Now, the wealthy man has returned and wants to keep his home.[69] Lāye, a woman whose husband is martyred in the Iran-Iraq war, gives birth to a child several months later. Suri, also a war widow, is living with her husband's parents. Despite the bereavement they share, they argue over everything. Makhmalbāf illustrates their disagreement with references to religious characters. For instance, while they are arguing, Suri's mother in law of 'Āliye says to Suri "do you think you are the afflicted Zeynab or the oppressed Zahrā, or a prisoner in the hands of Hend, the liver eater."[70] These names (i.e. Zeynab and Zahrā) refer to famous Muslim figures. After imam Hosein's death, his sister Zeynab was taken to Damascus as a prisoner where she protested before the 'Umayyad caliph, Yazid. Zahrā is the title of Fāteme, the prophet's daughter and the wife of the first Shiite imam, 'Ali. Hend is Abu Sofyān's wife. In the battle of Badr, Hend prompted a slave to kill Hamze, the prophet's uncle. Then she asked the slave to cut open his chest so that Hend could eat his liver. Makhmalbāf makes Suri an example for widows: her martyred husband was her supporter, and her hope in life. Another family living in the same home is Malihe and her husband, Hamid. He is *jānbāz* (literally means 'soul gambler' or 'gambling with the soul') a war disabled. Malihe married him in the hope of a reward in the hereafter. On the one hand, Makhmalbāf has tried to illustrate the difficulties that the martyrs' families endure, and their struggle to earn a living. On the other hand, he asserts that Iranians are responsible to support these families and in return they will be rewarded in heaven.

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[68] Ibid., p. 6.

[69] After the Islamic Revolution, people connected to the Pahlavi regime left the country and their properties was taken by the revolutionaries. Later an organization named Bonyād mostaz'afān took them and gave them to needy people to live in.

[70] M. Makhmalbāf, *Bāgh-e bolur*, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Barg, 1365/1986, p. 48.

Commitment to the 'values of the Revolution' (*arzeshhā-ye enqelāb*) was emphasized in literary seminars. The 'literature of the Revolution' was called 'divine culture' (*farhang-e elāhi*). The term implies that the Islamic Revolution originates with God and aims to develop religious principles. The implication was that anyone who did not agree with the values prescribed by the leaders of the Revolution was opposed to God's will and religious doctrine. The leaders of the Islamic Revolution claimed that they were God's representatives on earth. In this way, they encouraged the masses to participate in the fight to preserve the Islamic Revolution and its values. Iranians sacrificed their children too so that the 'divine culture' would supplant the Western culture propagated in Pahlavi period. Ahmad Ahmadi compares the pre-revolutionary poets, influenced by secularist culture and its literature, whose works are of no literary or religious value, to the post-revolutionary and war poets. The latter, he says, were raised in the school of the Shiite imams and nurtured from Islamic culture.[71] Ahmad Ahmadi cites Tondguyān's death in prison in Iraq, and says that we [Iranians] are responsible for preserving this culture (of martyrdom), in order to preserve the principles of the Islamic Republic.[72]

Manuchehr Akbari has also explained the characteristics of the 'literature of Revolution':

> "The poetry of revolution reflects anger, revolt, resistance and confrontation. It is the poetry of protest, of crying out, the poetry of life and chivalry; it is the poetry of compassion and enmity… the poetry of revolution is built with love, mysticism and epic…. In the poetry of revolution, mysticism is inscribed with protest against the idol (*tāghut*) in the field of fire, flowers, bullets and blood; on the trenches and the battlefields of light against darkness, by the mystics [alludes to the soldiers] of the path who knowingly have chosen it. They register their names in a battalion waiting for martyrdom, or in groups who strive for martyrdom. They run on the minefields … The mystics of the poetry of revolution are the youth such as Fahmide… they are

[71] A. Ahmadi, "Khāstgāh-e adabiyyāt-e qabl va ba'd az enqelāb," in *Majmu'e-ye maqālāt-e seminār-e barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*, Tehran: Samt, 1373/1994, pp. 4-6.
[72] Ibid., p. 7.

another manifestation of the victory of blood over sword."[73]

Akbari links the 'literature of Revolution' to love, mysticism, protest, and martyrdom. These concepts are frequently used in the war poetry. Akbari draws an analogy between the soldier and a mystic who strives to sacrifice his worldly desires on the path to spiritual perfection.

The literary works produced immediately after the Islamic Revolution often refer to the events of Karbalā. The death of Hosein, the third Shiite imam, is given a cosmic significance; Karbalā is a place where miracles happen. The motif of Karbalā is associated with a sort of divine aura. Writers and poets committed to the ideology of the state used the motif to foster loyalty to the Islamic state, and to motivate the people to support the war and sacrifice their lives as imam Hosein had, and thereby to enter paradise. This is also reflected in the memoirs that many soldiers wrote, describing their experiences on the battlefield.[74] The poets referred to the Muslims of the early centuries of Islam and their experiences on the battlefield, or praised them and the martyrs.[75] They are introduced as archetypes of piety. In a poem entitled *az nasl-e sorkh-e Sarbedārān* ('The Offspring from the Red, i.e. Bloody, Generation of *Sarbedārān'*), the poet Seyed Hasan Hoseini praises the soldiers died martyr's death, and compares them to a river (*rud*), which flows towards God. He holds that they are the companions of the messenger [Ayatollah Khomeini] of their time. He draws an analogy between the youth martyred during the war and the first companions of the prophet, al-'Ammār Ebn Yāser (d. 657), al-Abuzar Ghaffāri (d. 652) and Heydar (d. 661), a title of the first Shiite imam, 'Ali Ebn Abi Tāleb.[76]

Another literary genre used to support Iran's revolutionary state is known as

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[73] M. Akbari, "Negāhi be she'r-e enqlāb-e nur," in *Majmu'e-ye maqālāt-e seminār-e barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*, Tehran: Samt, 1373/1994, pp.18-19; for another explanation of the literature of Revolution see S. Kāshāni, "Adabiyyāt-e enqlāb-e eslāmi va mobāreze bā estekbār," in *Majmu'a-ye maqālāt-e seminār-e barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*, Tehran: Samt, 1373/1994, pp. 401-410.

[74] K. Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran,* pp. 114-5. For further information about fiction written in this period and a comparison between the Islamic activists and pre-revolutionary fiction writers see Ibid., pp. 116-124.

[75] Ibid., p. 124.

[76] See S. H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Sure-ye Mehr, 1387/2008, p. 41.

maktabi literature. The word *maktabi* became popular in Iran after the Islamic Revolution. A *maktab* is a traditional Islamic school. Maktabi literature refers to Islamic ideologically-oriented literature, produced by a group of revolutionary authors faithful to the principles of the Islamic Republic. The Islamic regime used the term to refer to individuals who wholeheartedly supported Ayatollah Khomeini's ideology. Before the Islamic Revolution, the revolutionary ideologue 'Ali Shari'ati had used the word in his works to refer to what he considered to be "the very spirit of Islam: its ideology."[77] He sought to offer a new ideology based on the Islamic heritage but free of the old Islamic sciences, which were the preserve of the *'olamā*. Shari'ati explains *maktab* as:

> …a harmonious and well-proportioned set of philosophical perspectives, religious beliefs, ethical principles, and methods of action which in a relation of cause and effect with each other constitute an active, meaningful, goal-oriented body which is alive, and in which all its various organs are fed by the same blood and are alive by the same spirit."[78]

Since the Islamic Revolution, the word *maktabi* has been applied to Islamic principles attuned to the Revolution, and to people who serve the oppressed. The Revolution was called the revolution of the oppressed, and the needs of the oppressed who live in clay houses (*kukh-neshinān*) were given priority over the needs of those who live in palaces (*kākh-neshinān*).[79] Manuchehr Akbari calls the poets who addressed Islamic values in their poems *Shā'er-e ahl-e velāyat*, which literally means 'the poets faithful to the prophet and the twelve Shiite imams.' He asserts that these poets supported the Islamic Republic, and followed the principles prescribed by the leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini. Manuchehr Akbari adds that the poets gave a positive answer to the

[77] H. Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent,* p. 128.
[78] Ibid. For further information about Shari'ati's views on *maktab* see 'A. Shari'ati, *Eslāmshenāsi: tarh-e asāsi-ye maktab*, Āmrikā va Kānādā: Anjoman-e eslāmi-ye dānishjuyān dar Āmrikā va Kānādā, 1355 /1976, pp. 1-37.
[79] Z. Mostafavi, "Barrasi-ye naqsh-e adabiyyāt-e enqlāb-e eslāmi dar mobāreze bā refāh-talabi," in *Majmu'e-ye maqālāt-e seminār-e barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*, Tehran: Samt, 1373/1994, p. 568.

imam of lovers and the old sage, meaning Ayatollah Khomeini. These poets employed Islamic and religious motifs and concepts such as the garment of imamate or leadership (*redāy emāmat*), the religion of love (*mazhab-e 'eshq*), and the perfume of 'God is the Greatest' (*'atr-e takbir*).[80] These motifs are important for the supporters of the Islamic Republic because the garment of imamate refers to the succession of the twelve imams who are regarded as the prophet's heirs, and the belief that their right of succession is handed down to the leader or leaders of the Islamic Republic. The religion of love motif relates to self-sacrifice for the principles of the Islamic Revolution. The perfume of 'God is great' points to the important role of this slogan during the Revolution (1978), when Iranians began their opposition to the Pahlavi regime by going to the roof tops at night and crying "God is great." The slogan was also used during the war when Iranians attacked Iraqi soldiers, running on the Iraqi minefields toward the enemy,[81] or when they gained a victory. In the war poetry the main motifs and metaphors were those related to the war and to martyrdom. The war poets used these concepts to support the ideology of the state, and to justify the war. Their poetry was an effective tool to inspire the Iranian population to support the Islamic Republic, and to participate in the fight.

The use of religious motifs in the war poetry can be illustrated using 'Lyric of Tulip-Faces' (*ghazal-e lāle-rokhān*) by 'Ali-Rezā Qazve:

ānān ke halq-e teshne be khanjar seporde-and
āb-e hayāt az lab-e shamshir khorde-and
tā dar bahār-e bāresh-e khun bārvar shavad
nakhli neshānde-and-o be yārān seporde-and
bār-e amānati ke falak barnatāftash
bar dush-e jān nahāde dar in rāh borde-and
in bishomār lāle-rokhān dar havā-ye yār

[80] M. Akbari, "Negāhi be she'r-e enqlāb-e nur," pp. 11-14.
[81] R. Baer, *The Devil We Know: Dealing with the New Iranian Superpower*, New York: Crown Publishers, 2008, p. 3.

tā ruz-e vasl thāniye-hā rā shemorde-and
har-chand shākhe-hā-ye ze tufān shekaste-and
har-chand sho'lehā-ye be zāher fesorde-and
ruzi-khorān-e sofre-ye 'eshq-and tā abad
ey zendegān-e khāk maguid morde-and[82]

Those who have entrusted their thirsty throats to the blade,
Have drunk the Water of Life from the edge of the sword.
That it may grow in the spring, when blood is being shed
They have planted a palm tree and entrusted it to the companions.
The Burden of Trust that the sky could not carry
They have carried on the shoulders of their souls.
These countless tulip-faced [lovers], in their desire for union with the Friend
Have counted the moments till the day of union.
Although they are like branches broken by typhoons,
Although they appear as a fire grown cold,
They are nourishing from the table of love for ever.
O you who live in clay, do not say they are dead.

In this poem, the martyrs of the war are compared to the prophet Khezr who drank from the Water of Life and gained eternal life.[83] The compound 'to entrust one's throats to the blade' (*halq be khanjar sepordan*) implies the act of self-sacrifice. The poet holds that the soldiers, who passionately go the battlefield simply to be killed, will survive eternally; like the prophet Khezr. In the fourth line there is a reference to the palm, a tree that is mentioned in the Qur'ān several times (2:266; 59:5; 80:29). The Qur'ān refers to palm trees in paradise, and the tree in the physical world is a sign of it (6:99). The tree is a source of nutrition for Mary, who shakes the trunk and eats the dates that fall upon her (19:25). In the fourth line,

[82] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, pp. 19-20.
[83] In the Islamic tradition, the prophet Khezr is living eternally because he found the Water of Life in the darkness and drank from the Water.

the poet uses the Qur'ānic image of the palm tree, saying that the martyr has planted a tree and left it to his companions, who are responsible for nurturing it. The tree grows when blood rains down. The poet is comparing preserving the principles of the Islamic Republic to protecting the tree, which entails emulating the martyrs and sacrificing one's life.

In the fifth and sixth lines there is a reference to the Qur'ānic concept of the Burden of Trust (*amānat*). This refers to the primordial covenant (7:171) when God confirmed man's duty to obey by asking the seed in the loins of Adam: "Am I not Your Lord," to which they answered: "Yes we witness it." According to the Qur'ān "the heavens and the earth and the mountains refused to carry [the burden of trust] and were afraid of it; but man took it up." (33:72). Martyrs carried the Burden of Trust by sacrificing their lives on the military front, according to the poet. Thus, they are true to the promise that Adam's progeny made in the Primordial time.

In the seventh line, the martyrs are said to be tulip-faced. A red tulip or rose symbolizes martyrdom, or the blood that is shed.[84] The potential martyrs on the battlefield are counting the moments to the time of union. In Persian literature, the compound *shemordan-e thāniye*, counting the moments, shows a lover's impatience and enthusiasm to unite with the Beloved. The poet draws an analogy between the soldiers and lovers; both are prepared to lay down their lives in the path of the Beloved. In the last lines, the poet refers to a Qur'ānic verse (3:169) to assert the martyrs' high rank in the hereafter. The verse says that God feeds the martyrs. The final reference to those who live in clay (*zendegān-e khāk*, literally, 'livings on earth') highlights the difference between the martyrs who live but not in this world and ordinary people who are bound by their daily needs.

IMPLEMENTING ISLAMIC IDEOLOGY (1982-83)

It was essential for the post-revolutionary Iran to implement Islamic teaching in order to

[84] U. Marzolph, "The Martyr's Way of Paradise: Shiite Mural Art in the Urban Context," in *Sleepers, Moles and Martyrs: Secret Identifications, Social Integration and the Differing Meanings of Freedom*, eds. R. Bendix & J. Bendix, Copenhagen: Musum Tusculanum Press &University of Copenhagen, 2004, p. 90.

stabilize the state's authority and power. After the Revolution, all key legislative, executive and judicial posts were occupied by clerics or people loyal to the teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini, who were called *maktabi*, or bound to ideology. The state started to develop the groundwork for an Islamic ideology and law. The first step was the Islamization of education. After transforming the primary and secondary schools, the state focused on Islamizing the universities, from the autumn of 1980. The idea was to counter the influence that the superpowers, notably the United States of America, had had on education under Pahlavi rule. In December 1982, Ayatollah Khomeini stated, "In contrast to the old universities, which had made their students backward and dependent [on the Western education and culture], a pure Islamic system would lead to progress and independence.[85] The Islamic state went one step further by institutionalizing revolutionary organs. The Coordination of the Revolutionary Guards was established in December 1981, and followed by the Ministry of Revolutionary Guards in November 1982. The formation of the organs, named above, leaded to better coordination between the parties who supported the state. The organs played the major role in implementing ideological ideas in 1983. In this period, new foundations were established as perpetual trusts to implement the principles and ideologies of the state, to assist the families of the martyrs, or to reconstruct the destroyed cities.[86] Among these foundations were the local *Komite*s, or local militant groups. Komites consisted of young, idealistic and radical men or women who gained their positions almost overnight, thanks to political upheavals. Some of them had been active in overthrowing the Pahlavi monarchy, and some others, possessed weapons. They confiscated the weapons when they attacked the army barracks. Thus, in many cases, they acted without receiving orders from their leaders, whether Marxist, Islamic-Marxist, or Islamic.[87] These foundations performed several duties such as propagating Islamic and moral values. Foundations such as the Foundation of the Dispossessed (*bonyād-e mostaz'afān*), the Foundation for the Martyrs (*bonyād-e shahid*), the Housing Foundation (*bonyād-e maskan*),

[85] D. Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution*, New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1990, p. 274.
[86] Ibid., p. 265.
[87] A.M. Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921*, p. 213. See also D. Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution,* pp. 82-3.

and the Reconstruction Foundation (*bonyād-e sāzandegi*) were so important for revolutionary Iran that the prime minister, Mir-Hosein Musavi, said: "If we lose these organs we lose the Revolution."[88] From 1983, the state focused on relatively marginal issues intended to reinforce Islamic tenets: Persian words replaced Western equivalents, Iranizing commercial names, and orienting the tourist industry to Islamic sites rather than Iran's pre-Islamic and cultural monuments.[89]

In 1985, five years after the Islamic revolution, an influential literary movement took shape. A group of students headed by Ahmad Zāre'i in the city of Mashhad, in the province of Khorāsān in northeastern Iran, started a movement that sought to disseminate revolutionary and Islamic values such as self-sacrifice and acts of bravery. One year later, in 1986, a poets' gathering took place in the southern city of Ahvaz, with the support of the Basij organization, the volunteer forces of the army. In 1990, the gathering was called the Congress of the Poetry of the Armed Forces. Two years later this cultural organization was renamed the Congress of the Poetry of Sacred Defense. It has been supported by the Organization for the Preservation and Propagation of Sacred Literature and Values. Over the years, the Organization has focused on drawing the attention of both those poets who were supported by university students and the intelligentsia, and of poets who did not want to become active involved members of the Congress.[90] The war poets who participated in the annual Congress, produced various forms of poetry such as lyrics (*ghazal*), panegyric (*qaside*), narrative poems (*mathnavi*), quatrains (*robā'i*), and the 'new poetry' (*she'r-e now*). The war poets followed in the footsteps of classic poets in poetic forms, and drew on classical Persian love literature in which the superiority of love over reason is proven. The ubiquity of the theme of love in classical Persian mystical poetry gave the war poets a wide range of classical love themes and motifs to draw on, such as the academy of love (*madrase-ye 'eshq*), the book of love (*ketāb-e 'eshq*), and the *ka'be* (sacred destination) of love (*ka'be-ye 'eshq*). In addition to mystical motifs, the war poets also drew on religious

[88] D. Menashri, *Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution*, p. 265.
[89] Ibid., p. 262.
[90] N. Farzad,"Qeysar Aminpur and the Persian Poetry of Sacred Defense," in *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 34:3, 2007, pp. 353-4.

motifs to legitimize Iran's war against Iraq. For example, imam Hosein's death on the plain of Karbalā is presented as a symbol of altruistic self-sacrifice. They used motifs related to the event of *'Āshurā* such as the book of *'Āshurā* (*ketāb-e 'Āshurā*), and the path of Hosein (*rāh-e Hosein*).

A focal concept in the poetry of the Sacred Defense was honoring the youth martyred in the fight against Iraq. Because they knowingly sacrificed their lives to revive the principles of the Revolution, a war poet should not fail to praise their sacrifice. His poem should embody loyalty to the martyrs' goals.

The Organization for the Preservation and Propagation of Sacred Literature and Values has two central aims. Firstly, to deliver the message of the martyrs to the community. Secondly, to disseminate the main ideas and values that inspire the poetry of revolution.[91] The martyrs' message to the community is that they should support the Islamic state and follow the principles of the leader of the Islamic Republic. In addition, the martyrs ask Iranians to emulate imam Hosein's self-sacrifice. By employing those notions, the war poets promoted the core ideas of the Revolution and mobilized the Iranian population to fight and offer their lives for the cause of the Revolution.

Qeysar Aminpur was one of the poets who participated in establishing the Literary Movement of Sacred Defense. In his poems, Aminpur portrays the destruction of the Iran-Iraq war and encourages the soldiers to fight. In 'A Poem for War' (*She'ri barāy-e jang*), he says that in a time of war, the pen is not adequate to show opposition: one has to take up weapons. The poet portrays a war scene, in which a man's severed head is found on a roof far from his home, and a bloody doll shows where a child has been killed. The poet uses these heartbreaking scenes to inspire the community to support the soldiers, and he emphasizes that they are victorious because they are following the orders of their imam, Ayatollah Khomeini, who calls for resistance and self-sacrifice. Aminpur tells the soldiers that they should continue to offer their lives until the throats of their mothers burn from mourning.[92]

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[91] Ibid., pp. 358-9.

[92] *Gozide-ye she'r-e jang va defā'-e moqaddas*, selection, notes and explanation of the context by S. H.

Many poets honor the martyrs of the war and the eight years of sacred defense, with different levels of eloquence and strength. I will refer briefly to the poems by Simin Behbahāni, known as "one of Iran's highest-ranked contemporary poets" and " Iran's national poet."[93] Before the Revolution, she used poetry to show her opposition to the Pahlavi regime. She wrote against oppression and injustice imposed by the Pahlavi regime, and demanded a change in the political system, using the metaphors and codes used by pre-revolutionary writers. For instance, to refer to the dictatorship, she uses metaphors of fruitlessness, cold and silence, while the Revolution is referred to with metaphors of spring and the rainbow.[94] Iranians are victims of social injustice. Their lives are a struggle for a loaf of bread, security, honor and freedom from pain and poverty, according to Behbahāni.[95] In a poem entitled 'The Angel of Freedom' (*fereshte-ye āzādi*), Behbahāni addresses an oncoming revolution. She says that a demon (*div*) is drinking the blood of the youth, and enchains the angel of freedom. Furious, noble souls sacrifice their lives, draw their blades, and kill the demon.[96] Some of her war poems present painful scenes of the war. 'Write it Down, Write it Down' (*Benevis, Benevis*) illustrates a war scene in which defenseless Iranian civilians are killed. She praises the soldiers killed in defending the country, and refers to them as those who have chosen death and won honor.[97]

My discussion of another poem by Behbahāni, 'I Will Rebuild you, O my Homeland' (*Dobāre misāzamat vatan*) draws on Kamran Talattof's discussion of this work. The poet says:

dobāre misāzamat vatan, agarche bā khesht-e jān-e khish
sotun be saqf-e to mizanam agarche bā ostokhān-e khish

Hoseini, Tehran: Sure-ye Mehr, 1381/2002, pp. 111-17.

[93] K. Talattof, "I Will Rebuild you, Oh my Homeland': Simin Behbahāni's Work and Sociopolitical Discourse," in *Iranian Studies*, 41:1, 19-36, 2008, p. 20; for further discussion of Behbahāni's style see R. Sandler, "Simin Behbahāni's Poetic Conversations," in *Iranian Studies*, 41:1, 2008.

[94] K. Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran,* pp. 106-7.

[95] S. Behbahāni, *Jāy-e pā*, Tehran: Zavvār, 1350/1971, pp. 77-80.

[96] Ibid., pp. 81-3.

[97] S. Behbahāni, *Majmu'e-ye ash'ār-e Simin Behbahāni Jāy-e pā tā āzādi*, Tehran, Enteshārāt-e Nilufar, 1377/ 1998, pp. 460-1.

dobāre mibuyam az to gol be meyl-e nasl-e javān-e to
dobāre mishuyam az to khun be seyl-e ashk-e ravān-e khish
dobare yek ruz-e ashenā siyāhi az khāne miravad
be she' r-e khod rang mizanam ze ābi-ye asemān-e khish
agarche sad sāle morde-am be gur-e khod khāham istād
ke bardaram qalb-e ahreman ze na're-ye ānchonān-e khish…[98]

Again, O my home land! I will rebuild you, though it be with the brick of my soul
I will construct a column under your roof, though it be made of my bone
Again, I will smell your flower's scent, as your youth desire,
Again, I will wash the blood off you[r body] with my flowing tears
Again, on a familiar day darkness will leave the house
I will color my poem using my own blue sky
Although, I have been dead for a hundred years, I will stand on my grave
To tear apart the heart of evil with my [strong] cry out...

The poem was composed in 1981, one year after the beginning of the war. In this poem, the poet inspires the young men to reconstruct the ruined places with the bricks of their souls. This will not be possible unless they sacrifice their lives to stop the enemy's attacks. In the second line, Iran is likened to a home whose roof will be supported by columns made of the youths' bones. In the third line, the poet says 'I will smell your flower's scent, as the desires of your youth,' to assert that the wish of the young generation will come true when they win the fight. To clean the blood from the land's body, the poet uses the stream of her tears. She mourns not for the dead land, but perhaps cries in happiness to revive the country. The motif 'to wash the body with tears' is repeatedly used in Persian classical literature. Nizāmi uses the image of washing the lover's body with tears in his epic romance *Leyli and*

[98] This is my literal translation using the translation of the poem by K. Talattof, "I Will Rebuild you, Oh my Homeland: Simin Behbahāni's Work and Sociopolitical Discourse," in *Iranian Studies,* p. 25. K. Talattof has offered various readings of the poem, but they are not a part of the present discussion. For further information see Ibid.

Majnun. Shortly after hearing the news of Leyli's death, Majnun dies over her tomb, and "the mourners burst into tears/ they rained tears over him / washed him completely with the water of the eye (i.e. tears) / gave him, who was felt on the soil, to the soil" (*dar gerye shodand sugvārān/ kardand bar u sereshk bārān/ shostand be āb-e dide pākash/ dādand ze khāk ham be khākash*).[99] Considering that Behbahāni composed her poem during the war, the reference to the day when darkness (*siyāhi*) will leave the house must be a reference to the day the war ends. The poet's reference to 'tearing the heart of evil apart with a strong shout' may be explained as the soldiers' crying 'God is the Greatest' (*Allāh-o Akbar*) as they go into action.[100]

Here, I refer to a poem by Hamid-Rezā Akbari to show a different level of literacy. He illustrates a war scene, the soldier's death on the front line:

…
va tofangam tekkiye dāde be marg
dar in shomāreshi ke āsmānash
kutāh miāyad
tā kenār-e jenāzehā-i ke tond tond ettefāq mioftad
ke in hame zendegi bi-khod migozarad
hanuz ham yek taraf-e divār sālem nist.[101]
…
And my weapon leans back on death
In this counting, when the sky goes down near the bodies
that quickly die
….
Because life is beyond uselessness

[99] N. Ganjavi, *Leyli va Majnun*, ed. B. Zanjāni, Tehran: Mo'asesse-ye enteshārāt va chāp-e dāneshgāh-e Tehran, 1369/1990, no. 4453-54, p.174.

[100] For further information about S. Behbahāni's war poetry see F. Milāni, "Simin Behbahāni: Iran's National Poet," in *Iranian Studies,* 41:1, 2008.

[101] *Ravāyat-e chahārdahom: Majmu'e-ye ash'ār-e chahārdahomin kongere-ye sarāsari-ye she'r-e defā'e moqaddas*, by 'A. R. Qazve, Tehran: Nashr-e Lowh-e Zarrin & Nashr-e Sarir, 1384/2005, pp. 54-5; also see Ibid. pp. 29-31; pp. 43-4.

Now neither side of the wall is safe (i.e. the wall is completely destroyed)

In this poem, although the poet uses imagery to describe a battle scene and the death of numerous soldiers, he has not given a cohesive image of a battlefield. So many soldiers are being killed that even the all-seeing sky cannot count the number. In the fourth line, the poet points to the uselessness of ordinary life by saying '*zendegi bi-khod migozarad'*. The compound *bi-khod* literally means 'beyond himself in ecstasy, useless and nonsense'. The meaning may be that one who offers his life makes it serve a purpose.

Several female poets participated in propagating the principles prescribed by the Islamic Republic. They have written about the Islamic Revolution and the war: I will refer to Sepide Kāshāni because several of her poems have been broadcast in the media.

be khun gar keshi khāk-e man doshman-e man
bejushad gol andar gol az golshan-e man
mosalmānam-o ārmānam shahādat
tajalli-ye hastiest jān kandan-e man
konun rud-e khalq ast daryā-ye jushān
hame khushe-ye khashm shod kherman-e man
man āzāde az khāk-e āzādegānam
gol-e sabr miparvarad dāman-e man
joz az jām-e towhid hargez nanusham
zani gar be tigh-e setam garden-e man[102]

O my enemy! If you fill my soil (i.e. country) with blood
From my flower garden, roses will boil (i.e. raise or grow up) from roses,
I am Muslim and my ideal is martyrdom
The agony of my death is the splendor of existence
Now the river of the crowd is (moving) like an angry sea

[102] K. Kohdu'i, "Barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e takhdiri," p. 492.

All my harvest is a bunch of anger.
I am a freeman from the land of freemen
My leap makes the flower of patience grow
I will never drink from any cup but the cup of Oneness
Even if you sever my neck with the dagger of oppression.

In this poem, Kāshāni talks to the enemy (i.e. Iraq), asserting that if you cover my soil, or my country, with blood, roses will grow from it. Roses and tulips symbolize martyrdom. She says that a Muslim strives from martyrdom, because it is his ideal. The poet compares the Iranian public to an angry sea: just as no one can stop a flood from happening, no one can stop the Iranian nation from fighting the enemy. She says that she would not abandon her religious beliefs even if the enemy cut off her head.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I aimed to explain how poetry has been used to inspire Iranian public in various historical periods from Constitutional Revolution to time of the war between Iran and Iraq. During the Constitutional Revolution poets used non-poetic themes such as criticism of the Persian monarchical system, absolute power in order to establish. The poets employed mystical motifs such as the martyr of love to praise individuals who offered their lives during the Constitutional Revolution for freedom. During Mohammad Rezā Shāh's reign, poetry was used to unify the Iranians and give them a national identity. For this purpose the epic Shāhnāma by Ferdowsi was introduced as an Iranian's national icon. Later, during 1970s poetry was used as a political tool to establish solidarity between Iranians against Pahlavi dynasty. The poets used religious metaphors to motivate Iranians to protest against the Shāh and the influence of Western culture. They were convinced that Islam should be revived in order to rescue people from the tyrannies imposed upon them all over the world. After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, many poets were condemned by the

supporters of the Revolution, but later, the Islamic Republic used poetry to propagate the ideals of the Revolution. A new type of literature appeared during the Iran-Iraq war, called the Literature of Resistance. Another genre that emerged after the Revolution was the literature of the Islamic Revolution. The poets and writers employed the same motifs used by the classical mystics to link self-sacrifice for the ideals of the Revolution to a mystic's spiritual progress. The poets used revolutionary-Islamic motifs to draw parallels between the war, the Revolution and the events of Karbalā. Committed literature was another literary genre that supported the Revolution. This genre refers to the ideologically-oriented literature. A group of authors faithful to the principles of the Revolution created this genre, using the mystical motifs such as the religion of love to assert that following the principles of the Islamic Republic is the same as following the path of love, and obeying the principles prescribed by the Shiite authorities.

This poetry was supported in various ways. A meeting of poets, later called the Congress of the Poetry of Sacred Defense, which was held in Ahvaz in 1986, was supported by the Organization for the Preservation and Propagating of Sacred Literature and Values. The Organization aimed to support the poets and the university students who supported the Revolution. These poets imitated the poetry of classical poets in form and content, writing ghazals, panegyric, narrative poems, and quatrains. A number of these poets also composed poetry in new poetic forms. In their metaphor and imagery, these poets extensively draw on the motifs of mystical love such as the book of love, the school of love and the Ka'be of love, connecting the path of war with spiritual progress of a mystic. In addition, they used religious motifs such as the book of *'Āshurā*, and the path of Hosein linking the war to the events at Karbalā, legitimizing the war against the Iraqi soldiers. In this poetry, martyrdom is venerated and all soldiers who are killed are called martyrs. This was a conscious way of giving meaning to death and mobilizing people to offer their lives for a sacred cause.

CHAPTER TWO

MYSTICAL LOVE IN IRAN-IRAQ WAR POETRY

INTRODUCTION

My objective in writing this chapter is to explain how during the war with Iraq the medieval, mystical concept of love, and related motifs, were extensively used by the Islamic Republic of Iran and the war poets to mobilize the Iranians to fight against the enemy, or to send their loved ones to the battlefield. Soldiers were commonly identified as 'lovers' and 'gnostics' on a mystic journey to union with the Beloved (*ma'shuq*). Poetry played a significant role in this identification of war with love mysticism. According to the war poets, the soldier in battle attains the spiritual station of the mystic, whether or not he is killed. In this chapter, I will discuss the mystical love-centered themes.

The mystics took the image of the relation between lover and Beloved from the relationship between the lover and the metaphorical beloved that is a common theme in the *nasib*, or prologue, of a *qaside* (an ode).[103] Meisami discusses how a Persian courtly *qaside* reflects the relationship between the lover and beloved. She says that the poet, as a lover, shows his fidelity toward his patron, the beloved, by praising the latter's generosity, bounty and beauty, using metaphors and similes. Later, more of the courtly concepts of the lover and beloved were applied to mystical poetry. For example, the mystic poet Hakim Sanā'i Ghaznavi employed courtly elements in his mystical poems; encouraging the audience to take up the role of the lover to become the "achieved personification," according to Meisami. In mystical poetry, the lover is presented as one who suffers loneliness, and endures harsh treatment from the Beloved, but expects no compensation for the hardships that he endures. The courtly poet praises the beloved more for his generosity and benevolence, while the mystic poet praises the Beloved for offering him pain and

[103] F. Orsini, "Introduction," in *Love in South Asia: A Cultural History*, Cambridge: the University of Cambridge Oriental Publication, 2006, p. 17.

affliction.[104]

To serve their own ends, the war poets used the image of a lover who sacrifices his life for the sake of the Beloved, and several literary and mystical motifs. For instance, they defined death on the battlefield as a mystical stage that would purify the soul. Thus, the soldier attains the stage of union with the Beloved on the frontline. The war poets considered fighting the enemy as a pre-requisite for companionship with the Beloved. They proclaimed that the soldiers who fought against the Iraqi enemies and sacrificed their lives would join the Beloved in the hereafter. Death, therefore, should hold no fear.

Obedience is an indispensable part of spiritual progress as it is treated in classical mystical literature, and it is a central motif in this war poetry. To be more precise, the soldier is portrayed as a faithful, obedient lover who strives to fulfill the will of the Beloved. In such war poems, the spiritual master or beloved may be Ayatollah Khomeini or the Third Shiite imam, Hosein. In Persian love literature, absolute obedience requires the lover's loyalty, represented as the lover's death. Like the lover, the soldier offers his life on the battlefield to affirm his fidelity toward the spiritual beloved (i.e. Ayatollah Khomeini).

The war poets used the mystical concept of self-mortification. The hard mortifications that the mystic inflicted on himself are analogous, in the war poetry, to the hardships that a soldier endures. Consequently, in the war poetry, fighting the enemy leads to spiritual elevation. Like the mystic, the soldier repudiates his own existence, considering it as an obstacle that bars him from union with the Beloved. For this reason, he goes to the frontline, to sacrifice his life and become one with the Beloved.

In mystics' treatises, love is the goal of progress, and also motivates the mystic to begin his spiritual journey. Love is presented as an agent making the lover aware of himself. Earthly love usually leads to a spiritual love,[105] making the lover long for the beloved, and long to lay down his life for the beloved. The lover experiences the pain of separation. He becomes patient, and he will be happy when he is allowed to be in the presence of the beloved. To prove his love and fidelity, he offers his most precious belonging, his life, to achieve union with the beloved. In this process, the lover attains

[104] J. S. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 253.
[105] Ibid., p. 137.

spiritual perfection through this sacrificial behavior. In a spiritual love relationship, the lover seeks the Ideal Beloved and, as there is no analogue for Him in the world, the lover begins to mortify his body so that his soul may progress to a spiritual stage of perfection that is worthy of the Beloved. By passing through the stages of perfection, the lover's soul attains the Beloved's character-traits and is led to eternal life within the Beloved, which ultimately, changes the lover's character.

This chapter shows how metaphorical mystical love, popular with classical love poets, was transposed into a literal mode during the Iran-Iraq war in the form of soldiers offering their lives for the cause of the ideal Beloved. Death on the front was made meaningful by equating it to attaining mystical spiritual perfection. Various love motifs, such as the school of love, were used to alleviate the fear of death and transform it into a transcendent event. This transformation of the spiritual mystical concepts to experiences in the real life will be illuminated by taking some of the themes and tropes found in love poetry, the poetry of mystical love, and the poetry of the Iran-Iraq war, to show how an idea or image is confirmed and transformed as it passes from one context to another. For instance, the concepts of illness/emaciation that in mystical treatises are signs of a lover's absolute devotion and profane love to the Beloved in the war poetry show a soldier's preparedness for self-sacrifice on the battlefield.

LOVE THAT DESTROYS

Love's destructive aspects, which appear quite frequently in war poetry, are also addressed in the classical literary tradition. Love inflicts illness, suffering, and dishonor upon the lover. In his *Savāneh,* the medieval mystic Ahmad Ghazāli writes: "Truly, love is an affliction, and ease and intimacy in it are strange and borrowed."[106] Love, whether it is metaphorical or mystical, affects the lover's body. Profane love causes the lover's illness, and is mentioned as such even in medical treatises. The physician and philosopher, Ebn Sinā (980-1037) writes about the lover's characteristics: "hollowness of the eye, continuous

[106] Ahmad Ghazāli, *Resāle-ye Savāneh va resāle'i dar mow'eze*, with notes and introduction by J. Nurbakhsh, Tehran: Khāneqāh-e Nematollāhi, 1352/1947, p. 21.

movement of the eyelids, dryness and emaciation of the body, tearful eyes …"[107] In war poetry the soldier is likened to a lover afflicted by love. He does not hold back from the hardships that love imposes on him on the military front, rather he seeks more. Like a lover, the soldier cries out and weeps on the battlefield.

A destructive aspect of love that is highlighted in the war poems is that it emaciates the lover. The lover comes to resemble an ill person but cannot lament because of extreme weakness. Rather, the lover is selfless. He denies himself (*anniyat*) in his search for the beloved. His pale and yellowish face and his emaciation show that he eats little and does not sleep except to see the beloved in his dreams.

Love destroys the lover's ego and leads him to repudiate his own identity (*hoviyyat*) as he seeks union with the Beloved. The mystics understand self-denial as a gateway to eternal life because they consider it as a process through which the mystic annihilates into the Beloved. War poets elaborate on this phenomenon by equating death on the battlefield with the self-denial of a mystic. For the war poet, self-denial is a remedy for the heart, and separation from the 'self' is a way to become one with the Beloved.

In classical love literature, love is of the same nature as fire: they both destroy whatever they touch. Love burns the lover, and transforms him from within.[108] When love occupies the lover's heart, he denies his "I-ness" (*maniyyat*) and his sense of self. In this dynamic process, love destroys the lover's negative traits and purifies his soul; afterwards, he is worthy to receive the positive traits of the Beloved. Love annihilates the lover into the Beloved. This purifying characteristic of love is highlighted in war poetry to inflame the emotions of the youth and inspire them to participate in the fight. The soldier is compared to a lover who is burning from the fire of love. This fire makes his soul pure and worthy of union with the Beloved. In war poetry, the imagery of the moth and candle is used. The martyr is the moth that sacrifices its existence in the path of love for the candle. Having reached the stage of selflessness, the moth enters the candle's fire to unite with it.[109] Like

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[107] A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnun*, p. 7.

[108] L. Anvar-Chenderoff, "Without Us, from Us, We're Safe: Self and Selflessness in the Divān of Attār," in *Attār and the Persian Sufi Tradition: The Art of Spiritual Flight*, eds. L. Lewisohn & C. Shackle, London & New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2006, p. 242.

[109] For the development of candle metaphors in Persian literature from the nine to the fourteenth century, see:

the selfless moth, the soldier goes to the battlefield to be annihilated into the Beloved.

Annihilation (*fanā*) is, on the one hand, a mystic's separation from consciousness of all things, including himself, and replacement of these things with a pure consciousness of God. On the other hand, through annihilation (*fanā*), the mystic's imperfect attributes are replaced by the perfect ones bestowed by God. *Fanā* is not the end of life: the divinely-bestowed attributes remain (*baqā*) with the mystic.[110] The medieval mystic Najm al-Din Rāzi (1177-1256) writes: "love burns the metaphorical (i.e., worldly) existence (*vojud-e majāzi*) of the lover to reveal his real (i.e., spiritual) existence that is the Beloved covered under the clothing of lover."[111]

These mystical concepts are used in the war poems. The soldier's participation in battle is depicted in terms of denying his consciousness, destroying his negative attributes, and replacing them with the positive attributes of the Beloved. The soldier's death on the battlefield is compared to attaining the mystical stage of continuance (*baqā*), which follows the stage of annihilation.

A LOVE NOT CHOSEN

In classical mystical treatises, love is defined as a divine grace that falls on the chosen ones, so the lover has no control over his destiny. In his *Savāneh,* Ghazāli likens the lover to dice on a board, as a lover has no free will. He further adds that the lover cannot undertake anything. Ghazāli, in the story of the furnace stoker, shows that falling in love is out of the lover's control. In this story, a furnace stoker falls in love with a king. The king decides to punish him, but his vizier rescues the man from punishment by saying that it is not fitting for a king to punish a man for what is outside his free will (*ekhtiyār*).[112] The idea of love as an uncontrollable force can be traced back to a Qur'ānic verse (5:59) in which God says that He has chosen His lovers at the beginning of creation (*azal*): "He loved them and they

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A. A. Seyed-Gohrab, "Waxing Eloquent…," in *Metaphor and Imagery in Persian Poetry*, pp. 84-123.

[110] F. Rahman, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Baḳā' wa-Fanā'.

[111] N. Rāzi, *Resāle-ye ʿeshq va ʿaql, meʾyār al-sedq fi mesdāq al-ʿeshq*, edited and annotated by T. Tafazzoli, Tehran: Bongāh-e tarjome va nashr-e ketāb, 1345/1966, p. 65.

[112] A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnun*, p. 168.

love Him" (*yohibbohum va yohibbunahu*). This verse is interpreted by Ghazāli, and in Sufism in general, as showing God's eternal Will. Thus, man cannot fall in love through his own free will. Ghazāli quotes from the medieval mystic Abu Yazid Bastāmi (d. 848 or 875), "I supposed that I loved Him, but recognized that He loved me first."[113] Ghazāli implies that Bāyazid is among the elected lovers and his love for the Beloved was determined in pre-eternity. For these predestined lovers, knowledge and schooling are considered obstacles that hold them back from union with the Beloved.

THE SCHOOL OF LOVE

One of the dominant themes is that of 'the school of love' (*madrese-ye 'eshq*). In mystical literature, it expresses the necessity of abandoning conventional education and following the path of mystical perfection. The war poets used the school of love to mobilize youth for the front. The war poets compare the battlefield to the school of love and the soldier to a lover who is attending the school of love. A soldier who dies at the front-line is considered as a graduate from the school of love. Needless to say, both the soldier and the lover prepare themselves to offer their lives for the ultimate goal: unification with the Beloved. On the battlefield, a soldier experiences the lesson of self-sacrifice, as the mystic in the academy of love learns to abandon his life and this world to be united with the Beloved. This motif is related to the teacher of love (*ostād-e 'eshq,* or *mo'allem-e 'eshq*), 'the book of love' (*ketāb-e 'eshq*) and 'the lesson of love' (*dars-e 'eshq*), which will also be discussed here.

EDUCATION AND PURIFICATION IN THE SCHOOL OF LOVE

In classical mystical literature, the metaphor of a school of love refers to the spiritual purification that guides the mystic towards union with the Beloved. The student in the school of love learns the principles of love, and the first principle is to fight against the

[113] Ahmad Ghazāli, *Savāneh*, p. 26.

carnal soul, described as an enemy. This self-purification is also self-sacrifice for the sake of union with the Beloved. The school of love motif is indicated in Persian either by *madrese-ye 'eshq* or by *maktab-e 'eshq*.

The word *maktab* (pl. *makātib*) means a place of education. It has been an important Islamic institution from the earliest days of Islam.[114] In an Iranian *maktab* children learn to read and write, based on the recitation and memorization of the Qur'ān, and they read from medieval Persian literature. In the Islamic tradition, education or *tarbiyat* connotes morality and discipline, as well as knowledge. In literary texts, *tarbiyat* is shown through virtuous behavior, rather than erudition. In traditional schools, *adab* ('etiquette' or 'refined and well-mannered conduct') was the main subject. *Majles al-adab* referred to schools for children, and the teacher was known as the *mo'addeb*, *mo'allem* or *mokatteb*, referring respectively to his role in teaching good conduct, knowledge, and literacy.[115] There is a genre of *adab* books telling how to achieve proper behavior and a better position in the hereafter.[116]

The medieval Persian mystics introduced the motif of the school of love in their literary works to express the process of spiritual elevation. Love educates the lover to develop spiritual and moral strengths. To attain spiritual perfection, the mystic should pass through spiritual stages, analogous to classes, to purify his soul from negative character traits. For instance, the mystic Ruzbahān Baqli (d. 1209) elaborates on the transitions of the soul. He identifies twelve stations, beginning with servitude and ending with longing, through which the mystic ascends to perfect love.[117] On achieving each station, the mystic gains a better understanding of the Beloved's Beauty, and his desire for union with the Beloved increases.

In *The Garden of Truth*, the mystic poet Sanā'i says that love teaches the lover to

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[114] J.M. Landau, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Maktab. R. Hillenbrand, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Madrasa, 2. Islamic Studies in the Mosque: Early Period. For more information about madrase see A. Zaryāb, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Education v. The Madrase in Shiite Persia.

[115] R. Hillenbrand, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Madrasa, 1.Children's Schools. For further information see A. Azarnoosh, Tr. Suheyl Umar, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Adab. For a war poem on the subject of *adab*, see M. 'A. Mo'allem Dāmghāni, *Rej'at-e sorkh-e setāre* (*majmu'e-ye she'r*), Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Sure-ye Mehr, 1387/2008, p. 219.

[116] A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnun*, p. 43.

[117] C.W. Ernst, "The Stages of Love in Early Persian Sufism from Rābi'a to Ruzbihān," in *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rumi*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London & New York: Khāneqāh-e Nematollāhi Publications, 1993, pp. 449-51.

offer his life, because a "headless man" (*sar-boride*) is a companion of love and knows the secrets of the Beloved.[118] In Persian literature, the head implies either life or reason and rational thinking. Thus the image of "headless man" points both to self-sacrifice and detachment from discursive reason. The initial step for the student in the school of love is to deny his discursive reason (*'aql*) because it is unable to understand the mystic secret. In the school, love like a teacher guides the lover to abandon self when he embarks on the path of love. Only a selfless lover may enjoy the bliss of union.

Uniting faith (*din*) and infidelity (*kofr*) is another lesson that love teaches, according to Sanā'i. *Kofr* and *din* are veils (*parde*) that prevent the lover from understanding the secrets of love. In mystical literature, *parde* hides the Beloved from those who do not understand the secret of love because they follow the principles of discursive reason. Love teaches the lover to abandon mundane desires for the sake of union with the Beloved, because worldly desires are the greatest veils that separate the lover from the Beloved.[119]

The mystic poet, Rumi identified the school of love as a mystical stage through which one learns immediate divine knowledge (*'elm-e ladunni*) without participating in a conventional education using paper and ink.[120] According to Rumi, God teaches the lover to read divine knowledge from the tablet of the invisible World.[121] He reveals the divine secrets to the heart of the lover. He thus attains knowledge through divine revelation.

In the school of love, a lover learns how to behave before the Beloved. This proper conduct is called *adab* in Persian literature. A lover who wants to show his love for the beloved should not only behave politely, offer his life and all his belongings for the

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[118] Sanā'i Ghaznavi, *Hadiqat al-Haqiqat va shari'at al-Tariqt*, Tehran: Markaz-e Nashr-e Dāneshgāhi, 1382/2004, p. xx. Bektāshis, a dervish group active in sixteenth century and afterwards, called " beheaded dead people" (*sar-boride morde*) they died before death. See A.T. Karamustafa, *God's Unrully Friendes: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period 1200-1550*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press,1994, p.92.

[119] Ibid., pp. 228-30.

[120] A. Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalāloddin Rumi*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1993, p. 337.

[121] A. Schimmel, *I am Wind, you are Fire: The Life and Work of Rumi*, Boston & London: Shambhala, 1992, p. 177. Rumi writes: "The teacher of the school of love is He, the Owner of Glory/ We are like a seeker of knowledge and this is what we repeat (*madrese-ye 'eshq-o modarres zol-jalāl/ mā cho tāleb 'elm-o in tekrār-e māst*). See Mowlānā Jalāl al-Din Rumi, *Kolliyāt-e Shams-e Tabrizi*, biography by Badiʿ al-Zamān Foruzānfar, explanation about *Divān-e Shams* by A. Dashti, Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1337/1959, p. 266, *ghazal* no. 608.

beloved, Love teaches proper conduct to the lover, which he cannot learn through a conventional education.

In the Iran-Iraq war poetry, self-sacrifice on the front-line (namely the school of love) is defined as etiquette and proper conduct. Virtue leads a man to offer his life. The war poet Mohammad ʻAli Moʻallem from Dāmghān employs the concept of *adab* in a *ghazal* entitled ʻThe Etiquette of Being in Love' (*adab-e ʻāsheqi*):

hamin basam adab-e ʻāsheqi ke az tab-e sharm
cho shamʻ pish-e rokhash āb mitavānam shod[122]

For me this etiquette of being in love is enough,
That I in a fever of bashfulness may melt like a candle before his face.

The poet Rumi says that there is no proper conduct for the etiquette of love (*adab-e ʻeshq*) but rudeness:

adab-e ʻeshq jomle bi-adabist
ommat-e ʻeshq ʻeshqohom ādāb[123]

The etiquette of love is nothing but rudeness
Love is the proper conduct for the community of the lovers

The word *bi-adabi* is opposite to the word *adab* in Persian language. Literally, *bi-adabi* came to mean ʻrudeness and to behave unmannerly.' Rumi says for a community of lovers there is no rule. They follow the principles prescribed by love although others say that these behaviors are inappropriate.

In the war poetry, the relationship between the lover and beloved is often depicted

[122] M. ʻA. Moʻallem Dāmghāni, *Rejʻat-e sorkh-e setāre*, p. 219.
[123] Mowlānā Jalāl al-Din Rumi, *Kolliyāt-e Shams-e Tabrizi*, p. 197, *ghazal* no. 434.

through the metaphor of a candle, very common in Persian literature.[124] The lover burns and melts as a candle does. In these lines, the lover is in fever because of the excitement of meeting the Beloved, and feelings of awe for the Beloved. He is bashful, as is proper for a lover (self-confidence would be arrogant). He melts like a candle before the beloved, so that nothing remains of his self. The poet is defining the soldier as a lover and using the concept of *adab* to imply that the soldier is sacrificing his most precious belonging, his life, at the Beloved's door (i.e., on the battlefield). In short, volunteering and fighting is defined as proper conduct, part of the etiquette of self-sacrifice for the Beloved.

The mystical motif of the school of love is adapted in a modern political context by Ayatollah Khomeini in a *ghazal* entitled 'The School of Love' (*maktab-e 'eshq*):

dard mijuyand in vārastegān-e maktab-e 'eshq
ānke darmān khāhad az ashāb-e in maktab gharib ast[125]

These graduates of the academy of love are seeking pain
Only rarely does anyone seek a remedy from the members of this academy.

Ayatollah Khomeini implies that the lover who detaches himself from the physical world seeks more pain (*dard*) from love. He calls the lover *vāraste,* meaning both liberated and pious (translated here as 'graduates' to match the metaphor). He is liberated in the sense that he is saved from punishment in the hereafter. Ayatollah Khomeini implies that one who attends the school of love, finds his soul purified and attains a higher spiritual perfection. The pain of love (*dard-e 'eshq*), which the lover demands from the Beloved, is a motif found in the mystic literature on love. Khomeini has politicized the mystical motif of the school of love. In his sermons, he equated the mobilization unit, the *Basij*, with the school

[124] For candle imagery see J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Candle: ii. Imagery in Poetry; also see A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, "Waxing Eloquent …," in *Metaphor and Imagery*, pp. 84-123.
[125] Ayatollah Khomeini, *Divān-e Emām: Sorudehā-ye hazrat-e Emām Khomeini*, Tehran: Mo'assese-ye tanzim va nashr-e āthār-e Emām, 1377/1998, p. 51.

of love: "Basij is the school of love (*Basij madrese-ye 'eshq ast*)."[126] During the war, many soldiers were selected from among the Basij units. The members were trained to offer their lives on the battlefield with passion, in expectation of union with the Beloved. They considered themselves members of the school of love, and those who went to the battlefield were graduates from the school.

For the classical mystical poets, and the war poets, the school of love is superior to a conventional school. If there is a battlefield where the lover can die, what need of an ordinary conventional classroom? An element of disdain for conventional (especially Western) education was part of the revolution. Anti-Western sentiments were propagated to assert that the West is responsible for destroying Islamic culture in Iran. People who actively participated in demonstrations against the Pahlavi regime, and who were loyal to the principles of the Islamic Revolution, are known as *maktabi*, students. The term is used to mean literalists or activists. After the Revolution, later called Islamic, and during the war, *maktabis* gained the highest official positions, while educated people were dismissed from their posts. [127] However in the war poetry, the conventional school has its value, as the

[126] U. Marzolph, "The Martyr's Way to Paradise: Shiite Mural Art in the Urban Context," in *Sleepers, Moles and Martyrs: Secret Identifications, Social Integration and the Differing Meanings of Freedom*, ed. R. Bendix & J. Bendix, Copenhagen: Musum Tusculanum Press &University of Copenhagen, 2004, p. 93. The Basij was established in January 1981. Its full name is the *Vāhed-e Basij-e Mostaz'afān* ('the mobilization unit of the down-trodden'), and its members are called *basijis*. It was a preliminary step toward creating an'Army of twenty million,' which Ayatollah Khomeini referred to in his sermons necessary for the ultimate victory of the Islamic Revolution. The *basiji* volunteers were mostly very young boys or older men. During the war, the clergy used religious codes to inspire a sense of altruistic sacrifice in the *basijis*. For instance, they compared the road to the battlefield with the road to Jerusalem (*tariq-e qods*). *Basijis* would clear a path for army equipment by running across minefields, and they were successful in confusing or even overwhelming Iraqi armies. (E.L. Daniel, *The History of Iran*, Westport, Connecticut, London: Westwood Press, 2001, p. 208; D. Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict*, London: Paladin, 1990, p.52. For the military function of the *Basij-e Mostaz'afān* see pp. 55, 92, 106, 112, 171 and 176.) In Islamic doctrine, the word 'oppressed' (*mostaz'af*) is applied to people oppressed under a tyrant regime. However, in the lead-up to the Islamic Revolution (1979), Mortezā Motahhari and 'Ali Shariati, ideologues of the Revolution, extended it to spiritual and cultural oppression. They said that the oppressed should defend the spiritual and cultural values of their society. Iranians as a whole were considered *mostaz'af* because their cultural and religious values were threatened by the Pahlavi monarch and, during the war, by the Sunni leader of Iraq, who was seen as a real threat to the Shiite's faith. (A. Ashraf, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Islam in Iran: xiii. Islamic Political Movements in 20th Century Iran) The 1979 Revolution mobilized many different groups, but the leaders of the Revolution in retrospect highlighted the role of the 'barefoot and oppressed.' The authorities registered people in the Basij Unit as volunteers to serve the principles of the Islamic Revolution.

[127] For example, during Mohammad 'Ali Rajā'i's (1933-1981) brief presidency, in 1981, the Islamic activists (*maktabis*) occupied the state's managerial and technical posts. See S. A. Arjomand, *The Turban for the*

place where students were recruited for the war.[128] The war poet Qeysar Aminpur, in a poem called 'The Twin of the Lovers of the World' (*hamzād-e 'āsheqān-e jahān*), compares both the *madrese* or university, and the battlefield, to the school of love:

harchand 'āsheqān-e qadimi
az ruzegār-e pishin
tā hāl
az dars-o madrese
az qil-o qāl
bizār budehand[129]

Although lovers of bygone ages
From the past until now
Have been weary of lessons and schools
Disputes and talks …

The poem continues below. The mystics said that conventional education was not required to attain spiritual progress. Here, Aminpur says that lovers have never been interested in any form of education, whether it is following lessons or participating in a discussion. The lover is interested in the school where love reveals itself and educates the lover. In other words, love deepens the lover's understanding of the worthlessness of the mundane world and the necessity of detachment from it.

Although in mystical poetry, love is considered an act of grace from God, in the war poetry, love can be cultivated and developed in the school of love. Aminpur continues:

Crown, New York: Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 164.

[128] Speaking of his interviews with young Iranians imprisoned in an Iraqi camp, Ian Brown writes: "They left the school during the year and went to the front directly or were recruited via the local unit of the Basij to which the child belonged." (I. Brown, *Khomeini's Forgotten Sons: The Story of Iran's Boy Soldiers*, London: Grey Seal Books, 1990, p. 45.)

[129] Q. Aminpur, *Majmu'e-ye kāmel-e ash'ār*, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Morvārid, 1388/2009, p. 272.

ammā
e'jāz-e mā hamin ast:
mā 'eshq rā be madrese bordim
dar emtedād-e rāhro-i kutāh
dar yek ketābkhāne-ye kuchek
bar pellehā-ye sangi-ye dāneshgāh
va milehā-ye sard-o felezi
gol dād-o sabz shod[130]

But
This is our miracle
We took love to the school
At the end of a short corridor
In a small library
On the stony steps of the university
And the cold metallic fences
[Love] flowered and flourished.

The 'small library' is presumably the locale being used as a recruitment office. In Aminpur's poem, the lover has chosen to be possessed by love. When love for self-sacrifice is taught to the students, they will quickly respond to this religious-mystical appeal because their heart is open. Aminpur exaggerates the positions of the lovers when he compares them to prophets by using the word *e'jāz*, which refers not to a simple wonder but to the miracle by which a prophet demonstrates that he has a mission from God. Mohammad's *e'jāz* was to produce the Qur'ān, while the soldiers have become lovers, transforming the educational system to love martyrdom. In this way, the poet, as a pioneer of war poetry, and his peers are able to perform a miracle: developing love in the hearts of the students.

[130] Ibid, pp. 272-3.

In the above poem, Aminpur uses a concept that is common in Persian mystical literature: the lover's heart is fertile soil prepared for the tree of love to grow. The mystic Ghazāli, for example, compares the soul to the soil in which the tree of love (*shajarat al-'eshq*) grows, watered by the lover's tears.[131] In the war poetry, it is the blood of the lover that waters the tree of love. Aminpur defines the school as a stage through which love grows. When the tree of love occupies the heart of the student, there is no room for worldly desires, so he offers his life on the battlefield.

In Persian literature, the tulip symbolizes martyrdom. After the section of this poem cited above, Aminpur compares love to a tulip, to show that a martyr never dies. A tulip's flowering every spring is comparable to the mystic concept of continuation (*baqā*) after annihilation (*fanā*). In the war poetry, a soldier's love for death on the military front is comparable to the growth of a tulip. The desire for self-sacrifice develops, grows and flowers in the heart of students at universities and schools. Love guides the students to the front line to offer their lives and attain the stage of continuation. There is a similarity between a university and the battlefield: in both places, when one 'graduates,' another one takes his place. This cycle is like the flowering of a tulip every spring.

In Aminpur's poem, love does not lead the lover to abandon worldly desires, or call him to remembrance and meditation, or even to recite the Qur'ān and pray the whole night. The mystics or pious Muslims perform the mentioned practices and rituals in order to get closer to God. Love encourages the lover to prepare the soil of his heart for the plant of love.

At the end of this poem, Aminpur compares the lover to the plant, and says that the plant may be reborn:

ān fasl
fasli ke hatman mitavān motevalled shod
hatman bāyad bahār bāshad
…

[131] Ahmad Ghazāli, *Resāle-ye Savāneh*, pp. 7, 21.

mā bāz mitavānim

har ruz nāgahān motevalled shavim

mā

hamzād-e 'āsheqān-e jahānim[132]

That season

The season in which one can certainly be born,

Surely it should be Spring?

…

We may be born again every day

We are the companions of the lovers of the world.

According to the poet, spring is the best season to be born. Spring is the symbol of resurrection and the re-birth of existence on the Last Day. A lover can never die, because he dies before he dies. That is, the lover detaches his soul from the idol of himself, causing the death of selfish desires while he still lives, and he then continues (*baqā*) eternally in the Beloved. The poet uses the concept of eternal survival in the Beloved to encourage young men onto the battlefield. The dynamic setting that the poet creates allows the soldier to see his potential death to a mystic ultimate union with the Beloved.

To sum up, in the war poetry, the soldier survives eternally in three senses: in the mystical sense, he attains the same spiritual perfection that a mystic can, and therefore survives eternally in the Beloved. In a more orthodox religious sense, the soldier's death on the battlefield is martyrdom and guarantees him eternal life in heaven. Moreover, the community honors his death by emulating his act.[133]

[132] Q. Aminpur, *Majmu'e-ye kāmel-e ash'ār*, p. 274.

[133] In this thesis 'orthodox' refers to Muslims whose religious practices are confined to the execution of religious duties as defined by Islamic jurists.

LOVE AS SPIRITUAL TEACHER

An indispensable part of the school of love is the motif of 'the teacher of love' (*mo'allem-e 'eshq*). In addition to the term *mo'allem*, synonyms such as *āmuzgar* and *ostād* are also used. For the mystical poets, God is the Universal Teacher of love, who is superior to any ordinary teacher. As we have seen above, taking the work of Rumi as an example, God teaches the lover to read divine knowledge from the tablet of the invisible World. The student repeats whatever God teaches to him. The war poets used the motif, but they introduce the imam Hosein, the third Shiite imam, as the teacher of love. Imam Hosein died on the battlefield, and in the war poetry, he teaches soldiers to offer their lives in battle to preserve Shiite Islam. War poets say that Hosein offered his life in battle because of his passionate love for the Beloved, and that he serves as the teacher of love encouraging young men to go to the battlefield.

The war poet Sorush from Esfahān introduces the theme in a *mathnavi* entitled 'The Water Carrier of Karbalā' (*Saqqā-ye Karbalā*).

…
cheshm az jān-e jahāni dukhte
az barādar 'āsheqi āmukhte
har ke rā bāshad Hosein ostād-e 'eshq
lājeram dāde be kolli dād-e 'eshq[134]
…
He ['Abbās] closed his eye to the soul of the world
He learned love from his brother [Hosein]
Everyone who has Hosein as his teacher of love
There is no doubt that he does justice to love

The title of this poem, 'The Water Carrier of Karbalā' (*Saqqā-ye Karbalā*) points to a motif

[134] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3*, selected by M.'A. Mardāni, Tehran: Howze-ye Honari-ye Sāzemān-e Tablighāt-e Eslāmi, 1370/1991, p. 64.

that is related to love, and in this poem, to the teacher of love. A s*aqqā* is someone who brings water to people, and is the title of Abo al-Fazl al-'Abbās, imam Hosein's half-brother. 'Abbās is the archetype of love and loyalty in war poetry and in Persian passion plays (*ta'ziye*), because of his exceptional behavior on the day of *'Āshurā* (10th of Moharram 680) when the Sunni Umayyad soldiers barred Hosein and his companions from the Euphrates. The children cried bitterly from thirst. Abo al-Fazl galloped to the Euphrates several times to bring water, but his hands were cut off and he perished.[135] The poet identifies Hosein with the teacher of love and Abo al-Fazl with his student, using this historical event to encourage young men to go to the battlefield. The poet writes that, on the day of *'Āshurā*, Abo al-Fazl fought against the enemy alone. He galloped from the left of the army to the right, fighting the Sunni soldiers as he went. An enemy soldier cut off his right hand but he fought on with his left hand until it too was cut off. But Abo al-Fazl was happy with this event; he says that he would receive two wings as his reward in paradise. Sorush from Esfahān says that Hosein, the teacher of love, taught the brave Abo al-Fazl to choose death over life; therefore, a student should not be afraid of death because through death he receives his reward and the Beloved reveals Himself to him.

Sorush from Esfahān calls Hosein the teacher of love (*ostād-e 'eshq*). In the second hemistich, he plays on the word *dād,* meaning both justice and a lament or appeal for justice. To give *dād,* as in the phrase, *dād-e kasi rā dādan*, means to answer an appeal, to release someone from oppression or hardship. In this hemistich, love is the one who intercedes, for Abo al-Fazl's life, and will intercede for all. Therefore, one who abandons his life on the battlefield pays his debt to love.

Another example of the teacher of love motif is found in a *ghazal* entitled 'The Ka'be of the Intended One' (*Ka'be-ye maqsud*), by the war poet Azizollāh Shekarriz:

āmukht dars-e 'eshq Shekarriz az Hosein
bigāne shod ze khish cho shod āshenā-ye 'eshq[136]

[135] For information on Abo al-Fazl al-'Abbās see J. Calmard, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under 'Abbās B. ʿAlī B. Abū Ṭāleb .

[136] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3*, selected by M.'A. Mardāni, p.70.

Shekarriz has learned the lesson of love from Hosein

As soon as he knew love, He [Shekarriz] became a stranger to himself

Shekarriz equates Hosein's death in battle with the lesson of love. Consequently, a soldier who chooses death, as Hosein did, teaches the lesson of love to his peers. In the second hemistich, the poet employs the word *khish*. The word means in Persian relatives, kinship, or oneself. Hosein not only teaches the soldier to offer his life but also to deny his sense of self.

In the school of love, in which the Universal Teacher guids the lover to the final stage of spiritual perfection, the guidance is connected to the concept of leadership in worldly sense. During the Iran-Iraq war, Ayatollah Khomeini was considered both a political leader and a spiritual master. He was called the leader (*emām* or *rahbar*) of the Revolution. In Shiite tradition, *Emāmat* refers to "supreme leadership" of the Muslim community after the death of the prophet Mohammad. For the Twelver Shiites, the legitimate imams are the descendants of the prophet. The twelfth imam, Mahdi, was 'occulted' (removed to a spiritual existence which is nevertheless in contact with this world) and will return before the Day of Judgment.[137] Khomeini, a descendent of the seventh imam, Musā al-Kāzem, was accorded the title of imam, and it was thought that his leadership, like that of the legitimate imams, was a sure path to salvation in the hereafter.[138] For many Iranians, Khomeini was a spiritual leader. During his career, he taught philosophical and mystical subjects at Qom's Feiziya School.[139] His career along with his family background gave him both a political and mystical position during the war.

[137] For more information on the doctrine of the Imāmate see W. Madelung in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Imāma; also see O. Leaman & Kecia, A., *Islam: The Key Concepts*, New York: Routledge, 2007, pp. 124-8.

[138] H. Algar, "A Short Biography," in *Imam Khomeini Life, Thought and Legacy: Essays from an Islamic Movement Perspective*, ed. A. R. Koya, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust & Crescent International, 2009, pp. 19-21.

[139] M. Baqar, "Khomeini's Search for Perfection: Theory and Reality," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed. A. Rahnema, London & Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Zed Books, 1994, p. 77.

THE BOOK OF LOVE

Another aspect of the school of love is the book of love (*ketāb-e'eshq*). In order to understand the modern political use of the motif, its theological and mystical dimensions should be considered. In an Islamic context, the archetypical book is Qur'ān. In theology, several words mean book: the word *moshaf*, often translated as codex, denotes one of the first collections of the Qur'ānic material.[140] Another form of a book is *lowh*, usually translated as tablet. The Qur'ān (35:22) refers to a tablet that is preserved in heaven (*lowh al-mahfuz*),[141] and the same word is used elsewhere in the Qur'ān. One's destiny is thought to be written on the Preserved Tablet, and to be unchangeable. In Qur'ān 98:1, the *lowh* is the first revelation to Mohammad, and the beginning of the revelation of the Qur'ān. The divine will is preserved on the *lowh* by the pen (*qalam*).[142] From a theological point of view, the importance of the Book lies in reciting and understanding religious principles. Mystics say that reciting the Qur'ān leads one to spiritual perfection.

For the mystics, a human being is the Qur'ān par excellence, or is a copy of the Preserved Tablet, in which all its beauty and wisdom appears, and the face of the beloved is like the manuscript of the Qur'ān.[143] The classical love poets introduced this motif to their poems to emphasize the necessity of purifying the heart, the site of love, which is comparable to the Preserved Tablet. As with the Tablet, the divine will is written on the tablet of the heart, and nothing can be erased.

The heart (*del*) is the center of one's understanding and of divine knowledge, and the location of *zekr,* the remembrance of God that illumines and perfects the soul.[144] God knows what is hidden in the heart, and on the Day of Judgment, one's actions will be

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[140] J. Burton, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Muṣḥaf.

[141] R. Wisnovsky, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qu'ān*, under Heavenly Book. For mystical view on Preserved Tablet see M. Tourge, *Rumī and the Hermenutics, of Eruticism*, Leiden: Koninkelijke Brill, 2007, p. 58. For Ghazāli's view on Preserved Tablet see M. Elkaisy- Friemuth, *'Abd al-Jabbār, Ebn Sinā and al-Ghazāli*, New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 128-29.

[142] A.J. Wensinck and C.E. Bosworth, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Lawḥ.

[143] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975, pp. 412-3.

[144] *The Niche of Lights: A Parallel English–Arabic Text*, by Mohammad Ghazāli, translated, introduced and annotated by D. Buchman, Brigham: Brigham Young University Press, Provo, Utah, 1988, pp. xix-xxiv.

judged on the basis of one's heart.[145] Hypocritical actions will be counted as worthless.[146] God casts the divine Light into the purified heart of his servant, according to Abu Hāmed Ghazāli.[147] Likewise, the heart records evil and false thoughts, and the hearts of evildoers are hardened so they cannot accept God's revelation and messages.[148]

The motif of the book of love is popular with the war poets. In addition to words such as tablet (*lowh*) and codex (*moshaf*), found in a religious context, they use more secular terms such as *daftar* (notebook, used by Bahrāmchi in the example just cited) and also preface (*dibāche)*.[149] The war poets used the mystical motif of the book of love to define self-sacrifice as a spiritual stage, in which the soldier reads divine secrets from the preserved tablet of his heart. In mysticism, self-denial may be considered as a pre-requisite for self-sacrifice on the path to perfection. In the war context, the soldier who denies himself becomes capable of understanding the divine secret.

The war poetess Akram Bahrāmchi uses the motif in a *ghazal* (published 2008) entitled 'The Myth of History' (*osture-ye tārikh*):

khāterātash ruzhā-ye rowshan-e sangar va nur
daftar-e 'omrash ketāb-e 'eshq-o shur-o sāz bud [150]

His memories were the bright days of trenches, and light
The notebook of his life was the book of love, longing and preparation [for battle]

Bahrāmchi links the trenches to light to suggest a mystical purpose to the war and its aftermath. For the mystics, "the real light is God and anything else called light is a

[145] J.D. McAuliffe, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), 'God Acts upon the Hearts,' under Heart.
[146] A.Z. Nasr Hamid, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, under Intention.
[147] M. Smith, *Al-Ġazāli the Mystic*, London: Luzac & Co., 1944, p. 120.
[148] J.D. McAuliffe, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), 'Negative Associations,' under Heart.
[149] For the preface of love (*dibāche-ye 'eshq*) see: S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Sure-ye Mehr, 1387/2008, p. 132.
[150] *Kuche por az 'atr-e nāme to: Majmu'e-ye ash'ār-e defā'-e moqaddas*, ed. A. Binā'i, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Sure-ye Mehr, 1387/2008, p. 16.

metaphor."[151] God guides his servant through the appearance of light. Mystics point to the Qur'ānic verse (24:35) quite frequently.[152] Najm al-Din Rāzi defines those who are enlightened by the light of God as the only survivors in the world: the rest are dead, but think they are alive.[153] The inner light that is revealed to the mystic after self-purification guides him on the path of love,[154] and the light of guidance is revealed in the heart of the youth on the front. Bahrāmchi uses this connotation of light to inspire self-sacrifice in the soldier. She implies that the light of God is revealed on the battlefield and guides the soldier to read from the book of love. This creates a setting that allows the soldier to equate himself with a mystic who is guided by the divine light. In a compact double metaphor, Bahrāmchi refers to the soldier's diary as a notebook in which the deeds of one's life are recorded (*daftar-e 'omr*), which implies, it is the preserved tablet of the heart, and then equates this with the book of love. His deeds on the battlefield, written in the book of love, will be preserved until the Day of Judgment.

Following the extract that has been cited, Bahrāmchi refers to predestination (*taqdir*) to indicate that the soldier was selected in pre-eternity to fight against the enemies of religion. The soldier's journey to the battlefield is a prelude to a pilgrimage to the Beloved, and the soldier's heart is compared to the purified heart of a mystic who receives the divine beauty and revelation. While the mystic goes through an ascetic training to achieve his goal, the soldier attains the same spiritual level by accepting the hardship of war out of love, and going to the front to die. One who wants to understand the divine secret should offer his life on the front-line. Then, his short life is transformed into a book of love that will not perish.

The war poet Mohammad-'Ali Mardāni uses the book of love motif in a *qaside* entitled 'In Relation to the Imposed War' (*dar rābete bā jang-e tahmili*):

bar lowh-e 'eshq naqsh-e moqarnas kesham

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[151] M. Ghazāli, *The Niche of Lights (Meshkāt al-Anwār)*, p. xxxii.
[152] C.W. Ernst, "The Stages of Love in Early Persian Sufism from Rābi'a to Ruzbihān," in *Classical Persian Sufism: From its' Origins to Rumi*, pp. 449-50.
[153] N. Rāzi, *Resāle-ye 'eshq*, p. 80.
[154] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 4-60.

āzin ravāq-e bāgh-o golestān konam[155]

I am making engravings on the tablet of love
I will adorn the threshold of the garden and the rose-garden.

Moqarnas is a way of decorating the inside of a half-dome in Islamic architecture, especially in mosques. The poet compares his heart (*lowh-e 'eshq)*, literally, the tablet of love, to a mosque, which he decorates with engravings or incising. As a moqarnas pattern looks pitted, it resembles a battlefield covered with shell-holes.

The contemporary poet Mohsen 'Ali-khāni uses the motif of the notebook of love (*daftar-e 'eshq*) in a *robā'i*:

in daftar-e 'eshq az Hosein in dārad
rokhsāre-ye khun chehre-ye shirin dārad
gar khāter-e dargāh-e 'azizi dārad
del bordan az u vazhe-ye khunin dārad[156]

In the notebook of love from Hosein, we find the following:
"What sweetness there is, in a bloodied complexion?
If one seeks acceptance at the threshold of a beloved
And to steal his heart; he should use words stained with blood."

The notebook of love is linked to Hosein's self-sacrificing behavior. Self-sacrifice is a heritage he has left for the Shiites, and it is preserved in the notebook of their hearts. The poet compares the soldier to a suitor who, if he wishes to be accepted by the beloved, should paint his face with blood.

[155] *Mosābeqe-ye she'r-e jang*, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e sherkat-e sahāmi-ye chāp-e vezārat-e Ershād-e Eslāmi, 1361/1982, p. 19.
[156] *Kuche por az 'atr-e nāme to: majmu'e-ye ash'ār-e defā'e moqaddas,* ed. A. Binā'i, p. 41.

THE GRAMMAR OF LOVE

The motif of grammar of love is derived from the motif the lesson of love (*dars-e 'eshq*), which is in turn, related to the academy of love. Medieval mystics used the motif in the sense that spiritual disciplines are an alternative to ordinary lessons. They said that their relationship with the Beloved requires ascetic preparation. For this purpose, they denied themselves and disregarded the world. In his mystical work *al-Monqiz men al-Zalāl* ('Deliverance from Error'), Ghazāli writes that following one's desires makes one blind, unable to see the truth and follow it, but the fear of God can save one from going astray, for it means following God's commands and detachment from all things, lawful and unlawful alike.[157] Self-discipline is an important principle in mystical progress. It increases love toward God in the heart of the mystic. Fear of God is one of the mystical disciplines that unite the mystic with God. When his purposes become a single purpose, he frees himself from everything and begins contemplating and 'remembering' God. This process clears his mind and light enlightens his heart. All these guide the mystic to love of God and nearness to Him.[158] Orthodox Muslims insist on performing the devotional duties that are obligatory on every individual: prayer, fasting, pilgrimage to Mecca and charity.[159]

The motif of the lesson of love, which for the mystics was a preparatory ascetic discipline, takes a different form in the war poetry. A number of these poets speak of the grammar, or the grammar-book, of the language of love, in a way that resembles the etiquette of being love, in poems and treatises on profane love. The war poet Qeysar-e Aminpur used the motif of *dastur-e zabān-e 'eshq* ('The Grammar of the Language of Love') as the title of a volume of poetry, for a chapter in his book *Majmu'e-ye kāmel-e ash'ār* ('The Complete Collection of Poems'), and as the title of a *ghazal*. A *dastur* is a book of model texts which the student copies, to learn the art of writing or of correct expression, so it relates to the motif of the lesson of love rather than the book of love. However a *dastur* is also an order issued, to be obeyed. Aminpur refers to motifs in the

[157] A.J. Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam*, London, Boston, & Sydney: Mandala Books, 1979, p. 45-49.
[158] Ibid., p. 56.
[159] W.A.R. Shadid & P.S. van Koningsveld, *Religious Freedom and the Position of Islam in Western Europe: Opportunities and Obstacles in the Acquisition of Equal Rights*, Kampen: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1995, p. 67.

etiquette of love such as indirect communication with the beloved, hiding the secret of one's love, the lover's patience and the jealousy of a rival, and to both meanings of *dastur*, as a model text for the student, and as an order to be obeyed.

dast-e 'eshq az dāman-e del dur bād
mitavān āyā be del dastur dād?[160]

May the hand of love be kept from grasping the hem of the heart,
Is it possible to give orders to the heart?

The question is rhetorical: love asks no permission, it commands the heart. The power of love, and its functioning according to its own rules and principles, are emphasized in the following lines: "Can one order the ocean/ not to remember the shore?" The mystical motif of the ocean of love (*bahr-e 'eshq,* or *daryā-ye 'eshq*) appears several times in this poem. In mystical love treatises, a perfect mystic enters the ocean of love and finds the pearl of Truth, but one who is unready, who does not experience this love, cannot reach even the shore of love.[161] By using the term, the poet indirectly compares the soldier with a perfect mystic who is able to dive into the depths of the ocean of love if he denies himself. Thus, the battlefield is like the ocean of love in which real lovers may find the pearl of Truth, according to the poet. The next line puts the rhetorical question in a new form: "Can one order the wave and the wind to stop?" Here, the poet compares the action of love on the heart to the wind and the wave: their movements are beyond man's power. The wind is a common feature in classical love poetry, where it is called *sabā*, *nasim* and *bād*. The wind carries the message or the perfume of the beloved to the lover. Through his rhetorical questions, Aminpur says that love attracts and occupies the lover's heart, and the lover has no control of this. Using these mystical motifs in the political context means that one need not ask whether war makes sense. War and its violations are compared to love coming upon

[160] Q. Aminpur, *Majmu'e-ye kāmel-e ash'ār*, p. 34.
[161] For a classical mystical example see Sanā'i Ghaznavi, *Hadiqat al-Haqiqat*, p. 228.

a lover, and death to falling in love. It is an order (*dastur*) to be obeyed.

In the following lines Aminpur refers to the other meaning of *dastur.* In combination with *zabān* ('language'), *dastur* means the grammar or grammar-book that is a model to copy.

ān ke dastur-e zabān-e 'eshq rā
bi gozāre dar nahād-e mā nahād
khub midānest tigh-e tiz rā
dar kaf-e masti nemibāyest dād

The One who put the grammar of the language of love
In our nature, without an explanation
Well knows that he should not put
A sharp blade in the hand of a drunken man

The poet implies that one does not learn the language of love in school: rather, it is put into our nature at the time of creation. The language of love has a grammar (*dastur*) like every other language. In the second line, Aminpur plays with the ambivalence of *nahād*, which means both 'nature' or 'essence,' and as a verb, 'to put.' In Persian grammar, the subject of a sentence is also the *nahād,* while the *gozāre* (literally, 'the explanatory part') is the predicate that completes the sentence. The poet refers to the Creation when the Creator put the language of love in human nature, but without any explanation. Therefore the grammar of love in one's nature is incomplete, like an incomplete sentence that every one completes as he wishes. The soldier completes the sentence of love with his death.

In the last line, the poet compares this incomplete grammar of love to a sharp blade that should not be given to a drunkard because he has no control over his actions. The poet compares the soldier-lover to a drunken man. In mystical love literature, a lover is described as drunk on heavenly wine. He seeks the eternal Cupbearer and offers his life to become one with Him.

Aminpur uses the motif of the grammar of love to assert that the soldier completes the sentence when he offers his life on path of love (i.e. on the military front) and achieves eternal survival.

THE RELIGION OF LOVE: FIGHTING IN THE PATH OF LOVE

In the poetry of the Iran-Iraq war the mystical motif of the religion of love and other motifs connected to it were used to fan the flame of self-sacrifice. I will also discuss how death became meaningful for Iranian soldiers, so that they offered their lives for the cause of mystical love, and not merely for their country.

The mystics attribute several practices, doctrines and concepts to the religion of love, through which one can achieve union with the Beloved.[162] One of the first requirements of the religion of love is to tread the path of love, referred to as the *tariq-e 'eshq* or *rāh-e 'eshq*. The path of love in classical mystical texts offers an alternative to the orthodox path of Islam, defined by the practices of the mosque and the religious law (*shari'at*). However *shari'at* itself means a path: the main path, and the concept of the path of religion is part of orthodox theology. Some terms for it are taken from the Qur'ān. For example, *shari'at* and *menhāj* are used together at 5:48, where Arberry translates them as "a right way and an open road," and *din,* religion, occurs almost 100 times.[163] The path, or religion, entails following the direction given by God, which consists of religious principles and practices. Staying on the path limits a Muslim to a distinctive way of life; the way of obedience and submission to God. The path guides a Muslim to spiritual progress and eventually to salvation.

The orthodox path has a political dimension, for a Muslim who follows it not only fulfills his personal religious obligations, but also demonstrates and witnesses God's will in society. He must not only watch his own steps but also take part in social, political, economic and cultural affairs. Sufism also constitutes a path (*tariqe*) that begins with

[162] For information on Jāmis, a groupe of dervishes lived in classical period, called 'men of the religion of love, see A.T. Karamustafa, *God's Unrully Friendes,* p.80.

[163] N. Calder & M.B. Hooker, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Sharīʿa, 1. Sharīʿa in Ḳurʾān and ḥadīth.

repentance and leads through a number of stations (*maqāmāt*), representing the acquisition of virtues, such as absolute trust in God, and on to a higher series of ecstatic states (*ahvāl*). These culminate in the extinction (*fanā*) of the mystic (or the extinction of his lower soul or human attributes), and the subsequent continuance of his transformed personality, which has now taken on the attributes of God).[164] However, in the war poetry, the path of love is defined by sacrifice on the battlefield.

One political aspect of the path is to struggle[165] for the cause of God (*jehād fi sabil Allāh*). Iranian leaders, during the war, called the fight against the Iraqi regime a 'sacred defense' (*defā'-e moqaddas*). They legitimized the war by referring to religious motives such as 'defending righteousness' (*defā'-e haqq*) and the 'defence of Islam and Islamic values' (*defā' az eslām va arzeshhā-ye eslāmi*).[166] Constant elaboration on such motifs persuaded the audience that fighting the war was a religious duty. They saw themselves as preserving Islam from its infidel enemy. To confirm the infidelity of the Iraqi Ba'thist regime, the leaders of the Islamic Republic classified them as dissenters (*boghāt*, sing. *bāghi*). According to Shiite Islam, a dissenter is one who is against the Shiite imam. In a sermon at Friday prayers in Tehran Ayatollah Mohammed Emāmi Kāshāni (b.1934) defined *boghāt* as those who act against the ruler of Islam, Muslims and the Islamic community. Therefore, Iraqi authorities are *boghāt*, because they attacked the Islamic country of Iran. Ayatollah Khomeini, in his sermons, referred to the Iran-Iraq war as a war of Islam against infidelity (*kofr*).[167] These sayings legitimized the fight against Iraq: Iranians should fight to preserve Islam.

The necessity of the fight with the enemies of God is confirmed by the Qur'ān: God will reward in Paradise one who fights with the infidels (9:111). Iran's Shiite authority called the Sunnis infidels, whose ancestors had taken the caliphate from the family of the prophet and killed them. However according to them about sixty percent of Iraq's

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[164] J. Baldick, *Mystical Islam: An Introduction to Sufism*, New York: Tauris, 2000, p. 3.
[165] For different kinds of *jehād* see S. M. Gieling, *Religion and War in Revolutionary Iran*, London & New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1999, p. 40.
[166] Ibid, p. 45.
[167] Ibid, pp. 55-61.

population are Shiite, and most of the Iraqi soldiers were Shiite Muslims.[168] In the Iranian war propaganda the population in Iraq were called 'the oppressed nation of Iraq'. Rescuing the oppressed Iraqis from the tyrannies of the Sunni state was one of the goals of the war. Saddam Hosein had taken authority by force, thus, the Shiite Muslims of Iran had a responsibility to free Iraqis and restore their rights.

The Qur'ān makes a distinction between one who fights on the path of God and one who remains in a safe place (4:95); it gives a higher status to the former. The importance of performing *jehād* is seen in the earliest years of Islam, when the Muslim community was shaped. In later periods, *jehād* was considered a duty that had to be performed regularly. For instance, the Caliph Hārun al-Rashid (766-809) performed *hajj* one year and fought against the Byzantines the following year. In this period, some mystics took part in fighting against the infidels. 'Abdollāh Ebn al-Mobārak is a famous example. Some even devoted their lives to fighting the infidels, as part of an ascetic discipline. These people were connected by a common ideology, lifestyle and goals. For them *jehād* was a religious obligation to be fulfilled by all believers "irrespective of the political authority."[169] For the medieval mystics, fighting for the cause of God was equal to other core religious practices, such as fasting and prayer. *Jehād*, in the sense of physical struggle, was a form of self-mortification and a method of attaining spiritual progress.

Mystic writers used the motif of the path of love (*tariq-e 'eshq)* to offer an alternative to formal religion. *Jehād* was used to refer to a moral struggle, in the first case against one's self. One who embarks upon the path of perfection has a higher spiritual power, because he abstains from worldly desires and mortifies his body to purify his lower soul (*nafs*) of negative traits.[170] The path consists of several stages and stations. It begins with repentance (*towbe*), meaning to turn one's face from sin. The mystic repents of sin, worldly desires, and the things that separate him from God. The next step is abstinence (*wara'*), which originates in the fear of God. An ascetic abstains from all worldly

[168] R. Wright, *In the Name of God: The Khomeini Decade*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989, p. 86; for a historical example, see D.G. Tor, *Violent Order: Religious Warfare, Chivalry and the Ayyār Phenomenon in the Middle Islamic World*, Istanbul: Wurzburg, 2007, pp. 39-40.
[169] Ibid., pp. 41-45.
[170] E. Geoffroy & et al, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Ṭariḳa, I. the nature and Development of the Term in Sufism.

belongings and desires. What comes next is *tawakkol*, means absolute trust in God. The next station is patience (*sabr*), which is followed by the station of gratitude (*shokr*). Following that is contentment (*rezā*). The celebrated mystic Zo'al-Nun the Egyptian (d. 859) says, "*Rezā* is the joy of the heart in the bitterness of the divine decree." The next stations are fear (*khowf*) and hope (*rajā*). A mystic is not afraid of the fire of the Hell, but rather of God's scrutiny. The last stations are love (*'eshq*) and gnosis (*ma'refat*). The interconnection between love and gnosis is elaborated on by Ghazāli, who writes, "… one can only love what one knows."[171]

WAR POETRY, AND THE PATH OF LOVE

Persian war poets employ the terminology used in classical love literature, and by the medieval mystics, building on those traditions. In war poetry, the soldier's journey to the front line is defined as a mystical path of perfection involving obedience, and offering, to some extent, an alternative to the orthodox practices of the mosque. One who follows these principles has greater virtue and morality. His spiritual attainment connects him to the divine truth. The soldier on the battlefield quickly reaches the spiritual level that a mystic might achieve through a lifetime of ascetic practices. He becomes an example of virtue to be followed by other members of the community. There is a major difference, however, between the mystic striving to achieve spiritual elevation and the soldier fighting in the war.

The war poets equated death on the battlefield with embarking on the path of love, to persuade the young soldiers of Iran to sacrifice their lives. The war poet Seyyed Hasan Hoseini applied the motif of the path of love in a *ghazal* entitled 'Farewell' (*vedā'*):

vāy-e man gar dar tariq-e 'eshq kutāhi konam
khāsse vaqti yār bā bāng-e rasā mikhānadam[172]

Woe to me if I am not ready to go on the path of love

[171] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 109-132.
[172] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 33.

Especially when the beloved calls me with a clear voice

The poet compares a soldier's yearning to fight the enemy with a mystic's yearning to embark on the path of love. For the soldier it means *jehād*. The soldier hears the voice of the beloved (*yār*) calling him. The poet then elaborates on the mystical tenets: the path of love, in Islamic mysticism, embraces the *shari'at* (religious law), *tariqat* (the mystical path) and *haqiqat* (the Truth). *Shari'at* as we have seen is a Qur'anic term derived from *shar'* and meaning "the main road." The principles that a mystic (*sālek* or *morid)* who starts on the path should follow are called *tariqat,* In Arabic, a *tariq* is a branch of the *shar'*. Therefore, following the religious law is a prerequisite for entering the path.[173] Hoseini compares the soldier who goes to the front line to a mystic who resolves to act on the principles of the *tariqat.* Both may understand the divine reality (*haqiqat*), which is the ultimate destination of the mystic journey. Another important aspect of the war poetry is identification of the beloved.

In the second line, the poet compares Ayatollah Khomeini to the spiritual beloved (*yār*). Because of the gender neutrality inherent to Persian, the gender of the beloved remains unclear. '*Yār*' and '*dust*' ('friend') may refer to a female or male beloved.[174] Ayatollah Khomeini is also compared to a spiritual master (*sheykh*) whom the aspirant mystic must obey. In Islamic mysticism, the relationship between a mystic and his master is of great importance. A mystic who embarks upon the path to spiritual perfection should follow the principles of his master (i.e. the teacher of love), who for the mystic is a perfect model of God on earth, the prototype of the 'perfect man'. The aspirant mystic perceives the Beauty of God in his master,[175] who is represented as a friend who guides the student to follow the principles and practices of the path, such as abstinence, self-mortification, and

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[173] Ibid., p. 33.

[174] See J. Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1968, p. 86.

[175] G. Böwering, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under Ensān-e Kāmel. In late Safavid Iran, religious scholars such as the jurist mollā Mohammad Bāqir Majlisi (1037-1110/1627-8) and Mohammad Tāher Qomi heavily attacked Sufis who claimed that a mystic can see the beauty of God in the face of his master. See Z.A. Safā, *Tārikh-e adabiyyāt dar Iran: az āghāz-e sade-ye dahom tā miyāne-ye sade-ye dawāzdahom hejri*, 5th edition, Tehran: Ferdowsi, 1363/1984, pp. 209-211. For further information on Sufi orders in the Safavid period see S.A. Arjomand, "Religious Extremism, Sufism and Sunnism in Safavid Iran: 1501-1722," in *Journal of Asian History*, vol. 15:1, 1981, pp. 1-35.

reciting the Qur'ān and the remembrance (*zekr*) of God's names. The aspirant mystic should obey the instructions and principals that his master dictates.[176] In the war poetry, these ideas are applied either to Ayatollah Khomeini, who is presented as a spiritual master and beloved, or to imam Hosein.

Hoseini emphasizes the importance of obedience (*etā'at*) to the beloved. In the poem above, he says that the beloved (*yār*), meaning Khomeini, has called him. The lover follows the demand of his beloved, Khomeini, and offers his life on this path. It is worth noting that Ayatollah Khomeini was an ideal leader for both traditionally religious Iranians and the educated younger generation. For the former he represented cultural values and traditions, and for the later he was a champion of national independence. Ayatollah Khomeini intended to change the world, and this idea fascinated the young population.[177]

In the following couplet, Hoseini juxtaposes the path of love with death on the battlefield and compares Ayatollah Khomeini to the third Shiite imam, Hosein:

bāng-e hal men nāser az ku-ye Jamārān miresad
dar tariq-e 'āsheqi ruh-e khodā mikhānadam[178]

The call 'is there anyone to assist me' is heard from the direction of Jamārān
The Spirit of God (*Ruh-e khodā*) is calling me to embark on the path of love

The poet again says that a lover who embarks on the path of love should obey the will of the Beloved. The expression 'is there anyone to help me' (*hal men nāsir*),[179] repeats words attributed to imam Hosein, during the battle against the Umayyad caliph Yazid on the day of *'Āshurā*. Their use here implies that the Sunni Saddam Hosein, Iraq's president, and his men are faithless, and usurpers of authority, like Yazid. According to the Shiite sources, Yazid did not respect Islamic principles: for example, among Shiites it is believed that he

[176] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 135.
[177] A.M. Ansari, *Modern Iran since 1921,* p. 201.
[178] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 33.
[179] This is the abstract form of *hal men nāser yansoroni*? ('Is there anyone to assist me?').

drank wine. In this comparison, the Iranian youth correspond to imam Hosein's righteous companions, and the Iraqi soldiers to Yazid and his men, who killed imam Hosein, the grandson of the prophet Mohammad, on the plain of Karbalā.[180]

The voice from Jamārān saying 'is there anyone to help me' is that of Ayatollah Khomeini, who lived in this suburb of Tehran. Khomeini is therefore being equated with imam Hosein. Khomeini, like Hosein, called Shiites to assist him against the enemy. The poet politicizes the mystical motif of the path of love to create a dynamic setting in which soldiers equate themselves with the historical companions and helpers of imam Hosein. They fight against the descendants of the Umayyad caliph to take revenge for Hosein's blood.

To illustrate Khomeini's influence on his followers, Hamid Dabashi refers to Khomeini's role as a leader who mobilizes the Revolution to an Islamic Revolution, and in turn the Islamic Revolution offers him the highest mystical position. For his followers, Khomeini "revived the religious consciousness…, he has made it possible to believe again in a metaphysics of Ultimate Salvation…, he is considered to have enacted a popular epic."[181] These notions are introduced in war poetry; Ayatollah Khomeini is also equated with a sage who knows how to cure the pain of love.[182] The poet Abd al-Hamid Ja'fari, in a *ghazal* entitled 'In Memory of Friends' (*yād-e yārān*), compares Ayatollah Khomeini to the "pole" (i.e., axis or guide post) of the chivalrous" (*qotb-e 'ayyārān*). The war poet 'Ali Mo'allem from Dāmghān describes Ayatollah Khomeini as opium (*afyun*) that cures the drunkenness of the wine of love, saying: "to believe it, this visible argument is enough for me because Khomeini is the best opium for my long-lasting drunkenness (*marā be bāvari insān dalil-e 'eyni beh*/ *ke dir nash'e-am afyun-e man Khomeini beh*).[183] The analogy between Khomeini and opium is not only that he is a remedy for drunkenness, but also that his charisma attracts followers who cannot leave him alone. Mohammad 'Ali Mo'allem also introduces Khomeini as the point to which the 'pillars' turn (*qeble-ye owtād*), saying:

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[180] For further information on '*Āshurā* see M. Ayoub, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under 'Āšūrā'
[181] H. Dabashi, *The Theology of Discontent,* p. 418.
[182] See 'A.R. Qazve, *Az nakhlestān tā khiyābān*, Tehran: Sherkat-e Enteshārāt-e Sure-ye Mehr, 1387/2008, p. 40.
[183] M. 'A. Mo'allem Dāmghāni, *Rej'at-e sorkh-e setāre,* p. 53.

"no one asks, what do you have in the dish of perfume / O direction for the pillars! No one seeks what you have (*kas naporsad ke to dar table-ye orād che dāri / kas najuyad ke to ey qeble-ye owtād che dāri*).[184] Based on the doctrine of *qotb*s, Islamic mystics believe that existence is always supported by forty mighty men, the poles (*qotbs*), and when one dies another pole takes his place.[185]A 'pole' is a man who has achieved spiritual perfection. In Persian mysticism *qotbs* and *owtād* are used indiscriminately; *owtād* is a Qur'ānic term (38:12, 78:7; 89:10), *qotb* is not. The poet compares Khomeini to the *qeble* to which Muslims turn in prayer, to say that all the 'pillars' follow Khomeini's instructions and his principles. Thus, existence as a whole is in need of his support.

'Abdollāh Giviyān compares Ayatollah Khomeini to several famous mystic masters, entitled 'I Know my Lineage Well' (*man tabār-e khod rā khub mishenāsam*):

tā Bāyazid-o Joneyd…
tā Busa'id-o Khāje Ansār…
dar pish-e pāy-e pir-e zamān
āsude dar behesht-e Jamārān
be chelle benshinand[186]

… until Bāyazid and Joneyd…
Busa'id and Khāje Ansār…
Perform the forty-day retreat (*chelle neshini*)
in Jamārān, at the feet of the master of the age

Giviyān suggests that Khomeini's spiritual level is higher than medieval mystical masters such as Abu Yazid Bastāmi, known as Bāyazid, al-Joneyd (d. 910), Abu Sa'id Abi'l-Kheyr

[184] Ibid., p.115.
[185] Also known as the forty saints; see B. Radtke, "The Concept of Wilāya in Early Sufism," in *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rumi*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London & New York: Khāneqāh-e Nematollāhi Publications, 1993, pp. 483-496.
[186] *Gozide-ye she'r-e jang va defā'-e moqaddas*, p. 139.

(967-1049) and Khāje ʻAbdollāh Ansāri (1006-1089). They should perform *chelle- nishini* before Khomeini. This means literally, "sitting for forty days" and refers to the mystic practice of a forty-day retreat, during which the mystic fasts, prays and contemplates God constantly, in the hope of receiving guidance from God. According to the poet, Khomeini spends most of his life in his room performing religious devotions, and has gained a divine knowledge through which he can interpret what is revealed to those mystics.

THE PRAYER OF LOVE

1. OBLIGATORY PRAYERS

The motif of the prayer of love (*namāz-e ʻeshq)* relates to the path of love, since prayer is part of the orthodox Islamic path, the *shariʻat*. Prayer is common to all religions: it distinguishes believers from non-believers, and the manner of prayer distinguishes one religious community from another. Prayer in Islam has different forms: it may be an appeal for forgiveness (*esteghfār*), an expression of praise for God (*tasbih*), a repeated recitation and remembrance of God, and more. I will discuss only *namāz* and (in the following section), mystic prayer.

The most characteristic and common form of prayer among Muslims is the obligatory prayer, known as *salāt* or *namāz*, which are performed five times daily by Muslims. The obligatory prayers are one of the 'five pillars of Islam,' the others being the declaration of faith, fasting during Ramazān, pilgrimage to Mecca, and almsgiving. In Islam, these practices demonstrate one's religiosity and piety, and obedience to God. The obligatory prayers connect the believer with God, without any intermediary. This evokes the image of Moses talking to God,[187] and the prophet Mohammad's ascension (*meʻrāj*) and conversation with God. Mohammad is reported to have said that daily prayer is a remembrance of the joy of the ascension. This enabled mystics to link mystical ecstasy to the ascension terminology. To some extent, a sincere Muslim may experience such a divine

[187] G. Böwering, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, under Prayer, the Institution of Ritual Prayer.

presence.[188]

The mystics developed an alternative literary and theological, motif, the prayer of love, to illustrate how their relationship with the Beloved differed from that of orthodox Muslims. According to the treatises on mysticism, a mystic should contemplate God constantly, not just as set times. Such a mystic's faith (*imān*) was considered superior to performing religious rituals without mindfulness. In the poetry of the Iran-Iraq war, the prayer of love is connected to the soldiers' prayer and their act of sacrifice on the battlefield. Their act is compared to the prayer of imam Hosein before he fights with, and is killed by, the soldiers of Ebn al-Ziyād. Using this comparison, war poets can introduce imam Hosein as a lover performing the prayer of love.

The importance of prayer is stressed by Ayatollah Khomeini, who writes that one should be happier with his prayers than with the victory of the Islamic Revolution.[189] For him, prayer sustains the Islamic political tradition. He implies that prayer is more important than the Revolution because, on the one hand, prayer connects one to God and, on the other hand, if more Muslims perform the prayers, this union strengthens the Islamic community. Performing prayer connects the believers to each other, creating a sense of community. Every individual performs his duty with one's personal space, it connects him each day to the community. The believer also knows he is performing the ritual in the way the prophet did. So prayer connects the believer with three realities: the community, the prophet and God.[190]

The war poets applied the terminology of ascension and prayer to the events of the war. In war poetry, a soldier's fight on the battlefield is compared to the prayer of a Muslim. During the war, the soldiers would perform the ritual obligatory prayers in congregation (*namāz-e jamā'at*) before an attack. The prayer was a means of preparing for death, and fostered belief in divine support for their fight against an enemy of religion. The possibility of death, after prayer, gave a transcendent quality to the fight, like the prophet's

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[188] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 218; G. Monnot, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Ṣalāt, B. The place of ṣalāt in the Muslim religion.

[189] *Pithy Aphorisms, Wise Sayings and Counsels*, Tehran: The Institute for the Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works (International Affairs Division), 1994. p. 38.

[190] G. Monnot, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Ṣalāt, B. The place of ṣalāt in the Muslim religion.

ascension.

The war poets used the mystical motif of prayer of love for further political purposes. Mohammad Khalil Mozanneb inserts the motif of the prayer of love into imam Hosein's death on the plain of Karbalā:

salām kard be ākhar namāz-e 'eshq be 'eshq
ke gheyr-e 'eshq be mehrāb-e khun nadid Hosein[191]

He [Hosein] saluted love, in his last prayer of love
Because he saw nothing except love in the prayer niche of blood

The lines tell us that Hosein's last prayer was directed to the prayer niche of blood (in contrast to the prayer niche in the mosque, which marks the direction for obligatory prayers. In this prayer, Hosein encountered, and greeted, love. The poet implies that the vision of love removes the fear of death. By using the term prayer niche of blood, rather than the prayer niche of the heart, the poet implies that this prayer is in fact the moment of Hosein's death on the battlefield. And when love manifests itself, the lover sees nothing but love.[192]

The war poet Samad Parviz introduces the motif of the prayer of love in a quatrain (*robā'i*), in which he compares the fight against the enemy to the prayer of love, and connects it to the death of imam Hosein:

namāz-e 'eshq dar sahrā be pā bud
emām-e 'āsheqān khun-e khodā bud
sary ke ruy-e neyze āye mikhānd

[191] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2*, selected by M.'A. Mardāni, Tehran: Howze-ye honari-ye Sazemān-e Tablighāt-e Eslāmi, 1369/1990, p. 24.
[192] For further examples, see *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3*, selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 75; S. Behbahāni, *Majmu'e-ye ash'ār*, Tehran: Mo'assese-ye Enteshārāt-e Negāh, 1385/2006, p. 940.

be haftād-o do mellat āshenā bud[193]

The prayer of love was performed on the plain
The leader of the lovers was the blood of God
The head on a lance, that recited the Qur'ān,
Was one known to the seventy-two nations

The prayer of love, which in traditional Sufism had to be connected to battle against the temptations of the lower soul and self-sacrifice here it is connected to Hosein.

The importance of the lover's loyalty even in death is neatly examined in the section "The Narration of Mansur Hallāj on the Gallows" in the *Ellāhi-nāme,* by the mystic poet ʻAttār:

pas u goft ān ke serr-e ʻeshq beshnākht
namāzash rā be khun bāyad vozu sākht[194]

Then he [Hallāj] said one who knows the secret of love
Has to perform his ablutions with blood, to perform the prayer [of love]

By connecting the ablutions, which are done before beginning the obligatory prayers, to Hallāj's symbolic act of covering his face with his blood when his hands were cut off, ʻAttār shows the initial step in the path of love is willingness to death.

2. THE REMEMBRANCE OF GOD IN MYSTIC PRAYER

The examples of the prayer of love above relate to the obligatory prayers, especially when they are performed by the congregation in a mosque. In other cases the prayer of love motif relates to forms of prayer that are free from the restraints of the mosque. The contemporary

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[193] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e ʻĀshurā 3*, selected by M. ʻA. Mardāni, p. 30. In the second line, the term 'the blood of God' (*khun-e khodā*) is a title of Imām Hosein. It refers to the divine tradition (*hadith-e qodsi*), in which God speaks in the first person: "whom My love kills, for him shall I be blood money."

[194] Farid al-Din ʻAttār, *Elāhi-nāme*, ed. Hellmut Ritter, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Tus, 1368/ 1989, p.107.

poet Shahāb refers to this freedom of restraints in a *ghazal* entitled 'The Prayer of Love' (*namāz-e 'eshq*), intended to mobilize the youth of Iran to take part in the fight:

be ruy-e asb qiyāmam be ruy-e khāk qo'ud
in namāz-e rah-e 'eshq ast kaz ādāb tohi-st[195]

I stand up [in prayer] on the horse; I prostrate myself in the dust,
This is the prayer of the path of love, for which there are no proper forms

The poet makes a distinction between the prayer of love and daily prayers (*namāz*): there are prescribed forms (*ādāb*) for the daily prayers, but not for the prayer of love.[196] Although he uses the word *namāz*, the reference is to free-form prayers. He uses the word *qo'ud*, meaning sitting down or remaining in one place, rather than *sojud*, the movement in the obligatory prayer in which the believer kneels forward until his forehead touches the ground (or for a Shiite, touches a small tablet made of clay ideally from Karbalā). This is in part a contrast to the prayer on the back of a horse, representing prayer in movement and prayer in stillness respectively. But the use of *qo'ud* rather than *sojud* is also another sign that it is mystic prayer, not the prayer of the mosque, which is intended. Some of the classical mystics considered this a higher form of prayer, or even an alternative to the obligatory daily prayers. Mansur Hallāj is an example: he said, "It is You who drives me mad with love, not my remembrance (in prayer) of You."[197] The idea is that for one whose soul is pure, there is a stage at which one is in constant communion with the Beloved and so near to the Creator that the religious protocols are redundant. By saying that there are no proper forms required, in the prayer of love, Shahāb compares the soldier to a mystic, and his death to the spiritual elevation of the mystic. They both endure hardships to purify their soul from negative traits. They leave their family and their belongings through the path of

[195] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3*, selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 74.
[196] The word *ādāb*, translated here as proper forms, means "high quality of soul, good upbringing, urbanity, and courtesy." F. Gabrieli, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Adab.
[197] H.W. Mason, *Al-Hallaj*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1995, p. 71.

perfection and give up their lives for a higher cause. The poem may be interpreted in another fashion: the soldier may not leave the battle to perform prayer. While fighting, he is in constant remembrance of God. Neither the mystic nor the soldier needs to pray in a specific form, but they purify their hearts to receive the revelation of the Beloved, and they remember God in their hearts, not with their tongues.[198] The soldier attains the same mystical level that the mystic does because he is performing prayer without any *ādāb.* To reach the ultimate goal of prayer, standing in presence of God, the soldier comes to believe that his body is a barrier between himself and the Beloved. The mystic fights with his lower soul, which is considered the primary enemy of man, while the soldier fights the enemies of his religion. According to the poet, both the soldier and the mystic have a common goal; both perform *zekr* constantly to connect with the Beloved.

Discipline of *zekr* is defined as "an act of worship," "a methodical and repeated invocation of a formula, divine name, or litany (*werd*)."[199] To assert the importance of invocation of God, Sufis refer to the Qur'ānic verses in which the remembrance of God is mentioned as an obligatory act (33:41; 29:44). No less important than the doctrine of obligation is the doctrine of reciprocity of *zekr* through which man receives God's blessing when he invocates Him. As the Qur'ān states: "So remember Me and I will remember you" (2:147). Another doctrine of invocation is that "in essence the invocation, the invoker, and the Invoked One are one."[200] The invoker is inseparable from the Invoked. Another reason for which one should remember God is not to forget that He is his Lord. Although, we in our essence profess God's Lordship, the darkness of existence has veiled our soul; thus, man needs an inwardly spiritual journey to purify his soul.[201]

In war poetry the spiritual practice of *zekr* is associated with the soldiers' prayer on the battlefield. In a quatrain called 'Burning because of Thirst' (*suz-e teshnegi*), an

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[198] For more information on remembrance with the tongue and in the heart, and the method of performance, see L. Gardet, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Dhikr; Sh. Friedlander, *The Whirling Dervishes: Being an Account of the Sufi Order Known as the Mevlevis and its Founder the Poet and Mystic Mevlana Jalaluddin Rumi*, Abany, NY: State University of New York Press, c.1992.

[199] M.I. Waley, "Contemplative Disciplines in Early Persian Sufism," in *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rumi*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London & New York: Khāneqāh-e Nematollāhi Publicaitons, 1993, p. 50.

[200] Ibid. p. 506.

[201] Ibid. pp. 506-8.

anonymous war poet writes:

az 'arsh gozasht zekr-e yā rabhā-yash
shod tire ze dud-e āh-e del shabhā-yash
bar ātash-e sine-ash kasi āb narikht
misukht ze suz-e teshnegi labhāyash[202]

His invocations, i.e. O God, passed from the throne of God
From the sigh of his heart his nights became dark
No one poured water on the fire of his heart
His lips were consuming because of heat of (i.e. extreme) thirstiness

The poet asserts that the soldier's remembrance of God passed through His throne while the soldier sighs from the pain of separation from the Beloved. There is no one who can assist the soldier and settle the fire of love burning his heart. In this poem, the soldier on the military front on the one hand is compared to a mystic performing God's invocation (*zekr*). On the other hand the soldier is likened to imam Hosein who martyred while he was suffering from extreme thirst. The soldier's prayer may be seen as invocating God's name and His attributes. Through *zekr*, his heart is filled with passion for God and yearning for union with Him. Although night is dark, the poet associates the darkness with yearning for union with the Beloved. In Persian literature the lover's night is dark and long because he cannot sleep because of the pain of separation. In the third and fourth lines, by using the compound *suz-e teshnegi* i.e. literally "heat of thirstiness;" the poet refers to Karbalā and imam Hosein's death. He was killed, while for ten days, had no access to water. By employing the mystical word *zekr* and making reference to the event of Karbalā the poet draws an analogy between the mystic and imam Hosein; afterwards, the poet likens the soldier to both a mystic who is performing invocation and to imam Hosein who offered his life in the fight.

[202] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2*, selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p.11.

THE PRIMORDIAL COVENANT AND ITS WITNESSES

In mystical literature, the motif of the primordial covenant is derived from a Qur'ānic verse (7:171) in which God made a covenant between Himself and Adam's progeny.[203] He asked Adam's descendants, "Am I not your Lord?" (*alast-o birabbekom*) and they answered, "Yes, we witness it" (*balā shahidnā*). The affirmative *balā,* in Arabic, or *bali* in Persian, looks and sounds very much like *balā'*, meaning affliction. The similarity was exploited in Persian literature. The mystics say that from the Day of the Covenant, man has accepted continual afflictions, because through suffering one's soul becomes pure and worthy of union with the Beloved.[204] Covenant (*mithāq)* is also a Qur'ānic word meaning "to trust, to have confidence in." The souls who answered in the affirmative to this Covenant are known as witnesses to it – the *shāhed-e alast.*

Basing themselves on the Qur'ānic verse, mystics have asserted that humanity made a covenant with God, which obliges them to purify their hearts from negative attributes to become worthy of God's forgiveness and receive His grace. The mystic's goal is to return to that moment of the covenant, in which there was an accord between God and humanity. Mystics use the motif to say that men do not belong only to the physical world, they originate in a divine moment, and their short lifetimes are an opportunity to purify their souls and become worthy of returning home, to paradise.

The poets of the Iran-Iraq war adapted this mystical motif to draw an analogy between a martyr's death at the front and a moment of spiritual perfection. The martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war, being the elected ones, are witnesses to the Covenant in Pre-eternity, and will be witnesses on the Day of Judgment in the hereafter. In this poetry, the primordial covenant entails a responsibility to participate in the fight against the enemy, for this is an act of obedience. When the soldier says *bali* and goes to the front, he is accepting afflictions for the sake of the Beloved. Therefore, he is fulfilling his eternal covenant.[205]

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[203] C.E. Bosworth, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Mīthāḳ; M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *The Spirituality of Shi'i Islam: Belief and Practices*, New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2011, pp. 144-45 and 253.

[204] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 137. On this account Rumi wrties, He said *alast*, you answered yes/ what is gratitude for saying 'yes' it is enduring afflictions (*goft alast u to begofti bali/ shokr-e bali chist keshidan balā*). See Mowlānā Jalāl al-Din Rumi, *Kolliyāt-e Shams-e Tabrizi*, p. 161, *ghazal* no. 355.

[205] The idea goes back at least as far as Rumi. See A. Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, p. 341.

Death on the battlefield makes the soldier a witness, *shāhed*, to God's unity, and also makes him a martyr (*shahid*), whose example will be followed by the community. The two words come from the same root.[206]

One of the Islamic theoreticians whose ideas were used during the Islamic Revolution, and also in the war with Iraq, was 'Ali Shariati (1933-1977). He presents an interpretation of witnessing, as mentioned in verse 2:143 in the Qur'ān: "And thus, we have made you a just nation, so that you may bear witness unto the rest of mankind, and that the Apostle [Mohammad] may bear witness unto you…" In Shariati's reading, "this witnessing entails a responsibility for Muslims to perpetuate the heritage of their martyrs, of the Shiite imams and religious leaders, and of the Book, to make their nations an example, and to become martyrs for the people of the world, like the prophet who is both a witness and a martyr." Shariati even asserts that a martyr achieves the same spiritual rank that the prophet did.[207]

During the war, the leaders of the Islamic Republic drew on the mystical motif of bearing witness to assert that a solider who dies in battle becomes a model of sacrifice that the community should imitate. In a Friday sermon, Ayatollah Khomeini encouraged the Iranian young men to participate in the fight and sacrifice their lives to bear witness: "…to tear the veils of darkness and oppression, shed your blood. O martyrs! I take you as a witness that I am delivering the message of your blood."[208] Repeated references remind the audience that the martyr is alive and his witness is remembered. In Shiite tradition the Shiites' twelve imams are "spiritually present and actively involved in human affairs long after [their] deaths."[209] A similar attitude toward soldiers who have fallen in action exalts their rank to that of the Shiite imams. Ayatollah Khomeini holds that he is delivering 'the message of the martyr's blood'' (*payām-e khun-e shahid*). He indicates that the martyr is

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[206] R. Peters, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Shāhid.

[207] 'A. Shariati, *"Hosein vāreth-e Ādam,"* in *Hosein vāreth-e Ādam, Majmu'e-ye āthār 19*, Tehran: Qalam, 1367/1988, p. 200.

[208] *Dar maktab-e jom'e*: *Majmu'e-ye khotbehā-ye namāz-e jom'e-ye Tehran*, compiled and ordered by markaz-e madārek-e farhangi-ye enqelāb-e eslāmi, vol. 2, week 71-113, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e chāpkhāne-ye Vezārat-e Ershād-e Eslāmi, 1365/1984, p. 53, (sermon of 19/10/1359; 01/09/1981).

[209] D. Pinault, "Zeynab bint Ali and the Place of the Women of the Households of the First Imāms," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety*, ed. G. R.G. Hambly, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998, p. 81.

still a witness and observes his act. Thus, someone in the audience may conclude that the martyr is observing his actions, and he should show his loyalty to the martyr by emulating the path he took.

The concept of witnessing to the nation led during the war to a genre of martyr's testimonies: letters and wills written by Iranian soldiers. Sa'id Fathollāh, one of those who died, writes to his mother: "Over here, there is a war between Islam and blasphemy, and I have witnessed to it in full."[210] Sa'id Fathollāh defines himself as a witness to other nations, and considers the Iraqis as unbelievers. His subsequent death made Sa'id Fathollāh a model of morality and virtue.

The poet Seyed Hasan Hoseini applies the concept of the witness of self-sacrifice in a quatrain designed to encourage the Iranian population to participate in the fight against the Iraqi enemy:

in ast payām-e khun-e yārān-e shahid
jang ast barādarān neshastan natavān[211]

This is the message of the blood of the martyred friends
O brothers! This is war: we cannot sit [idle]

The martyr's message – written in blood – tells the people of Iran that they cannot be indifferent to the invasion. In revolutionary and war poems, the verb "not to sit" (*neshastan natavān*) means to come into action against opponents.

In a *ghazal*, the war poet 'Abbās Barāti-pur (b. 1943) compares the fallen soldier to a primordial witness (*shāhed-e alast*), a lover and a mystic:

ey shāhed-e alast kojā bār baste'i

[210] N. Nazemi, "Sacrifice and Authorship: A Compendium of the Wills of Iranian Martyrs," in *Iranian Studies*, vol. 30, no. 3/4, Selections from the Literature of Iran 1977-1997, (Summer, Autumn 1997*)*, p. 269.
[211] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 148.

mast-e sabu-ye nāz kojā uftāde'i[212]

O Primordial Witness! Why have you packed up your things?
Drunk on the jar of coquetry, where are you heading?

Barāti-pur employs the mystical motif of the primordial witness to say that the fallen soldier has fulfilled his covenant with God. The compound verb "to pack a load" (*bār bastan*) points to a mystical attitude to temporal life, his dismay of clinging to earthly possessions is an idea that every Muslim is familiar with. The mystical motif of being drunk from the jar of coquetry requires some explanation. In Persian love literature, coquetry (*nāz*) is a characteristic of the beloved, who teases the lover by flirting and coquetry, but not following through. It is matched on the lover's side by supplication (*niyāz*), a characteristic through which the lover displays his need and dependence on the beloved. In mystical treatises, "The interplay of these forms of behavior mirrors man's relationship with God."[213] For instance, in his mystical work *Savāneh*, Ghazāli holds that the Beloved tells the lover that he may unite with the Beloved if he shows his *niyāz* to Him. This union results in the eternal survival of the lover.[214] The Beloved's coquetry is an appearance of indifference towards the lover, while revealing something of His beauty to attract the lover. Indifference and partial revelation awaken the lover's desire.

The mystical concepts of *nāz* and *niyāz* are employed in war poetry to define the soldiers' struggle for martyrdom as *niyāz* for union with the Beloved. The motif of being drunk from the jar of coquetry (*mast-e sabuy-e nāz*) may be observed from various points of view. Firstly, in a worldly sense, the soldier is defined as a lover drunk on the beloved's coquetry. Ayatollah Khomeini may be defined as the beloved who offers the wine of selflessness to the lover. He asks the lover to go to the battlefield and fight against the enemy, or run onto minefields to clear the way for the armour. In war poetry, the fight

[212] See *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2*, selected by M.'A. Mardāni, p. 13.
[213] The translation 'supplication' is borrowed from Sh.A. Aflāki, *The Feats of the Knowers of God* (*Manāqeb al-'Arefin*), trans. J. O'kane, Leiden: Brill, 2002, p. 393; the quotation can be found at p. 717, n. 108.
[214] Ahmad Ghazāli, *Savāneh*, p. 20.

against the enemy of the Beloved proves the lover's fidelity and his *niyāz* for companionship and, possibly, union with the Beloved. The metaphor of drunkenness, referring in this line to death and religious rapture, will be discussed below. In the poem, the soldier is compared to a mystic/lover who strives to purify his soul to become worthy of union with the Beloved. The Beloved's coquetry, like wine, intoxicates the lover, removing his reason and his awareness of self, and transforms him into a selfless drunk who offers his life in the hope of union with the Beloved.

THE PRIMORDIAL CUP

Another aspect of the primordial covenant found in the war poetry is the primordial cup (*jām-e alast*). Mystics employed the motif of the primordial cup to characterize the mystic path as an alternative to orthodox religion, in which drunkenness is forbidden. Rumi, for example, refers to Qur'ān 76:21: "Their Lord will give them to drink of a pure wine (*sharāban tahurā*)."[215] In mysticism, a mystic becomes drunk from the wine offered to him by the Primordial Cupbearer. During the 1980s, religious scholars employed the mystical concept of intoxication to define martyrdom as *ipso facto* a guarantee of spiritual progress, so as to motivate the Iranian population to fight against the Iraqi enemy.

The war poets used the motif in comparisons between the soldier in battle and a mystic who has drunk the primordial wine and freed himself from the shackles of reason. 'Ali-Rezā Qazve (b. 1963) writes "O God! Offer me wine that I may deny the whole of existence/ while dancing in agitation and drunkenness."[216] Here the poet also uses the imagery of dancing, common with classical mystics such as Rumi, who said that every movement in the mystics' dance (*samā'*) results in a vision of the Beloved. Rumi shows the selflessness of this dance by stating that, at the moment of ecstasy, the Beloved may dance on the tablet of the lover's heart.[217] Qazve uses the mystical concept of dancing, devoid of

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[215] A. Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, p. 150. Arberry translates the verse, "Their Lord shall give them to drink a pure draught." See *The Koran Interpreted*, trans. A. J. Arberry, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1995, p. 316.
[216] 'A.R. Qazve, *Qatār-e andimeshk va tarānehā-ye jang*, Tehran: Lowh-e Zarrin, 1384/2005, p. 101.
[217] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 185.

self, and integrates the drunkenness resulting from passionate love. The soldier, drunk and devoid of self, dances when the Beloved reveals His beauty. This dance reaches its peak when the soldier dissolves in ecstasy and is killed in a minefield. In a *mathnavi* entitled 'The Narrative of Shamefulness' (*mathnavi-ye sharmsāri*) Qazve writes:

> …
> *kojāyand mastān-e jām-e alast*
> *dalirān-e 'āsheq, shahidān-e mast*[218]
> ...
> Where are the men intoxicated by the primordial goblet?
> The brave lovers, the drunken martyrs?

The poet compares the martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war to a mystic intoxicated by the primordial wine of love. The poet inserts the motif of the primordial cup into his poem to define the martyr as a believer who witnessed God's Lordship at the time of *alast*. The motif of the drunken martyr (*shahid-e mast*) indicates that the soldier fights the enemy because he is intoxicated by the wine of love, and is delighted by fulfilling the Primordial Covenant.

HIDDEN TREASURE

Another motif related to the primordial covenant is that of hidden treasure. War poets, following in the steps of the mystic authors, drew on a divine tradition (*hadith qodsi*) in which God says, "I was a hidden treasure, and I wanted to be known, so I created the world."[219] This tradition says that God's primordial motivation for creating multiplicity where there had been One, was to make it possible for humans to recognise God. Poets play on the rhyme between the 'treasure' (*ganj*) which is buried in a ruin and which man should strive (*ranj*) to find. In mystical literature, love is the treasure hidden in the heart which cannot shine until the lover bids farewell to his life, pictures as turning the building of his

[218] 'A.R. Qazve, *Az nakhlestān tā khiyābān*, p. 40.
[219] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 189.

heart to ruins.[220] Ruining the heart means self-mortification and detachment from worldly desires. When the heart's building is ruined, the beauty of the Beloved that was concealed becomes evident. Revelation (*tajalli*) implies the appearance of what was hidden before.[221] The imagery of the treasure of love hidden in a ruin is applicable to events during the war, when cites were bombarded and loved ones were buried under the ruins. Survivors, who symbolically are the lovers, dug to find their treasures: the bodies of their loved ones.

THE GNOSIS OF LOVE IN MYSTICISM AND ON THE BATTLEFIELD

In Islamic mysticism, gnosis (*ma'refat*) is considered a means of guiding the mystic to a stage at which he understands the divine Truth. For the mystics, gnosis is superior to rational, prepositional knowledge ('*elm*). Gnosis deepens the mystic's insight, elevates his spiritual level, and unites him with the Beloved. Because discursive reason is incapable of understanding mystical secrets, the mystics consider *'elm* the greatest obstacle on the path of love because it causes the lover to stray and separates him from his final destination: union with the Beloved.[222] The mystics presented the gnosis of love (*ma'refat-e 'eshq*) as an alternative to conventional religious knowledge. For them gnosis is a gift God places in the heart to illuminate the path of love. It is thought that the Zo'al-Nun the Egyptian was the first mystic to describe gnosis as "knowledge of attributes of the Unity." He defines a gnostic as a selfless lover: "The gnostics are not themselves, but in so far as they exist at all they exist in God."[223]

The medieval mystic Hojviri defines gnosis as a measure of one's dignity: one without gnosis is worthless. Gnosis cannot be won, it is placed by God in the heart. Hojviri

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[220] A. Schimmel, *As Through a Veil: Mystical Poetry in Islam*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1928. p. 123. See also A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 189; according to Omaima Abou-Bakr the tradition is interpreted in Sufi texts as showing the "Diffusion of Unity in Plurality." See O. Abou-Bakr, "The Symbolic Function of Metaphor in Sufi Poetry: The Case of Shushtari," in *Alif, Journal of Comparative Poetics*, no. 12, Metaphor and Allegory in the Middle Ages, (1992), pp. 40-57.

[221] For further information on different forms of illumination such as the divine actions, divine names, divine attributes and divine essence see R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Cambridge: The University Press, 1921, pp. 125-130.

[222] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 140.

[223] M. Smith, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Dhu 'l- Nūn, Abu 'l-Fayḍ; for further information about Zo al-Nun see C. Field, *Muslims and Saints of Islam*, New York: Cosimo, 2011, pp. 60-7.

refers to the Qur'ānic verse "… We gave him life, and appointed for him a light to walk by, among the people…" (6:122) to show that gnosis originates from God.[224] Abu Hāmed Mohammad Ghazāli (1058-1111) writes that mystic insight is a necessary prologue to love: "Love without gnosis is impossible – one can only love what one knows."[225] The mystic Najm al-Din Rāzi stresses the superiority of gnosis over *'elm*. In his book 'Love and Reason' (*'eshq-o 'aql*), he draws an analogy between the lover and a diver: 'the lovers are divers who gamble their lives' (*ghavāssān-e jān-bāz-e 'āsheq-pishe*). These selfless divers are compared favourably to those who are not following discursive reason, and can reach the depths of the ocean of gnosis.[226]

The concept of gnosis is very important for Islamic mystics: they have dedicated a mystical stage to it. The mystic poet 'Attār, in his epic 'Conference of the Birds' (*Manteq al-Teyr*), places gnosis as the third stage in a mystic's progress. It comes after the stages of quest (*talab*) and love ('*eshq*).[227] According to the poet, the stage of gnosis has no beginning or end. When the heart of the mystic is enlightened by the knowledge of gnosis, he sees nothing but the Beloved (v. 3515-6), and follows the path; otherwise, according to 'Attār, one remains as ignorant as a donkey. The poet refers to Qur'ān 62:5, which compares people who have scriptures but do not put them into practice to "a donkey that carries books."[228]

In war poetry, a soldier who participates in the fight is compared to a mystic whose heart is illuminated by the divine light. Divine knowledge guides one to offer one's life on the battlefield, and through self-sacrifice, the soldier attains the same spiritual perfection as the mystic. The war poet Sāmet Borujerdi introduces the motif of the gnosis of love in a *ghazal* entitled 'Primordial Love' (*'eshq-e azal*).

ey ke az ma'refat-e 'eshq-e azal bi-khabari

[224] Abo al-Hasan 'Ali Ebn Othmān al-Jollābi al-Hojviri al-Ghaznavi, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, ed. V. Zhukovsky, introduction by Qāsem Ansāri, Tehran: Tahuri, 1376/1997, pp. 342, 44.
[225] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 130.
[226] N. Rāzi, *Resāle-ye 'eshq va 'aql*, p. 98.
[227] Farid al-Din 'Attār, *Manteq al-Teyr*, ed. M. R. Shafi'i-Kadkani, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e 'Elmi, 1384/2005, pp. 381-93.
[228] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 18.

sabr kon tā be to guyam khabar-e mokhtasari[229]

O! You who know nothing of the gnosis of Primordial love
Wait, so that I can give you a brief account

The poet defines gnosis as a prologue that leads one to understand primordial love. Primordial time (*azal*) is "the constant duration of existence in the past."[230] Thus, the existence of love is as old as existence itself. In Borujerdi's *ghazal*, the term primordial love alludes to the primordial covenant, which was discussed above. Borujerdi, like the mystics, says that both love and gnosis are primordial. In primordial time, God gave the soldier the freedom to choose either the Beloved or his daily life in the world. Needless to say the soldier chooses God's companionship. The soldier promised (in *azal*) to love God and not to choose anyone or anything else. Thus, he offers his life to fulfil his eternal covenant, according to the poet.

Borujerdi also tells us something about the characteristics of the gnosis of love in his *ghazal*. He uses the mystical concept of the fire of love (*ātash-e 'eshq*) to compare the soldier to a lover: "When love fires its sparks / it burns the roots of everything dry and wet."[231] The flame of fire transforms every creature. Love, like fire, transforms all the attributes of the lover to those of the Beloved. The fire-like nature of love is described by 'Attār: "I am sitting bewildered with dried lips/ the fire of love makes the water of my life boil."[232] The fire of love transforms the poet's existence, consuming the water of his life until nothing remains of him. The contemporary Persian scholar, Anwar, in a commentary on 'Attār's 'Conference of the Birds' (*Manteq al-Teyr*), writes that the fire of love burns and transforms the lover from within. In this process the Beloved makes the lover aware that He exists inside him, telling him that his existence is unreal in comparison to that of

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[229] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3*, selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 99.
[230] R. Arnaldez, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2*)*, under Ḳidam. The complement of *azal* is *abad*, "constant duration in the future."
[231] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3,* selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 99.
[232] Farid al-Din 'Attār, *Manteq al-Teyr*, p. 277. The water of life is an allusion to the search for eternal life. The prophet Khezr guides the pious to the water of life.

the Beloved.[233] Borujerdi uses the concept in the war context to equate the soldier with a lover, burning from the fire of love and motivated to fight the enemy of the Beloved.

In the following line, Borujerdi refers to another classical mystical concept, the urgent longing of the lover. The poet writes, "Love is that thing which, when it makes a circle on the door to the lover's heart / the lover, out of longing, knows neither his head nor his foot" (*'eshq ān ast ke chon halqe zanad bar dar-e del* /'*āsheq az showq na pā'i beshenāsad na sari*).[234] The image of love making a circle on the door of the heart (*halqe zadan bar dar-e del*) is open to various interpretations. One can picture it as a bullet striking the chest, making a circular wound and rendering the lover/soldier insensible. But it contains an implicit analogy between love and a serpent, curling at the threshold of the treasury of the lover's heart. In Persian literature, a serpent settles at the door of a treasury to protect it. The green emerald is the only object that can blind the serpent and allow it to be removed. In mysticism, the serpent stands for the ominous lower self (*nafs-e shum*) and the world. The serpent also symbolizes the mystic's transformation and his union with his inner self. The serpent sheds his old skin, the mystic's lower soul is annihilated, and through this transformation, gains eternal life.[235] The poet equates the lover's heart with a treasury that love, the serpent, wishes to enter. When the heart has become a treasury, fit for the snake to enter, it longs for the Beloved. When the Beloved knocks, the lover, filled with longing, hastens to the door, unable to distinguish between his foot and his head (*sar az pā nashnākhtan*). The Persian idiom refers to someone filled with excessive longing. The poet indicates that the Beloved, on the battlefield, is knocking on the door of the soldier's heart; he should open the door and welcome Him.

One line further, Borujerdi tells his reader that a lover should show his fidelity toward the Beloved. From this line onwards, the poet focuses on the responsibilities of the lover, and introduces the third Shiite imam, Hosein, as a model of fidelity: "Love means that you offer your life on the path of fidelity/ and that you abandon the soul of the world."

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[233] L. Anvar-Chenderoff, "Without Us, from Us We're Safe …," p. 242.

[234] See S. Borujerdi, 'Eshq-e azal, in *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3,* selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 99.

[235] A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, "Majnun's Image as a Serpent," in *The Poetry of Nizāmī Ganjavi: Knowledge, Love and Rhetoric*, eds. K. Talattof & J. Clinton, New York: Palgrave, 2000, p. 86.

The Qur'ān emphasises fidelity and the necessity of being loyal to one's family, fellow-Muslims and friends. In the Qur'ān, contentment with the will of God is a sign of fidelity. Fidelity and loyalty distinguish believers from unbelievers.[236] In mysticism, fidelity is owed to the Primordial Covenant between God and humanity.[237] Borujerdi identifies fidelity with the act of self-sacrifice on the battlefield, and the soldier with a lover whose death affirms his fidelity toward the Beloved and the community. He saves the community, with his life, from the attack of the enemy. The lover abandons "the soul of the world" (*jān-e jahān*) for fidelity's sake. In Persian love poetry, *jān-e jahān* is one of the names of the Beloved, or the title of a celebrated person. Here it means the Beloved.[238]

The poet dedicates the remainder of the *ghazal* to the events of *'Āshurā* and imam Hosein's death. Love and fidelity, the signs of the gnosis of love, are centred on imam Hosein. According to the poet, imam Hosein is a real gnostic because he gave priority to the will of God and offered his life on the path of fidelity: "so that the truly faithful lover is the thirsty king Hosein/ the mother of the world has never raised such a son as him."[239] The image of thirsty king refers to the event of Karbalā where the soldiers of Yazid had blocked the Euphrates. Thus, imam Hosein and his family had no access to the water. The poet compares this event to mystical concept of the lover's thirst for the Beloved.[240] On the one hand, the poet compares imam Hosein to a gnostic, who offers his life to fulfil the eternal covenant that was made on the day of *alast*. On the other hand, the poet compares the soldier to imam Hosein, the archetype of self-sacrifice, whose act should be emulated. The poet implies that if the soldier follows the path through which Hosein attained perfection,

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[236] E. Moosa, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (2), under Loyalty.

[237] G. Böwering, "The Scriptural 'Senses' in Medieval Sufi Qur'ān Exegesis," in *With Reverence for the World: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism Christianity and Islam*, eds. J.D. McAuliffe & et al., New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 354-57.

[238] An example of *jān-e jahān* referring to a celebrated person can be found in the *Divān* of medieval poet Hāfez of Shirāz who addresses: "The manifestation of the primordial grace, the light of the eye's desire / the summation of knowing and doing, the soul of the world, Shāh Shojā' " (*mazhar-e lotf-e azal rowshani-ye cheshm-e amal/ jāme'-e 'elm-o 'amal jān-e jahān Shāh Shojā'*). See Hāfez, *Divān-e khāje Shams al-Din Mohammad Hāfez Shirāzi*, ed. H. P. Bakhtiyāri, Tehran: ketāb-forushi va chāpkhāne-ye Brukhim, 1318/1939, p. 134, *ghazal* no. 302.

[239] See Borujerdi's poem titled '*eshq-e azal* in *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3,* selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 99.

[240] For increasing the thirst of love see the motif of seizing Hosein's cup chapter 4 in this study.

he acquires the gnosis of primordial love on the battlefield.

ABANDONING REASON FOR THE CAUSE OF SPIRITUAL PERFECTION

The motif of love and reason is popular with the war poets. In many of their references to the concept, they rely on classical Persian mystical literature that meticulously analyses the uneasy relationship between love and reason. The war poets emphasize the superiority of love over reason to promote a sense of self-sacrifice among the youth of Iran. Madness (*jonun* or *divānegi*) occurs in conventional religious contexts, as well as in mystical contexts, to emphasize the differences between love and reason.

In Islamic law, madness is usually represented by the word *jonun*, which came to mean "to cover, conceal" and "to be possessed, mad, insane."[241] In Islamic law, the insane person (*majnun*) has no "legal capacity."[242] Generally speaking, one who does not act rationally towards others or does not follow a moderate lifestyle is considered insane. He is incapable of legal action or the guardianship of his own property. Insanity does, however, have its privileges, and there are examples of sane individuals pretending to be insane. For example, a person accused of heresy might pretend that he is not aware of what he is doing or saying. In this case, insanity saves his life. In other cases, an authority figure may accuse a sane person, whose words or actions disrupt the status quo, of being insane.[243] Among the mystics, Loqmān al-Sarakhsi (d. 1407), al-Shebli (d. 1540), Abu Yazid Bastāmi and many more were called insane. According to Islamic lore, Moses, Jesus and Mohammad were also called insane.[244]

In mysticism, passionate love leads to madness. The words *divānegi* or *jonun* are used metaphorically to mean detachment from the mundane world. A mystic madman is overcome by selflessness; he forgets his bodily needs and seeks the divine truth. The

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[241] A.T. Welch, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Madjnūn.
[242] M. W. Dols, *Majnun: The Madman in Medieval Islamic Society*, ed. D. E. Immisch, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992, pp. 425-9.
[243] Ibid., pp. 450, 465.
[244] A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnun*, p. 151.

theologian Ebn al-Jawzi (d. 1200) considers excessive love a form of divine madness.[245] Excessive love for the Beloved separates the lover from other people and unites him with the true Beloved. The mystic Abo al-Qāsem Ebn Habib al-Neyshaburi writes, "He who knows himself is contemptible to others, and he who knows God is, to others, mad."[246]

The war poets admired this mystical tradition and gave a value to madness. For them, a real lover does not follow the principles of reason. His madness defines his spiritual progress. The war poets equated the soldier with the medieval mystics known as 'the wise fools' ('*oqalā al-majānin*) who knowingly separated themselves from worldly affairs and spent their time in contemplation.[247] They separated themselves from society, often living in cemeteries and wearing rags. For the wise people of the world, their unusual appearance and extreme piety and trust (*tavakkol*) in God were signs of madness. The wise fools did not hesitate to condemn the unjust behavior of those in authority. They advised others if they were asked. They had deep knowledge and were able to foresee the future. These qualities were considered signs that God chose to bestow gnosis on them, and inspired them to reveal truths.[248] They had a political role. Their unusual appearance was a sign of protest against unjust authority.

The war poets used the concept in a war context, comparing a soldier to a wise fool. Both are fighting against injustice, but the former fights on the battlefield. For the war poets, madness ending in self-sacrifice is superior to following the principles of discursive reason. By applying the concept in the poetry of war, they make the soldier to believe that he should act like a madman that in the war situation means attacking the enemy with no fear of death. The war poet Azizollāh Shekarriz pits love against reason in a *ghazal* entitled 'The Ka'be of the Intended One' (*Ka'be-ye maqsud*):

dar kish-e 'āsheqi nashavad pāy-band-e 'aql

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[245] M.W. Dols, *Majnun*, pp. 12, 318.
[246] Sh. el-Ezabi, "Al-Naysaburi's Wise Mad men: Introduction," in *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics, no. 14, Madness and Civilization*, Cairo: Department of English and Comparative Literature, 1994, p. 198.
[247] For further information on the wise fools, see Al-Hasan Ebn Mohammad Ebn Habib Neyshāburi, *Oqalā al-majānin ('Wise Fools')*, Najaf: al-Makab al-Heydary, 1378/1968.
[248] M.W. Dols, *Majnun*, pp. 366-377.

divāne-i ke shod be jahān mobtalā-ye 'eshq[249]

A mad man who is afflicted by love in the world
does not follow discursive reason in the religion of love.

Shekarriz equates the soldier with a mystic madman (*divāne*). The word literally means, "one possessed by demons," and is used to refer to one who acts like a demon.[250] In classical mystical poetry, *divāne* refers to one possessed by love: love is like a demon possessing the heart. The lover stops rational thinking and follows the demands of his heart. He destroys his sense of self (*nafs*) by neglecting the needs of his body. He suffers from "humiliation, rejection, reproach, hunger and isolation" in the hope of union with the Beloved.[251] For mystics, discursive reason is an obstacle in the path of love, for it tends to follow a logical order and accustomed ways. Ghazāli defines the relation between love and discursive reason in his *Savāneh*: "The outer limit for knowledge is the seashore for love, if the mystic traveller takes one step further, he will drown."[252] Intellect may accompany the lover to the shore of the sea of love, but no further. The intellect is limited to the physical world, and its support in the mundane world makes one dependent on it. Discursive reason, by nature, cannot understand divine secrets. A love-afflicted madman therefore detaches himself from reason to follow love's decrees. Detachment from the world, in Shekarriz's poem, is indicated by the idiom *pāy-band-e 'aql nashodan,* which is literally, "one's foot not bound to reason." Detachment is the first sign of embarking on the path of love.

Shekarriz employs mystical terminology, linking the madness of excessive love (*divānegi*) with 'calamity' (*mobtalā*, translated above as 'afflicted with'). In medieval Islamic medicine, being in love is considered a sickness, as we have seen above. It has clear symptoms: one who is possessed by love laughs and weeps without any clear reason; he is thin and emaciated, his skin is yellow because of malnutrition, and the pain of separation

[249] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2*, selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 69.
[250] Cl. Huart, H. Massé, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, under Dīw.
[251] A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnun*, p. 147.
[252] Ahmad Ghazāli, *Savāneh*, p. 9.

causes him not to eat or sleep well.[253] Shekarriz compares a soldier who offers his life on the battlefield to a madman, possessed by excessive love. Both detach themselves from discursive reason and consequently from the mundane world in order to improve their spiritual level and gain a better understanding of the divine truth and eternal union with the Beloved.

Being in love is considered, by Shekarriz, a conversion to the religion (*kish*) of love, a theme that was discusses above. The convert to the religion of love must abandon discursive reason (*'aql*). Reason is cautious, it watches over one's steps and preserves one's life, but love cares nothing for mundane desires and urges the lover to sacrifice his life.

'Ali Mo'allem from Dāmghān employs the motif of love and reason in a *ghazal* called 'The Etiquette of Being in Love' (*adab-e 'āsheqi*), which has already been cited above. In part of this poem we find:

kamāl-e 'eshq-o jonun bin ke az sabok-bāri
moqim-e khāne-ye gerdāb mitavānam shod[254]

See the perfection of love and of madness: thanks to the light burden,
I can make my home in the house of the whirlpool

Love is equated with madness and this madness removes the burdens of worldly desires. The lover does not remain on the safe seashore but enters the ocean and makes his home in the whirlpool.

In a *ghazal* entitled 'The Sea of Grace' (*daryā-ye rahmat*), the war poet Thābet shows that excessive love ends in madness:

'eshq-e to ākher be sahrā-ye jonunam mibarad
ey tawallā-ye to andar zendegi Leylā-ye man [255]

[253] M.W. Dols, *Majnun*, p. 85.
[254] M.'A. Mo'allem Dāmghāni, *Rej'at-e sorkh-e setāre*, p. 219.

Ultimately, love for you takes me to the desert of madness
Devotion to you has entered my life, O my Leyli!

The poet refers to the proverbial love of Majnun ('the possessed' or 'mad') for Leyli. The proof of selfless love is madness, following the example of Majnun. Only then can the lover benefit from the Beloved's love.

The superiority of madness over sanity is also mentioned by the contemporary war poet Mortezā Amiri Esfandaqe:

jonun rahbar-e in hemāsi rame ast
shaqāyeq dar injā bozorg-e hame ast[256]

Madness is the leader of heroic herd
Here, the anemone is the greatest of all

Through the parallel hemistiches, madness is linked to the anemone, which grows wild in dry places and has the connotations of red, blood and martyrdom. It is this anemone that is Lord and example of all soldiers.

THE KA'BE OF THE HEART

Another classical mystical motif used during the Iran-Iraq war is the Ka'be (House of God) of love. The Ka'be, the central shrine at Mecca, is in every sense central to Muslim life.

[255] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2*, selected by M.'A. Mardāni, p. 22. The story goes that love for an Arabian girl, Leyli, made Qeys Ebn Āmir mad and he wandered in the desert. From then on, he was called Majnun (lit. "Possessed" or "Madman"). The mystic poet Nezāmi composed an epic based on the story. See N. Ganjavi, *Leyli va Majnun*, ed. B. Thervatiyān, Tehran: Tus, 1364/1985; for an analysis of this epic see A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Leylī and Majnun*. For another example of the theme of love and reason in Persian war poetry, see: S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 43.

[256] *Gozide-ye she'r-e jang va defā'-e moqaddas*, p. 275.

The Ka'be is "the place of God's grace, His worship, and the proclamation of His glory."[257] A Muslim faces the Ka'be when performing the obligatory prayer and other religious rituals, with the awareness that the prophet did the same. An able-bodied Muslim with sufficient means should make the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca and greet the Ka'be at least once during his lifetime. This is a sign of obedience to God, and a time set aside to detach oneself from worldly desires and concerns.

In medieval mystical literature, compounds such as the ka'be of love (*ka'be-ye 'eshq*), the ka'be of the heart (*ka'be-ye del*) and the qeble of love (*qeble-ye 'eshq*) are used in contrast to the Ka'be of clay (*ka'be-ye gel*), which is the Ka'be in Mecca and is incapable of perceiving the beauty of God.[258] Although the Ka'be is made of stone, I assume that the mystics used the word clay to criticize worshipping the Ka'be as a physical object, rather than the Lord of the Ka'be. Referring to the clay reminds the reader of man's creation from clay, and that he is more concerned with his physical appearance than his spiritual progress. The mystics called the heart the ka'be of love, believing that self-mortification purifies the heart from false ideas and temptations, to be worthy of receiving the Beauty of the Beloved. Therefre the pilgrimage to one's own heart is more important than the pilgrimage to Mecca. The heart is important in mysticism because it is the location of belief in God and of testimony to His unity. Mystics fault those who go to visit the Ka'be while their hearts are busy with worldly affairs. The mystic Mohammad Ebn al-Fazl (d. 931), on this account, writes: "I wonder at those who seek His temple in this world: why do they not seek contemplation of Him in their hearts? ... if they are bound to visit a stone, which is looked at once a year, surely they are more bound to visit the temple of the heart, where He may be seen three hundred and sixty times in a day and night."[259] According to Ebn al-Fazl, one who wants to see the light of God has to purify his own heart, because God illuminates the heart of His servant when it is clean and pure. The Ka'be of clay cannot make such a transformation.

Although mystics recognize the sacredness of the Ka'be, the rituals relating to it are

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[257] A.J. Wensinck, & J. Jomier, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Ka'ba.
[258] A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnun*, p. 229.
[259] As cited in Ali Ebn Othmān al-Hojviri, *The Kashf al-Mahjub: A Persian Treatise on Sufism*, ed. R.A. Nicholson, preface by M. Karamshah al, Lahore: Zia-ul-Quran Publications, 2001, p. 427.

seen from a different point of view. Their spiritual importance is connected to the individual, and his presence in the *Masjed al-harām* surrounding the Ka'be. Ghazāli, for example, emphasizes the high station of the human person when he writes that circumambulation (*tawāf*) and other rituals gain their high spiritual level from the people performing them.[260] The medieval mystic Muhy al-Din Ebn al-'Arabi (1165-1240), in *al-Fotuhāt al-Makkiyye (The Meccan Revelations),* writes that the real Ka'be is man's being.[261] Ebn al-'Arabi emphasizes that man's being is superior to the Ka'be, which is made of stone, because man is God's vicegerent (*khalife*), he contains and represents all realities and, through him, God has mercy on other creatures.[262]

For Islamic countries, the Ka'be, as the locus of daily prayer and of pilgrimage, is politically important. Muslims performing similar rituals have a shared identity. Both sociologists and nationalist Muslims have recognized the annual gathering in Mecca, around the Ka'be, as a symbolic act of Muslim unity. When Muslims gather in Mecca, cultural differences, legal boundaries and political ties are put aside. The pilgrims all dress in similar white clothing, and see themselves as equals before God.[263]

'Ali Shariati, an Iranian Islamic modernist, equates one's preparedness for *hajj* to preparedness for death. He writes that the pilgrimage to Mecca is a political gathering; it is the beginning of rethinking what one has done, and what one is responsible for doing after returning home. The *hajj* eliminates distinctions between people: all are standing before God as at the Last Judgement. According to Shariati, a pilgrim should ignore his identity and begin to serve others, and should break idols and spread monotheistic religion, in imitation of the Prophet Abraham. Like Abraham, he should establish a community whose members are ready to offer their lives: a community of martyr-witnesses (*ommat-e shahid*).[264]

In his sermons, Ayatollah Khomeini presents the political aspect of the *hajj* ritual by

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[260] A.J. Wensinck & J. Jomier, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Ka'ba: iii. The Ka'ba and Islam.
[261] Ibid. For further examples see Sanā'i Ghaznavi, *Hadiqat al-Haqiqat va Shari'at al-Tariqat*, p. 221.
[262] R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 155-6.
[263] R.R. Bianchi, *Guests of God: Pilgrimage and Politics in the Islamic World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 45.
[264] Ibid, p. 31; A. Shariati*, Hajj: Reflection on its Rituals*, trans. A. A. Behzādniā & N. Denny, Costa Mesa: Evecina Cultural & Educational Foundation, 1993, pp. 9 and 12.

comparing it to a Muslim uprising: "This grand house is built for the people and for the people's uprising." He equates the rituals with protests against tyrannical authority. He calls the governor of Mecca "the idol" and the United State of America "the Great Satan." "[265] A Muslim has a duty to break idols, an archetypal act associated with the father of monotheistic religion, Abraham the idol-breaker, and with the prophet Mohammad. He compares opposition to unjust authority to the ritual of stoning Satan, which is part of the pilgrimage. Ayatollah Khomeini holds that the duties that *hajj* imposes upon a Muslim are not limited to the *hajj* period. Throughout his lifetime, a Muslim should be stoning the 'Great Satan,' whose temptations distract Muslims with the desires of the world and increase rancour and enmity. This entails political activism, protest, and fighting against anyone or anything that distances the believer from God.

The war poets used the same terminology, but they gave a different meaning to religious obligations and presented them as moral virtues. For them, there is no obligation to visit the Ka'be and perform the ritual. The soldier, like the pilgrim, leaves his belongings, his family, and his interests. His destination, the battlefield is compared to the ka'be of the heart, the place of the revelation of the Beloved, to offer a mystical sense to the participationg in the fight. Thus, the hardships that the soldier endurs on the battlefield purifies the heart, the ka'be of love, from the presence of 'idols.' So the soldier who chooses the battlefield over the pilgrimage to Mecca attains the same spiritual perfection that a mystic achieved. They used the motif to mobilize young men to participate, and to foster support for the army. During the war, Iranian soldiers would in fact dress in a white cloth resembling a burial shroud, or the white dress of pilgrims, but made from one piece of cloth rather than the three used to wrap a body, or the two pieces used by pilgrims.

KA'BE AND KARBALĀ

The war poet, Habibollāh Khabbāz introduces the motif of the ka'be in a *qaside* entitled 'The Purity of Karbalā' (*safā-ye Karbalā*):

maqām-e Ka'be beyt al-Allāh-e a'zam bā hame onwān

[265] *Pithy Aphorisms, Wise Sayings and Counsels*, pp. 41-2.

zamin-e karbalā rā ka'be-ye 'eshq-o safā guyad[266]

The station of the Ka'be, the House of God, for all its exalted position,
Praises the soil of Karbalā and names it the ka'be of love and purity.

The poet says that the soil of Karbalā, where imam Hosein was killed has a higher spiritual station than the Ka'be, and he calls Karbalā the Ka'be of love and purity. This suggests that self-sacrifice in battle has a higher station than the rites of orthodox Islam. According to the poet, Hosein's love of God was the main reason he continued the fight against the Umayyad caliph Yazid.

In this couplet, the poet employs the word *maqām*, meaning a station or rank, but also a place.[267] Qur'ān 2:124-127 associates "the House" (*al-beyt*) with the prophet Abraham who, with his son Ishmael, erected the Ka'be to be used by Muslims as a place of meeting and sanctuary. According to the Qur'an, the place where the prophet Abraham was standing (*Maqām-e Ebrāhim*) should be a place for performing prayer.[268] Pilgrims visiting Mecca feel they are linked to the prophet Abraham.

Islamic mystics consider *maqām-e Ebrāhim* as both a physical and spiritual abode. Al-Hojviri writes that *maqām-e Ebrāhim* has two connotations: firstly, it refers to an abode in Mecca, a place used for performing the *hajj* ritual. Secondly, it is the abode of the heart, where perfect friendship (*khollat*) and submission (*taslim*) to God appear.[269] The stage that Abraham attained, friendship with God, is defined as the final goal of a mystic.[270]

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[266] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3,* selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 42.
[267] J-Cl.Ch., Chabrier, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Maqām.
[268] G.R. Hawting, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Ka'ba.
[269] Abo al-Hasan 'Ali Ebn Othmān al-Jollābi al-Hojviri al-Ghaznavi, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, ed. V. Zhukovsky, p. 422. The source states that when Abraham was about to be burnt in the fire, the archangel Gabriel asked him: "Do you need to ask for anything from God?" Abraham replied: "It is enough for me that He knows that I am thrown in the fire because of Him."
[270] The mystics call a saint 'a friend of God' (*wali*). The word is derived from the root *waliya* meaning 'to be close or near.' See B. Radtke, "The Concept of Wilāya in Early Sufism," in *Classical Persian Sufism: From its Origins to Rumi*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London & New York: Khāneqāh-e Nematollāhi Publications, 1993, p. 488. The medieval mystic 'Ali al-Tirmizi (d. ca. 910), known as al-Hakim (the sage), offers a broad outline of the saints' (*awliyā*'s) presence in the universe. There are forty saints who control the world after the prophet's death and their existence guarantees the continual preservation of the world. *Awliyā* are blessed

In the above couplet, Khabbāz elevates Karbalā above the *maqām* of the Ka'be. He writes that the *Maqām* calls Karbalā the Ka'be of love and purity. Karbalā is associated with love and purity because Hosein sacrificed his life there, while on the path of love. Karbalā is also a Shi'a pilgrimage place, lying in Iraq, so 'Karbalā' not only represents Shiah identity, and the ideal of self-sacrifice in battle, it is a concrete war aim.

The poet also calls Karbalā the ka'be of love (*ka'be-ye 'eshq*), which as we have seen is a metaphor for the heart. The heart of the lover, in turn, is that which bears witness to God. Thus, Karbalā (self-sacrifice in battle) is identified as the place of God's revelation. The poet creates a dynamic setting through which the soldier compares the battlefield to Karbalā, and to the ka'be of love, and so promises him spiritual progress if he dies in battle.

The war poet Nasrollāh Mardāni employs the motif of the ka'be of love in a *ghazal* entitled 'Heirs to Dust, Your Sun is the Spirit of God' (*vārethān-e khāk khorshid-e shomā Ruh-e Khodā).* The phrase *Ruh-e Khodā,* (the Spirit of God) in the title is the Persian equivalent of 'Ruhollāh', the given name of Ayatollah Khomeini.

bāyad ey yārān be suy-e qeble-gāh-e 'eshq tākht
bā samand-e sobh mitāzad be shab sardāretān[271]

O! Friends we must charge towards the Qeble of love
Because your leader is riding the horse of morning toward night

The poet compares Ayatollah Khomeini with a general who is fighting against darkness. He lightens the path for the soldiers to follow the direction of love (*qeble-gāh-e 'eshq*).

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with extraordinary powers and serve as mediators between the people and God. Their tombs are a source of blessings (*baraka,* lesser miracles). See B. Radtke, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Walī. For a chronological treatment of the concept of *welāyat* see B. Radtke, "The Concept of Wilāya …," pp. 483-96.

[271] *Mosābeqe-ye she'r-e jang*, p. 57.

SACRIFICE IN THE MENĀ OF LOVE

Another metaphor relating to the rites of pilgrimage is the Menā of love (*menā-ye 'eshq*), and its equivalent in Persian literature, the *maslakh-e 'eshq*. Menā is the last place that a pilgrim should visit before leaving Mecca and, significantly, the place where the pilgrim offers a sheep as a sacrifice, as well as the site of the pillars that pilgrims pelt with stones. This day, in the pilgrim's programme, is called "the day of the great sacrifice (*yawm al-azhā* or *yawm al-nahr*).[272] The pilgrim's sacrifice is a symbolic re-enactment of the prophet Abraham's sacrifice at the same place. In a dream, Abraham received a divine command to sacrifice his son (Qur'ān 37:102). According to tradition, he tried to follow the divine command several times, but each time, a miracle happened, and, at the last moment, a ram was sent for Abraham to sacrifice.[273]

Classical mystics introduced these motifs in their literary works to offer an alternative to orthodox understandings of Islam. They used the Menā motif as a metaphor for two spiritual processes: firstly, detachment from desires and purification of the soul; secondly, self-sacrifice for the cause of the Beloved.[274] One who intends to visit the House of God and, afterwards, go to Menā, has to empty his heart of worldly desires, otherwise, his effort is of no value. In his mystical work entitled *Kashf al-Mahjub*, al-Hojviri, quotes from al-Joneyd the leader of the Irāqi school of mysticism, that one who goes to perform *hajj* must separate his soul from its worldly attachments and deny his sense of self in Menā, the place of sacrifice. Al-Hojviri writes:

> "A man came to Joneyd; he asked him: 'Where are you coming from?' The man answered: 'I am returning from *hajj*.' Joneyd asked: 'Did you perform *hajj.'* The man answered: 'Yes, I did.' Joneyd asked: 'When you left your country, did you abandon all your sins?' The man said: 'No, I did not.' Joneyd asked: 'Then you did not travel.'… Joneyd asked: 'When you arrived in Menā, did you leave your sense of self (*maniyathā*)?' The man replied: 'No, I did not.' 'Then you have not visited Menā.'

[272] F. Buhl, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Minā.
[273] R. Firestone, in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, under Abraham.
[274] Abo al-Hasan 'Ali Ebn Othmān al-Jollābi al-Hojviri al-Ghaznavi, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, ed. V. Zhukovsky, p. 425.

> Joneyd asked: 'When you sacrificed [an animal] in the slaughter place, did you slaughter the desires of your heart?' The man answered: 'No.' 'Then you have not yet sacrificed.'"[275]

For a mystic, the real goal of performing *hajj* and visiting Menā is abandonment of self and its desires.

In his book entitled, 'An Interpretation of Hajj Rituals' (*Tahlili az manāsek-e hajj*) the contemporary scholar 'Ali Shariati refers to the prophet Abraham's act as archetypal behavior that a Muslim should imitate. Shariati writes that Abraham sacrificed his most precious belonging, his son, in the Menā of love. A Muslim should sacrifice whatever prevents him from confessing the truth. Furthermore, Shariati adds that one is responsible for knowing and sacrificing whatever keeps him from God.[276]

The war poets politicised the mystical motif of the Menā of love, linking it to the themes of fidelity, obedience and sacrifice. A pilgrim follows in the footsteps of the prophet Abraham and sacrifices a sheep to affirm his fidelity and obedience to the divine command, but the war poets motivate youths to offer their own lives as a sign of obedience and fidelity. The motif also contains an appeal to Iranian parents, asking them to emulate Abraham and encourage their children to participate in the war. They too were offering their children as a sacrifice in the Menā of love: the battlefield.

The war poet Azizollāh Shekarriz employed this motif in a *ghazal* entitled 'The Ka'be of the Intended One' (*Ka'be-ye maqsud*):

hargez kasi be Ka'be-ye maqsud rah nayāft
tā jān-e khod nakard fadā dar menā-ye 'eshq[277]

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[275] Ibid.

[276] 'A. Shariati, *Tahlili az manāsek-e hajj*, Tehran: Elhām & Bonyād-e farhangi-ye doctor 'Ali Shariati, 1389/2011, p. 145.

[277] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3*, selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 69. For more examples see M. Akbari, *Naqd va tahlil-e adabiyyāt-e enqlāb-e eslāmi*, vol. 1, Tehran: Sāzmān-e madārek-e farhangi-ye enqlāb-e eslāmi, 1371/ 1993, p. 304.

No one can enter the Ka'be of the Intended
Until he sacrifices his own soul in the Menā of love

Shekarriz writes that one cannot attain the final stage of perfection unless he sacrifices his life on the menā of love. The poet links the concept of the Intended (*maqsud*) to death on the front line. *Maqsud* can also be translated as "the object" (of a quest), or the desired one: it is analogous to the Beloved (*ma'shuq*). The *ka'be* of the Intended (*ka'be-ye maqsud*) means that what one lives and strives for, is like the Ka'be, the end point of a pilgrimage and the direction in which one turns in prayer. Each individual is free to direct his efforts as he chooses, but a lover seeks union with the Beloved through self-sacrifice in the Menā of love.

In the above couplet, Shekarriz states that sacrificing one's life (*jān-e khod fadā kardan*) enables the lover/soldier to reach the *ka'be* that is the goal, the intended, which is of course to unite with the Beloved. The mystics tell us that a lover who seeks to be one with the Beloved must sacrifice his identity, his desires, and his lower soul to be worthy of union. This self-sacrifice is called, usually metaphorically, 'death,' as in the famous prophetic tradition, "die before you die" (*mutu qabla an tamutu*).[278] One's death before the time of literal death is detachment from one's identity and desires for the sake of the Beloved. A mystic does not need to perform *hajj* to attain such a degree of purification. He is elevated to the state of purification through self-mortification, prayer, and abstinence from the world. While a pilgrim who travels through the desert to the House of God, but darkens his soul with worldly amusement, attains no spiritual perfection. As we have seen above, the Ka'be of clay is not the final destination (*maqsud*) of the mysticKhabbāz reiterates the priority of the *ka'be* of the heart over the rites of outward pilgrimage, using the motif of the menā of love:

safā-ye digari dārad menā-ye 'eshq-o jānbāzi

[278] L. Anvar-Chenderoff, "Without Us, from Us We're Safe…," p. 246.

sezad tā Ka'be bar in ka'be-ye del marhabā guyad[279]

The menā of love and self-sacrifice holds a different pleasure,
The ka'be of the heart deserves to be praised by the Ka'be

The word *safā,* translated here as 'pleasure,' has the connotations of cheerful, pleasant, and clean. The poet says that there is more joy for one who sacrifices his life at the "Menā of love" (the pure heart) than there is for a pilgrim who visits Menā and sacrifices a sheep.

Hosein Esrāfili, in a *qaside* called 'My City Khorramshahr' (*shahr-e man Khorramshahr*), compares the city to the menā of love. This city is one of Iran's ports-of-entry on the Persian Gulf. During the war, Khorramshahr was the scene of heavy fighting. Iraqi forces occupied the city on October 24, 1980, and held it until May 23, 1982. Because of the intensity of the fighting, Khorramshahr became known as 'the city of blood' (*Khuninshahr*).[280] Esrāfili however calls Khorramshahr the menā of lovers:

ey menā-ye 'āsheqān dar molk-e khāk
ahreman az rajm-e cheshmat khowfnāk[281]

O menā of lovers in the kingdom of clay
Satan is afraid of the stone cast from your eye

Esrāfili draws an analogy between the city of Khorramshahr and Menā, both being places of sacrifice. In Khorramshahr the lover offers his life on the path of love. The poet creates a setting in which the soldier equates himself with one who is performing an act of ritual sacrifice. In the second line, Esrāfili compares the city to a pilgrim who performs the ritual

[279] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3,* selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 43.
[280] A number of poets used the epithet 'city of blood' in the titles of their poems. See *Mosābeqe-ye she'r-e jang*, p. 75.
[281] Ibid., p. 52.

of stoning (*rajm*) Satan.[282] This metaphor implies that the Iraqis, the object of resistance, are Satan. This metaphorical Satan is afraid of the city of Khorramshahr.

The poet Khalil Mozanneb uses the motif of the slaughter-place of love (*maslakh-e 'eshq*, translated below as the altar of love) in a poem entitled 'The Epic of Hosein' (*hemāse-ye Hosein*). A *maslakh* is a place where sacrificial animals are slaughtered. Love in this term is the deity in whose honour the sacrifice is made. The poet refers to Hosein's death at Karbalā to praise his sacrifice:

keshid jazbe-ye gheybash be su-ye maslakh-e 'eshq
be ka'be az pe-ye qorbān shodan david Hosein[283]

The attraction of the Unseen drew him towards the altar of love
Hosein ran toward the Ka'be to be sacrificed

The poet draws an analogy between imam Hosein and a mystic who is 'attracted' (*jazbe*) by the divine beauty. In mystic terminology, attraction is the divine initiative that draws the lover to God, as distinct from the effort of the lover. A mystic may "abandon himself to be sized by divine attraction" (*jazbe, jazb*; Persian *keshesh*)."[284] Hosein is attracted to the altar of love (*maslakh-e 'eshq*), and runs to offer his life. Mozanneb equates Karbalā, where imam Hosein was killed, with the place of sacrifice a pilgrim visits at Menā. The connection is reinforced by the fact that imam Hosein performed the pilgrimage before travelling to Karbalā. The historian Abu Ja'far Mohammad Ebn Jarir Tabari (839-923) writes in *The History of al-Tabari* that when Hosein heard the call of people going to Minā, he joined them, and "performed the circumambulation of the Sacred House and ran between al-Safā and al-Marwah."[285] This is interpreted by Persian poets as Hosein's

[282] *Rajm* means throwing a stone. In the Old Testament the term means, "to stone, to drive away or kill by throwing stones". In Arabic the root has almost the same meaning "to stone, to curse." See: M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes & T. Fahd, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Radjm.
[283] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2,* selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 24.
[284] R. Gramlich, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Madjdhub.
[285] Abu Ja'far Mohammad Ebn Jarir Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, vol. xix, The Caliphate of Yazid. Ebn

preparation to be sacrificed.

THE MARTYR OF LOVE

Martyr (*shahid* pl. *shohadā*) is a Qur'ānic term meaning "witness." It is a sacred name, designating the blessed ones selected by God to sacrifice their lives for His cause. Qur'ānic verse 3:140 states that the martyrs are those who when tested have proven faithful: "So that God may know those who believe and may take martyrs from among you." The martyr is rewarded in the Hereafter: for example, a martyr is thought to enter into Paradise immediately, without passing through 'the torments of the grave,' to reside beside God and to be allowed to intercede on behalf of his family members. Martyrdoms may be classified as follows: 1) voluntary self-sacrifice for truth, reminiscent of Christ's death; 2) death on the battlefield defending Islam, as in Mohammad's fight against the Meccan pagans; 3) a sudden and unnatural death resulting from sickness or catastrophe.[286] Death on the battlefield gives an even higher status, and death, fighting unbelievers gives a higher rank again.[287]

Mystics, in their treatises, identified self-mortification and self-purification as means by which one experiences union with the Beloved. In addition to this mortification, mystics refer to those who offered their lives for the beloved as killed by love, or *koshte-ye 'eshq,* martyr of love or *shahid-e 'eshq*. These compounds were particularly common among Persian poets in medieval times. The modern war poets used this motif of *shahid-e 'eshq* to define the soldier's death on the battlefield as self-sacrifice for the cause of the Beloved.

Mo'āwiye, trans. I.K.A. Howard, New York: State University of New York Press, 1990, p. 69.

[286] A. Neuwirth, "From Sacrilege to Sacrifice: Observations on Violent Death in Classical and Modern Arabic Poetry" in *Martyrdom in Literature: Visions of Death and Meaningful Suffering in Europe and the Middle East from Antiquity to Modernity,* ed., F. Pannewick, Germany: Reichert Verlag Wiesbaden, 2004, p. 265. For further information on martyrdom see E. Kohlberg, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* (2), under Shahīd; E. Kohlberg, *Meideval Muslim Views on Martrydom*, Amsterdam: KNAW Press, 1997; A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Martelaren: van Mystieke Weg tot Oorlogspad*, in the series Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen (the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences), Amsterdam: KNAW Press (Aksant Academic Publishers), 72, no. 4, 2009.

[287] E. Kohlberg, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Shahīd.

A *shahid* witnesses the Truth and submits physically and spiritually to it. Therefore, he is ready to offer his life for the cause of Truth.[288] The question arises of why a mystical death on the path to perfection is defined as martyrdom. The answer has a great deal to do with the death of a mystic who was in fact martyred: Hallāj, who was tried in Baghdad in 922. Later, Hallāj was said to have died for the sake of love, and was called a martyr of love. When the mystic, Shebli asked God about the meaning of Hallāj's death, a *hadith-e qodsi* is revealed to him: "Whom My love kills, for him shall I be blood money."[289] In the mystics' view, God kills His lover and promises Himself as the blood money. Therefore, the lover does not suffer the pain of separation.

According to the mystics, divine love causes spiritual progress and perfection. This leads the lover to complete detachment from all that is worldly, and even to yearn for death in the hope of union with the Beloved. A mystic's unusual life and death can plant the seeds of a legend. Without doubt, more legends are attributed to the life and death of the martyred Hallāj, than to any other mystic.[290] Friederike Pannewick describes Hallāj's death as a scene in which the lover is asking the audience to kill him: "… al-Hallāj … 'before an enormous crowd' with a crown on his head … cried out:

> Kill me, O my friends,
> As only in death is my life."[291]

The medieval mystic, 'Attār, characterizes Hallāj as, "This combatant killed by God in the holy war… this fearless and sincere warrior."[292] Just as one who dies in battle defending Islam is a martyr, so the mystic 'killed by God' is also a martyr.

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[288] A. Ezzati, "The Concept of Martyrdom in Islam," in *Al-Serāt*, vol. XII, Papers from the Imam Hosein Conference, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986, p. 119.

[289] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 136. The Qur'ān (17:35; 25:68; 6:152) allows a murder victim's family to exact revenge on the killer. But the killer may pay compensation, if the family accepts this. See further J. Schacht, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Ḳiṣāṣ.

[290] L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, trans. H. Mason, Princeton & New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982, vol. 1, (The life of al-Hallāj), p. lxvii.

[291] F. Pannewick, "Introduction," in *Martyrdom in Literature*, ed. F. Pannewick, Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag Wiesbaden, 2004, p. 7.

[292] L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj*, vol. 1, (The life of al-Hallāj), p. 85.

From a political perspective, martyrdom is not a passive act.[293] ʻAli Shariati tackles this subject in his book *Shahādat* (*Martyrdom*), in which he asserts that one who offers his life for a cause gains awareness. This awareness transforms him into a model to be emulated by the community. He writes: "… in our culture, martyrdom is not a death that our enemy imposes upon the fighter (*mojāhed*). Martyrdom is a beloved death that the fighter himself chooses with all his consciousness, all his reason, knowing, awareness, and vision."[294] Shariati asserts that Hosein is an archetype of martyrdom and Muslim Shiites should follow his example because he laid down his life to preserve faith in God's religion.

The classical mystic poets used the motif of the martyr of love to stress the importance of spiritual death and self-purification as a means of spiritual progress, with reference to the prophetic tradition: die before you die (*mutu qabla an tamutu*). The classical love poets used the motif of the martyr of love to compare spiritual death to real death. But in the war poetry the motif depicts death on the battlefield as a bridge that unites the martyr with the Beloved. For instance, Ayatollah Motahhari, in a sermon, states, "Martyrdom is a virtual death as well as spiritual progress."[295] He defines martyrdom as the achievement of moral virtue and spiritual perfection. A martyr dies a mystic's death; therefore, the martyr lives eternally besides God.

The war poets apply the mystical motif of the martyr of love to show that God fulfils the quest for spiritual perfection, for one who embarks on the path of love. Love guides him to the front line, and through his death he sees the Beauty of the Beloved. One of the principles of this path is keeping silent and preserving the secret of love. When the lover reaches this stage, he becomes an intimate of the Beloved, and worthy of union with the Beloved.[296]

The war poet Seyed Hasan Hoseini applied the motif in a *mathnavi* entitled ʻA Romantic Narrative' (*mathnavi-ye ʻāsheqāne*). The poet dedicates his poem to the martyr, Māshāʻallāh Sarhangi:

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[293] F. Pannewick, "Introduction," in *Martyrdom in Literature*, p. 9.

[294] ʻA. Shariati, *Shahādat*, United States of America and Canada: Anjoman-e Eslāmi-ye Dāneshjuyān dar Āmrica va Kānādā, 1352/1933, p. 76.

[295] A.M. Motahhari, "Shahīd," in *Jihad and Shahadat, Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam*, eds. M. Abedi, G. Legenhausen, Houston: The Institute for Research and Islamic Studies, 1986, p. 141.

[296] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmāʻil*, pp. 21, 44.

bebin khāneqāh-e shahidān-e 'eshq
saf-e 'ārefān-e ghazalkhān-e 'eshq
che jānāne charkh-e jonun mizanand
daf-e 'eshq bā dast-e khun mizanand[297]

Be aware of the monastery of the martyrs by love,
Of the mystics who are singing lyrics of love
How lovingly they strive for madness
How they beat the drum of love with the blood-stained hand.

Hoseini draws an analogy between the front line and the monastery *(khāneqāh*) where the mystics gather to remember God and perform spiritual rituals.[298] The couplet contains several metaphors. First, the monastery symbolically represents the battlefield. Secondly, soldiers standing in line and fighting the enemy are equated with worshipping mystics, whose love for God unites them in the community of the lovers. Thirdly, soldiers' prayers on the battlefield are likened to the *zekr* practice of mystics. During the war, Iranian soldiers did in fact recite prayers and remember God before going into action. The poet creates a setting that allows the soldier to compare himself to a mystic and equate his journey to the battlefield with a mystic's quest to find a master, and his initiation into a Sufi order. The soldier equates his participation in military service and his fight against the enemy with the *bay'a* ('oath of allegiance') of an adept when he enters the path of spiritual perfection. The oath of allegiance binds the student to follow his master's principles. The soldier's donning of a military uniform is comparable to a mystic's donning of a dervish's garment. The soldier is ready to sacrifice his life to achieve spiritual progress, according to the poet.

[297] Ibid., p. 43.
[298] A *khāneqāh* is the lodge of a mystic order, and serves two purposes: community life (rooms for prayer and meetings) and accommodating individual mystics. A *khāneqāh* is used by the disciples of a particular shaykh. See A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 234.

The metaphorical aspect of the martyr of love is turned to reality in war poetry. The soldier equates the hardships that he endures on the battlefield with the spiritual principles that the mystic performs to perfect his soul. Annihilation of self to achieve union with the Beloved (*baqā*) is the final stage of perfection. The soldier's self-sacrifice on the battlefield is seen as absolute obedience to the Beloved.

The war poet Habibollāh Khabbāz employs the concept of blood money to draw a comparison between spiritual death and real death, and encourage young men to participate in the fight against the enemy of the Beloved and achieve the title of 'martyr of love.' This motif appears in a *mathnavi* called 'The Purity of Karbalā' (*safā-ye Karbalā*):

bahā-ye khun-e 'āsheq rā ke midānad bejoz ma'shuq
shahid-e 'eshq dar maqtal khodā rā khun-bahā guyad[299]

Who but the Beloved knows the value of a lover's blood?
In the place of slaughter; the martyr of love says God is his blood money.

This couplet refers to the divine tradition which says, "Whom My love kills, for him shall I be blood money" to exalt the spiritual rank of a soldier who dies in action. The poet draws an analogy between the soldier and a lover, and defines the soldier's death as a spiritual 'death' (renunciation) for the sake of the Beloved. It is the Beloved who knows the value of the soldier's blood.

The female war poet, Simin-dukht Vahidi uses this motif in a *ghazal* entitled 'The Green Tree of Afrā' (*derakht-e sabz-e Afrā*).

ma rā māndan che dardi bud sangin, sakht jānfarsā
to rā she'r-e shahādat ey shahid-e 'eshq, shivā bud[300]

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[299] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3*, selected by M.'A. Mardāni, p. 44.

[300] *Gozide-ye she'r-e jang va defā'-e moqaddas*, p. 88. For more examples see *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2*, selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 9.

Continuing to live was such a heavy pain for me, eroding my soul
O martyr of love, poetry on martyrdom suits you.

Vahidi uses the terminology and motifs of the classical love poets. The mystics used the motifs of love poetry metaphorically, to picture their inner mystical progress. Vahidi, in contrast, applies these motifs to literal war. As a woman, she is writing about a martyrdom in which she cannot participate, yet, in a life that is wearisome, the admiration of martyrdom is something to hold on to. She calls herself a martyr of love (a metaphorical martyrdom again) and aligns her writing about martyrdom with a soldier conveying the meaning to the Iranians through death on the battlefield. She goes on to say that the soldier's martyrdom is more eloquent than the poem. Accordingly, a man who understands the beauty of the martyr's death will follow his example.

CONCLUSION

My objective in writing this chapter was to illustrate how the war poets, during the Iran-Iraq war, fundamentally changed classical mystical motif of love and its afflictions to justify violence. Concepts and motifs drawn from classical love literature were used by mystics as metaphors for the trials and joys of the spiritual path and to emphasize man's potential for union with the Beloved through self-denial. The war poets applied the mystical concepts of renunciation and self-sacrifice to the real war situation. They concealed the horrific facts of the conflict with mystic metaphors that drew parallels between fighting the enemy and striving for spiritual perfection. This was a way to inculcate a desire for self-sacrifice in the youth of Iran, for mobilisation purposes, and a way of making the sacrifices of Iranian parents meaningful, and, as in the last example quoted, a way in which the poets themselves found meaning when life was a burden.

The mystical concept of love was popular with the war poets. In mystical treatises, love metaphorically unites the lover with the Beloved. A lover strives to cleanse his heart of

impure temptations. He comes to understand divine reality through contemplation, concentration, and remembrance. This understanding is only possible through the heart. During the war, capacity of love to unite the lover with the Beloved was used to impress upon the soldiers that the Beloved illuminates their hearts when they participate in the fight against Iraqi forces, who are considered the enemies of God. In war poetry, the enemy is depicted as Satan (*sheytān*), who aims to deceive humanity and deprive it of spiritual progress and union with the Beloved. The soldier's deepest love for the Beloved is shown by killing His enemy. The soldier is compared to a lover who is going to kill his rival (*raqib*), who is an obstacle separating him from the Beloved. Whether the soldier kills the enemy or the enemy kills him, the soldier will be rewarded in the hereafter: death unites the lover with the Beloved. The soldier, comparable to a perfect mystic, then remains eternally alive (*baqā*) within the Beloved.

In the classical love literature both the lover and the beloved are idealized; the lover is prepared to offer his life for the cause of the most beautiful, but cruel, beloved. In mystical treatises the characteristics of the worldly beloved are applied to the divine Beloved. The mystic is a lover who lays down his life in the path of love, in the hope of eternal union. This mystical concept underwent a fundamental change in the war poetry. The metaphorical meaning of the concept was transformed into real life. The soldier compares himself to an ideal lover who seeks death, hoping for union with the Beloved. Fighting the enemy becomes the path to union with the Beloved. The soldier is called a gnostic of love (*'āref-e 'eshq*); he belongs to the same class as other gnostics or lovers of God. Communal feeling encourages him to sacrifice his life for the cause, for the benefit of the community. Love is the common thread that binds this community together. The soldier/lover endeavours to show that he is worthy to offer his life to attain to the threshold of the Beloved. He tries to be the ideal lover. He transcends the limitations of reality and is transformed on the "level of analogy."[301]

The mystical relationship between a master and a mystic is redefined in war poetry, in the form of the spiritual relationship between Ayatollah Khomeini and his soldiers. The soldier, like the student of mysticism, follows the instructions of his master. Khomeini, in

[301] J. Scott Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry*, p. 269.

his speeches, reminded his soldiers to perform their religious duties and purify their hearts. He emphasizes the necessity of the fight against the infidel enemy (*jehād*). *Jehād* is seen as both a religious duty and a gate through which one may enter the path of salvation.

In mystic literature, self-sacrifice is used as a metaphor for detachment from mundane desires and taming the lower soul, which lead to spiritual perfection. The soul's entanglement with the attractions of the world separates it from its origin. In the war poetry, the concept of self-sacrifice is used to equate death in battle with the spiritual perfection of a mystic. The soldier who offers his life on the front line believes that the hardships that he endures on the battlefield will purify his lower soul. Therefore, through death, he attains the mystical perfection through which he annihilates his identity and becomes one with the Beloved.

CHAPTER THREE

MYSTICAL MOTIFS IN THE POETRY OF THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

INTRODUCTION

In the second chapter, I explained how the mystical motif of love adopted by the mystics found a new political meaning in the war poetry. The purpose of this chapter is to focus on other mystical motifs chosen by the Iranian war poets to define fight as spiritual self-mortification and death as spiritual elevation. In mystic treatises, Hallāj is represented as the archetypical lover but the war poets made a reference to him and his utterances in order to introduce him as a fighter for the sake of love and religion. In the ensuing paragraphs, I will explain how the war poets deployed and reinterpreted Hallājian motifs such as the cry, I am the Truth (*bāng-e ana al-Haqq*), the gallows of love (*dār-e 'eshq*), and the witness to the ascension (*shāhed-e me'rāj*) to justify the war and motivate young Iranian men to sacrifice themselves in the fight against the enemy. I will begin with a *mathnavi* by the war poet 'Ali-Rezā Qazve to show how the mystical concept of the spiritual master (*pir*), shifted into a political context, inspires the youth to lay down their lives.

halā! pir-e hoshyār-e dard-āshnā
beriz az mey-e sabr dar jām-e mā
man az sharmsārān-e ru-ye to-am
ze dordi-keshān-e sabu-ye to-am[302]

Draw near! Wise old sage inured to pain,
Fill our cups with the wine of patience
On meeting you, I am abashed,
I drink the dregs from your goblet

[302] 'A.R. Qazve, *Az nakhlestān tā khiyābān*, p. 40.

The poet asks the spiritual master, the *pir*, to pour the wine of patience into his cup. In classical mystical literature, the spiritual master teaches the principles of self-purification to the novice, and leads him through the mystic path to achieve the stage of self-annihilation (*fanā*). ʻAli-Rezā Qazve applies the motif of the *pir* to his poem to draw an analogy between Ayatollah Khomeini and a spiritual master who leads the soldiers to the final spiritual stage. He guides them to the battlefield where they, like mystics, deny their worldly needs to gain spiritual elevation. The poet compares the soldier to a mystic who asks his master to pour the wine of patience (*sabr*) into his cup. The spiritual stage of *sabr* is obtained by mortifying the body. Here it alludes to the hardships that the soldier endures on the military front, and stimulates him to obey Ayatollah Khomeini, the *pir*, and to fight against the enemy. This may purify his soul from negative character traits. During the war, many people called Ayatollah Khomeini both the leader of the Islamic Revolution and the spiritual master. People of various classes followed his principles as if he was their spiritual leader. They called him imam, literally ʻmeaning leader,' in both a religious and political sense, and followed the principles prescribed by him. For the soldiers, giving up their lives in the battle was the same as following the orders of their master.

The concept of *pir* also has an antinomian connotation. The master is commonly associated with a Zoroastrian priest or the old magus who resides in a tavern, and guides the mystic to find and understand the Truth. The poet asserts that the master's cup contains the dregs (*dordi)* of sorrow. This reminds the reader of the hardships that the master has endured in the path to spiritual perfection. He therefore knows the principles of self-purification and the rules of abstaining from worldly ties. In classical Persian literature, the motif of the wine of patience (*mey-e sabr*) stands for total rejection of worldly desires, and patience in suffering. In the war poetry, it implies absolute obedience to Ayatollah Khomeini. It entails purification of the soul, and tranquility of the heart.

MOTIFS BASED ON THE MYSTIC MARTYR HALLĀJ

The war poets use the mystic martyr Hosein Ebn Mansur Hallāj as an archetype of sacrificing one's life for the sake of mystic doctrines. Hallājian motifs refer to Hallāj's

mystical utterances and his execution on the gallows by the order of the Sunni court at Baghdad. The war poets employed these motifs to draw an analogy between a soldier's death on the front line and Hallāj's death as a mystic martyr. In this section I will explain something of the background of Hallāj, and the motif of 'the cry, I am the Truth,' his most famous ecstatic utterance. Then I will explain the motifs of 'the tongue is a tale-bearer (*ghāmmaz budan-e zabān)*, the gallows of love (*dār-e 'eshq*), ablution by blood (*vozu be khun gereftan*), and Hallāj and the ascension from the gallows (*Hallāj-o dār-e me'rāj*)'. Ascension (*me'rāj*) is associated with several elements in the prophet's ascension to the heavens. In mystic literature, the prophet's ascension is cited to show that man is truly capable of spiritual progress and of a personal vision of God. These elements are used in the war poetry to imply that death on the front line guarantees one's place before the throne of God. To illustrate how these motifs were applied to encourage soldiers to offer their lives on the battlefield, I will explain the following ascension motifs: the witness of ascension *(shāhed-e Me'rāj),* the *Borāq* of love (*Borāq-e 'eshq*), and two bow lengths (*qāb-e qowsein*).

HOSEIN EBN MANSUR HALLĀJ AS A ROLE-MODEL

The Iranian war poets referred to Hallāj's life, and his ecstatic utterances, to draw a comparison between a soldier's death at the front and Hallāj's martyrdom as a mystic, to show the superiority of death over life, to underline the differences between Sunni and Shiite Islam, and between mysticism and orthodoxy, Arab and Persian, and the tyrant's court and the constitutional government. Hallāj was born in 858 in the city of Tur in the province of Fars (Southwestern Iran). He moved with his family to Wasit later to Tustar where he became a disciple of the mystic al-Tustari in 876.[303] Hallāj's reputation for mystical insight grew after his first pilgrimage to Mecca, where he made a vow to stay for one year, and pray to God. He performed religious rituals such as prayer and fasting. He also began to act against "the discipline of secrecy" and shared his mystical insights. From

[303] M. Trexler, in *Holy People of the World: A Cross Cultural Encyclopedia*, ed. Ph. G. Jestice, California: ABC-CLIO, 2004, under Hallāj Hosayn b. Mansur al, p. 343-4.

this time onwards, he taught his pupils how to know God in their hearts. For this reason, he was called *Hallāj al-Asrār* ('the carder of secrets'). During his second pilgrimage, Hallāj prayed to God to reduce his soul to nothingness, so that he could become a servant through whose lips God grants access to Himself. In his third and last pilgrimage to Mecca, Hallāj made a new proclamation, which led to his brutal death. He made a clay model of the Ka'be in his home, where he performed religious rituals. At night, he would pray beside tombs, and by day he wandered through the town, asking people to kill him. He said: "O, Muslims save me from God"… "God has made my blood lawful to you: kill me." He also said his famous *shath* (theophanic exclamation): "I am the Truth." This exclamation showed that there was no distance between him and God.[304] Hallāj claimed a close relationship with God by saying, "What He wants, I want; and what I want He wants."[305] Hallāj refers to the mystical experience called 'the unity of the Presence' (*vahdat al-shohud*). In a mystic sense, *shohud* means the actual presence of God in the heart of His servant. This union happens through faith and love; it is not a physical union. One who empties his heart of his self, allows it to be filled with God's love "the essence whose Essence is Love.[306] Hallāj was arrested at the orders of the Abbasid caliph, al-Moqtader, and executed at Baghdad wearing a crown on his head. According to the mystics, he was executed because of his love for the divine, and his absolute submission to God. It is said that on the first day Hallāj was beaten, and the next day his head was cut off and his body was burned, then the ashes were thrown into the Tigris.[307]

After Hallāj's death, his disciples from Baghdad fled to Persia and transmitted his ideas secretly. A mystic from Shiraz, Ruzbehān Baqli (d. 1209) wrote commentaries on Hallāj's *Ketab at-Tawwāsin* and made his theory understandable for people.[308] Later, Sufis developed Hallāj's ideas, and honored him as a martyr. They interpreted his *shath*, "I am

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[304] A.T. Karamustafa argues that the legendary account of '*ana al-Haqq*' attributed to Hallāj may be inaccurate. See A.T. Karamustafs, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, California: University of California Press, 2007, pp. 25-6.
[305] H.W. Mason, *Al-Hallaj*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1995, p. 72.
[306] L. Massignon & L. Gardet, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under al-Ḥallāǧ.
[307] Ibid., For more information about Hallāj and his life see L. Massignon, *The Passion of Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, trans. H. Mason, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982.
[308] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 74.

[God] the Truth," as the utterance of an ideal believer.[309] Hallāj is famous for both his symbolic role as a lover who suffers from the pain of separation, and a lover who reveals the secrets of his Beloved.[310] Hallāj has become a model for all lovers who have been punished because they have unveiled the Beloved's secrets, and talked openly about the mysteries of love. This is his greatest sin, according to the mystics.[311] They made a myth of Hallāj's death, presenting it as a way of achieving the love of God. From Hallāj's life and death, they developed mystical motifs to show their inner state and their mystical relationship with God. A motif popular with the mystical love poets is "headlessness."[312] This points to his decapitation.

Aspects of Hallāj's life became favorite motifs in mystic poetry. The mystic poet 'Attār Neyshāburi, contributed considerably to the legend of Hallāj. In works such as *Tadhkerat al-Owliy*ā, *Manteq al-Teyr*, *Elāhi-nāme*, *Asrār-nāme*, and *Mosibat-nāme*, 'Attār refers to Hallāj's mystical state and his dramatic death. 'Attār holds that he too had successfully annihilated his ego, and so achieved ultimate union with Hallāj.[313] In *Mazhar al-'Ajāyeb* ('Manifestation of Wonders'), a book attributed to him, 'Attār compares himself to Hallāj: "'Attār, like Mansur, cries 'I am the Truth' setting the whole world on fire." He encourages the reader to follow Hallāj's way of life, taking the path of perfection to experience the mystical stage of annihilation. In *Haylāj-nāme* ('The Story of Hallāj') attributed to 'Attār, he repeats 'the outcry of *ana al-Haqq*' ('I am the Truth'), and says that he is united with Hallāj: "You are one with me in heart and soul – You are I, and I am You, master of union!" Several mystics such as Abd al-Rahmān Jāmi (1414-1492) have affirmed 'Attār's claim that he had a spiritual relationship with Hallāj, and that he achieved ultimate union with him. In his *Nafahāt al-Ons* ('The Odor of Friendship'), Jāmi writes that "the light of Mansur [Hallāj] after one hundred fifty years manifested to the spirit of Farid al-

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[309] R. A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, p. 80.
[310] A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 65.
[311] Ibid., p. 59; also see Ibid., pp. 64-5.
[312] C.W. Ernst, "On Losing One's Head: Hallājian Motifs and Authorial Identity in Poems Ascribed to Attār," in *Attār and the Persian Sufi Tradition: The Art of Spiritual Flight,* eds. L. Lewisohn & Ch. Shackle, London & New York: I.B Tauris, London: The Institute of Ismaili Studeis, 2006, p. 333.
[313] Ibid., pp. 330-333.

Din ‘Attār and becomes his spiritual authority.”[314] ‘Attār disseminated Hallāj’s fame by referring to his life, the afflictions that he suffered, his death, and his utterances. The French scholar Massignon states: “It was above all due to the literary works of ‘Attār that the Hallājian theme became one of the most famous leitmotifs in Iranian Muslim poetics, wherever Islam was propagated together with the love of Persian poetry because Persian poetry was used for the propagation of Islam.”[315]

In the course of time, Hallāj’s life and death has become a legend. Hallāj was executed because he built a ka‘be in his courtyard and performed the pilgrimage ritual walking around it.[316] This was considered blasphemous by the political authorities. The mystics made a myth around his death and said that Hallāj was executed because he revealed the divine secret.[317] His name, life, and teachings have been used as tools for political purposes in the 20th century. He is transformed into a political character in a poem by Shafi‘i-Kadkani (b. 1939) in his collection of poetry entitled *Dar kuche bāghhā-ye Neyshābur* (‘In the Alleys of Neyshābur’). He introduces Hallāj as an activist who protested against social injustice. The poet says that Hallāj appears in the heart of a lover who is singing his famous ecstatic utterance: ‘I am the Truth.’ The poet draws a comparison between Hallāj’s utterance and the prayer of love (*namāz-e ‘eshq*).[318]

…
bāz ān sorud-e sorkh-e ana al-Haqq
verd-e zabān-e ust
to dar namāz-e ‘eshq che khāndi?
ke sālhāst bālā-ye dār rafti va in shahnehāy-e pir
az morde-at hanuz
parhiz mikonand [319]

[314] C.W. Ernst, “On Losing One’s Head: Hallājian Motifs and Authorial Identity in Poems Ascribed to Attār,” pp. 333-34.
[315] Ibid., p. 336.
[316] A.T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period*, p. 25.
[317] Ibid., p. 26.
[318] F. Keshavarz, *Recite in the Name of the Red Rose: Poetic Sacred Making in Twentieth-century Iran*, Colombia: University of the South Carolina Press, 2006, p. 82.
[319] M.R. Shafi‘i-Kadkani, *Dar kuche bāghhā-ye Neyshābur*, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Tus, 1350/1972, pp. 46-47.

Again that red chant of *I am the Truth*
is the daily practice of his tongue.
What was it you recited, in the prayer of love?
For it is years since you climbed the scaffold but yet
These old watchmen are still
avoiding your corpse.

Shafi'i-Kadkani provides a political reading of Hallāj's death, attributing it to his defiance of the caliph. He asserts that Hallāj, aware of the caliph's illegitimacy, attempted to make the people of Baghdad aware of this, and motivated them to create uproar. The poet identifies the caliph's guards as the old town watchmen (*shahnehā-ye pir*) who arrested Hallāj and put him on the gallows. Literally, *shahne* means 'watchman'. The word is popular with classical love poets. For example, the fourteenth century Persian poet Hāfez used it to say that the moral police, in secret, behaved immorally. In his poem, Shafi'i-Kadkani equates Iranian revolutionary activists with Hallāj to inspire them to protest against the Pahlavi monarch. Hallāj was put on trial because he recited the prayer of love. However, the watchmen are afraid of his dead body, and the guards of the Pahlavi monarch are afraid of activists' dead bodies, because their deaths will awaken the Iranian population, leading to the overthrow of the regime.

Shafi'i-Kadkani's use of Hallāj in a modern context is not an isolated case but rather an example of how classical literary motifs have been used in modern times for political purposes. Hallāj was a champion not only during the Revolution, but also during the Iran-Iraq war. He became a living legend and served as the archetype of self-sacrifice in the path of love. The war poets employed Hallājian motifs to connect the fight against the Iraqi enemy to the spiritual self-denial that unites the mystic with the Beloved. In the ensuing paragraphs, I will analyze several Hallājian motifs frequently used in war poetry to illustrate how, within a political context, they served to motivate Iranian youth to lay down their lives on the battlefield.

THE OUTCRY OF I AM THE TRUTH

According to traditional accounts, one of the reasons for Hallāj's execution was his ecstatic statement: 'I am the Truth' (*ana al-Haqq*). During the war, his utterance was applied in war poetry asserting that self-sacrifice at the front unites the soldier with the Beloved. For example, the war poet Seyed Hasan Hoseini applies Hallāj's mystical utterance in a quatrain entitled 'The Prologue of Love' (*dibāche-ye 'eshq*), emphasizing that the first step in love is to offer one's life:

tā khāk ze khun-e pāk rangin nashavad
in dasht-e berahne lāle-āzin nashavad
tā lāle-rokhān bāng-e ana al-Haqq nazanand
dibāche-ye sorkh-e 'eshq tadvin nashavad[320]

As long as the soil is not colored with pure blood
As long as this barren desert is not adorned with tulips
As long as the tulip-faced people do not cry out, *I am the Truth*
The red prologue of love will not be written.

Hoseini compares the war between Iran and Iraq to the mystical path towards perfection. He suggests that writing the red prologue of love (*dibāche-ye sorkh-e 'eshq*) requires several steps. The first step is to use one's own blood to color the soil. The image implies the act of self-sacrifice because it reminds the Persian reader of the bloody deaths of imam Hosein and his companions. The second step is filling the desert with tulips, which in Persian literature symbolizes martyrdom. During the war and afterwards, the tulip has been used in mural paintings to refer to the soldiers killed on the battlefield. Moreover, in Tehran and other cities of Iran, the cemeteries of martyrs are decorated with tulips made of metals or other materials. During the war, a ballad (*tasnif*), composed by 'Āref from Qazvin (1882-1934), a politically engaged poet-singer during the Constitutional Revolution, was very popular. The first line reads: "Tulips are growing from the blood of the youth of the

[320] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 132.

homeland" (*az khun-e javānān-e vatan lāle damide*). ʻĀref composed this ballad to motivate Iranians to act against the Qājār monarchy, to establish a new social and political order. In the years of the war, ʻĀrefʼs poem was broadcast on public radio across the country on a daily basis. It often ran several times a day in order to inspire the crowd to participate in the struggle.[321] The third step is that the tulip-faced soldiers should cry out ʻI am the Truthʼ (*ana al-Haqq*), Hallāj's ecstatic utterance. Hallāj says that God bestowed spiritual progress upon him: "O people! When *al-Haqq* (God) takes possession of a heart, He empties it of all else but Himself; and when He keeps a man for Himself, He ruins him for all else but Himself. When He lovingly desires a servant, He incites His other servants to enmity against him, so as to bring him close to Himself."[322] Therefore, one who is elected by God suffers in the mundane world to purify his or her lower soul from negative traits, in preparation for union with God. Applying Hallāj's utterance in the poem of war implies that a soldier who repeats this utterance and consequently dies at the front will attain the same spiritual perfection that Hallāj had, and will ultimately be united with the Beloved. The three images together stress the importance of self-sacrifice for the sake of enduring love.

To illustrate Iranian clerics' appraisal of Hallāj's mystical utterance, I will give several examples from the *Divān* (ʻThe Collection of Poemsʼ) of Ayatollah Khomeini, who refers to Hallāj's outcry "I am the truth" and criticizes him. Khomeini asserts that those groups (i.e., the Sufis) who publicly cry I am the truth are ʻpretendersʼ or ʻintrudersʼ (*moddaʻiyān*).

zin moddaʻiyān ke fāsh ana al-Haqq guyand
bā khod-bini vafā nadidam hargez [323]

From these pretenders who proclaim aloud, I am the Truth,
I've never seen fidelity, for their eyes are on themselves

[321] J. Matīnī, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, under ʻĀref Qazvīnī.
[322] H.W. Mason, *Al-Hallaj*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1995, p. 70.
[323] Ayatollah Khomeini, *Divān-e Emām*, 1377/1998, p. 217.

Khomeini is placing himself in the millennium-old Persian mystic tradition. Classical poets such as Hafez use the term *modda'i* to allude to Satan who claimed to be more in love with God than Adam. Satan's argument with God resulted in his expulsion from heaven. Khomeini is criticizing Hallāj because he is boasting of his love for God. In boasting, he resembles Satan. In addition, Khomeini holds that "one who has never seen the beauty of the Friend, makes so much tumult."[324] Khomeini's next reference to Hallāj has a critical tone. In a quatrain, he characterizes Hallāj as a selfish (*khodbin*) man. Literally it means one who sees his own self, who is self-centred. Khomeini says, "a self-centered man is an infidel/a selfless man does not boast 'I am the Truth.' "[325]

Despite this criticism of Hallāj, in a *ghazal* entitled 'The Love of the Beloved' ('*eshq-e deldār*), Khomeini makes an example out of Hallāj's death: "The love of the Beloved affected me so that/ like Mansur, it took me from my land and put me on the gallows."[326] Ayatollah Khomeini follows Hallāj's mystical path, but he condemns Hallāj because he publicized his love through his ecstatic utterances. Ayatollah Khomeini holds that revealing love is the easier way, which Hallāj has chosen, while hiding love is the more difficult path of love. It is interesting to see that despite Khomeini's critical approach to Hallāj, this classic mystic was used in various ways in Persian war poetry to mobilize the Iranian population.

THE TONGUE IS A TALE-TELLER

One of the motifs which is popular with Persian mystical poets and the war poets is the tongue is a tale-teller. The tongue reveals the lover's secret, disgraces him, and makes him a target of censure. Mystic poets used the motif to assert that the adept should hide his spiritual station from one who has no mystical experience. Hallāj is the type of lover who reveals the secret of the Beloved, and was beheaded as a result.[327] In mystical treatises, love

[324] Ibid., p. 246.
[325] Ibid., p. 246.
[326] Ibid., p. 82.
[327] C.W. Ernst, "On Losing One's Head: Hallājian Motifs and Authorial Identity in Poems Ascribed to Attār,"

itself is a tale-teller (*ghammāz*) because it changes the lover's appearance and behavior, and unveils his secret.[328]

Even before Hallāj's execution, the question of hiding or revealing one's spiritual state, referred to the secret of love, was a matter of great concern. Two powerful mystical schools in Baghdad and Khorāsān addressed the subject. Those who followed the School of Baghdad, led by al-Joneyd, asserted that one should hide the inner secrets of one's heart and one's mystical states and experiences. Al-Joneyd taught his students to try "to remain on good terms with the religious and secular authorities of the capital."[329] The mystics of this school believed that they should unveil their mystical experiences only for the members of their own circle. Nevertheless, several mystics of this school openly talked about their state, the most famous being Hallāj himself. In contrast to the school of Baghdad, the school of Khorāsān, led by Abu Yazid Bastāmi, spoke of being intoxicated with divine love.[330] The followers of this school did not hide their love and their spiritual stations. A famous example is Abu Yazid Bastāmi who talked about his experiences. He is the first mystic to have claimed that he had ascended (*me'rāj*) to the heavens.[331]

The trope of revealing one's love has been popular in Persian literature until modern times. In Persian war poetry, the mystical motif of 'the tongue is a tale-teller' is used to draw an analogy between imam Hosein and Hallāj. They aim to identify the former's death as a mystical martyrdom. For instance, Seyed Hasan Hoseini applies the motif of unveiling the secret in a quatrain (*robā'i*) entitled 'The Unspoken Secret' (*serr-e magu*):

gar bar setam-e qorun bar-āshoft Hosein
bidāri-ye mā khāst, be khun khoft Hosein
ānjā ke zabān mahram-e asrār nabud

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p. 339.

[328] See in this study, chapter on Mystic Love in Iran-Iraq War Poetry, subtitle, Abandoning reason for the cause of spiritual perfection, pp. 67-72.

[329] A. Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History*, Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2000, p. 61; for further information see L. Ridgeon, *Morals and Mysticism in Persian Sufism: A History of Sufi-futuwwat in Iran*, New York: Routledge, 2010, p. 32.

[330] S.H. Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam's Mystical Tradition*, New York: Harper One, 2007, p. 179.

[331] Ibid., p. 178.

bā lahje-ye khun serr-e magu goft Hosein[332]

When Hosein rebelled against the tyranny of centuries
He wished to waken us, before he slept in blood
As there was no language to confide the secrets
Hosein revealed the unspoken secret with the tongue of blood.

In this poem, the word 'centuries' (*qorun*) refers to the oppression imposed on human beings since the beginning of human history, when Kane murdered his brother Abel.[333] Shiites believe that tyranny and oppression on earth started when Kane killed his brother Abel. From then on, the cycle of revenge was handed down from generation to generation, until it ended with Hosein's death, which has not been yet avenged.[334] He sacrificed his life to awaken the Muslims and to mobilize them to protest against unjust and illegitimate rulers. The poet Hoseini uses the idiom 'to sleep in blood' (*be khun khoftan*) to symbolize imam Hosein's death. It transmits the reader the feeling that Hosein death was unjust and cruel, and fans hatred and the desire for revenge. According to Shiite accounts, after the execution of Hosein and his companions, their enemies cut off their heads and trampled their bodies. This image is used repeatedly in annual Passion Play re-enactments of imam Hosein's death. During the war the plays intensified the audience's hatred for Sunni Muslims and the Iraqi enemy. Iranian propaganda presented them and the Iraqi soldiers as enemies of imam Hosein, as well as of Iranians.

According to the poet, imam Hosein had a message and a mission, to rouse Muslims to fight against tyrants and offer their lives for this goal. Iranian should follow Hosein's example. He is the archetype of self-sacrifice in the path of God. The poet uses the motif of the storyteller to connect Hosein's martyrdom to Hallāj's mystical martyrdom. They were both beheaded and their bodies were not protected. The poet also makes a contrast between

[332] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 111.
[333] For further information about the continuity of oppression during history see 'A. Shariati, "Hosein vāreth-e Ādam," in *Hosein vāreth-e Ādam, Majmu'e-ye āthār 19*, pp. 35-57.
[334] 'A. Shariati, *Hosein vāreth-e Ādam,* pp. 35-57.

imam Hosein and Hallāj. Unlike Hallāj, imam Hosein hid the secret of love, but his bloody death revealed it to those who understand it. Thus the soldier should also hide the secret of love from the Iraqi enemy and from people unable to understand it, but his bloody death at the front will reveal the secret. The soldier's death transforms him into a holy figure, a part of the archetype of self-sacrifice. He becomes a model whom the Iranian community should emulate.

THE GALLOWS OF LOVE

Another motif connected with Hallāj is the gallows of love *(dār-e 'eshq)* used frequently in war poetry to draw an analogy between Hallāj's execution and a soldier's death on the battlefield. The gallows symbolizes love, and the utmost sacrifice that a mystic can make to achieve union with the Beloved. The war poet Seyed Hasan Hoseini applies the gallows of love motif in 'The Outcry' (*faryād*) to equate a soldier's death to mystical martyrdom.

'ārefi ku dar ghazal faryād ras
jān-e mā rā mozhde-hā midād ku
'eshq-bāzi tā farāz-e dār-e 'eshq
shive-i digar nahad bonyād ku[335]

Where is a sage who could defend us in his *ghazal*
giving our soul much joyful news
Practicing love even on the summit of love's gallows
establishing a new foundation for love, where is he

The poet looks for the sage who gave good news and practiced love to the summit of the gallows. In this poem, the sage stands for a spiritual master, a familiar character in the *ghazals* of the fourteenth century poet, Hafez from Shiraz. In Persian literature, the sage may be a leader, an advisor, a kind friend, or a companion. In the poem of war, the sage

[335] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 97.

refers to Ayatollah Khomeini who led the soldiers to the battlefield, and asked them to sacrifice their lives for the cause of the Islamic Revolution. Although there is no direct reference to Hallāj's execution, in the second line, the motif of the gallows of love (*dār-e 'eshq*) refers to his execution. The soldier's familiarity with the narrative of Hallāj life, his execution, and his mystical elevation provides the poet with the opportunity to convince the soldier that his death is a path to spiritual perfection, Hoseini draws an analogy between the battlefield, where the soldier lays down his life and the gallows where Hallāj was hanged. The poem appears to create a dichotomy between the Iranian Hallāj and the Iraqi soldiers; between the heavenly objective for which the Iranian youn men sacrifice their lives, and the earthly objective that the Iraqi soldiers are fighting for it. The poet contrasts mysticism with orthodox Islam. Inspired by mystical motives, Iranian young men, like Hallāj, strive to offer their lives to become one with Him and achieve eternal salvation. Furthermore, they choose death to preserve "the truth of God's teaching and law."[336]

Ablution in blood (*vozu be khun gereftan*) is an element of the gallows of love motif, which was popular with the war poets. The kind of ablutions referred to the 'lesser ablutions' performed before obligatory prayers. In the war poetry this motif is uniquely used in a non-metaphorical sense. In a *robā'i*, the war poet, Mohammad-Rezā Sohrābi refers to Hallāj's death using the motif of ablution:

dar ma'reke-hā jonun gereftim cho tigh
sad bār vozu be khun gereftim cho tigh
hengāme-ye tufān-e khatar sā'eqevār
jān az tan-e khasm-e dun gereftim cho tigh[337]

Like the blade, we become mad on the battlefield
Like the blade, we perform ablutions in blood, one hundred times
At the time of typhoon of danger, we thunder-like
Have taken the soul of the enemy from his body

[336] H.W. Mason, *Al-Hallaj*, p. 41.
[337] *Gozide-ye she'r-e jang va defā'-e moqaddas*, p. 89.

Sohrābi draws a comparison between the soldier and a sharp blade that kills. The motif of the mad blade symbolizes killing the enemy without any fear of death. It refers to the fact that during the war the Iranian soldiers attacked the enemy although they did not have adequate weapons. In the second line, we come across the motif of ablution in blood. Literally, 'ablution means washing parts of the body with pure water, to prepare oneself for prayer'. Ablution in blood refers to Hallāj's execution. The mystic poet, 'Attār relates that when his hands were cut off, he covered his face with blood so that no one would think he was afraid of death.[338] Later, the mystics called this 'performing ablutions in blood.' One who embarks on the path of love, like Hallāj, should cleanse his body with his own blood. The poet, Sohrābi employs the motif to draw a comparison between death at the front, and mystic martyrdom. Aware of his impending death, the soldier leaves his loved ones and his belongings behind, just as a mystic who embarks upon the path of love denies his worldly desires, and metaphorically sacrifices his life, to achieve spiritual perfection. Inspired by the poems and state propaganda, soldiers were led to believe that through death they would attain to the same stage of perfection that Hallāj reached.

In their treatises, the mystics employed the motif of ablutions in blood to illustrate the inevitable suffering and death of a lover for the sake of the Beloved. In certain Sufi circles, such as the Ne'matollahi, a candidate should perform five rituals of ablutions before initiation and acceptance in a mystical order. They are: 1) the ablution of repentance from all past sins; 2) the ablution of submission to the will of God; 3) the ablution of spiritual poverty; 4) the ablution of pilgrimage on the Sufi path: 5) the ablution of fulfillment.[339] Through these outward and inward purifications, the pure love of God is revealed in the heart of the mystic. Hallāj performed ablution with his blood to repent from sin and submit himself to the will of God. In an anecdote, 'Attār asserts that ablutions with blood are the prerequisite for elevation to the summit of the gallows of love:

che midāni ke 'āsheq dar che kār ast

[338] *Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Owliya* ('Memorial of the Saints'), Fardi al-Din Attar, trans. A.J. Arberry, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966, p. 270.
[339] I.R. Netton, *Sufi Ritual: The Parallel Universe*, Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000, pp. 30-31.

ke sejdegāh-e u bālā-ye dār ast
bebāyad kard ghosl az khun-e khishat
ke tā ān sejdegāh ārand pishat[340]

What do you know of what the lover is doing
Because the place he prostrates himself is atop the gallows
You should perform ablutions with your own blood
So that you may be led to that place of prostration.

'Attār supposes that the lover is given the opportunity to perform prayer at the place of worship (*sejdegāh)* where Hallāj prayed, that is, at the gallows, providing he first bathes in blood (in this case the reference is to major ablutions, requiring bathing). 'Attār implies that one should purify his soul to die on the gallows.

We see that Sohrābi, like other war poets, employs the terminology and motifs which mystics used, to equate death on the battlefield with Hallāj's martyrdom. The poet means to say that death is a means through which one survives eternally, and achieves unity with the Beloved. Thus, one who enters on the path of spiritual perfection can never be defeated: his death is the beginning of a new life in and with the Beloved. Sohrābi implies that Hallāj offered his life to develop Shiite beliefs. It is worth noting that Hallāj was in fact a Sunni Muslim, but his act of sacrifice is applied in the war literature to inspire a sense of self-sacrifice in the community. In this literature, Hallāj is commonly presented as a Shiite Muslim, as his way of achieving union with the Beloved is blended with the paths of the Shiite saints.

HALLĀJ AND THE GALLOWS OF ASCENSION

Hallāj and the gallows of ascension (*Hallāj-o dār-e me'rāj)* is another element of the gallows of love motif. Literally, the word ascension (*me'rāj*) means "ladder," but the

[340] Farid al-Din 'Attār, *Elāhi-nāme*, with notes and introduction by H. Ritter, Tehran, Enteshārāt-e Tus, 1368/1989, p. 107.

reference is to the prophet Mohammad's ascension to the heavens. The concept of *me'rāj* derives from the Qur'ānic verse: "Glory be to Him who transported His servant by night (*asrā bi abdi-hi laylan*) from the Masjed al-Harām to the Masjed al-Aqsā (the further place of prayer) which We have surrounded with blessing, in order to show him one of our signs" (17:1).[341] The prophet who ascended to the throne of God and saw Him has achieved the highest spiritual perfection. Then he returned to the earth to guide humans. In mystical treatises, the *me'rāj* is a metaphor for man's spiritual progress, showing that man is capable of ascending to the divine if he purifies his soul by means of self- mortification and self-denial. This metaphoric aspect of *me'rāj* was changed to a dynamic reality by the war poets. The war poets draw an analogy between the prophet Mohammad's ascension and a soldier's death in battle, through which he achieves perfection and becomes a guide for the community.

A popular account, in the sense of Iranians knowledge about *me'rāj*, of the prophet's journey to heaven says that he was sleeping near the Ka'be in Mecca when he was awakened by the archangel Gabriel. He had a winged mount with him named Borāq. The prophet was mounted on Borāq and they began their journey to Jerusalem. On the way, they visited Hebron and Bethlehem. In Jerusalem, they met Abraham, Moses and Jesus, and the obligatory prayer (*salāt*) was performed with the prophet leading the prayers. This shows his superiority to the other prophets.[342] From Jerusalem they ascended to heaven. After passing through Hell and Heaven the prophet alone was standing before God's throne.[343] Gabriel was not allowed to draw near to God. Only the prophet, as a human being, could approach God. This refers to man's capacity to understand love, which angels

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[341] B. Schrieke, & J. Horovitz, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Mi'rādj.

[342] Ibid., under Mi'rādj: In Islamic exegesis and in the popular and mystical tradition of the Arab world.

[343] Ibid., For further information about Borāq see: R. Paret, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under al-Burāḳ; H. Taremy, in *Encyclopaedia of the World of Islam* (*Dāneshnāme-ye jahān-e Eslām*), under Borāq. The tradition of the ascension can be traced back to pre-Islamic history. According to the *Avestā,* Zarathustra spent ten years "in the best existence" and again joined his kinsmen. Vohā Manō is his companion and guide. Zarathustra passes through four stages until he arrives to the throne of Ahurā Mazdā. A well-known tale exists in Middle Persian texts, called the *Ardā virāf nāme*. It is the story of the magi Ardāvirāz, who through a spiritual journey visited Heaven and Hell. When he descends, he brings valuable commands for his community. Ebn al-Nadim in his *al-Fehrest* mentions a celebrated angel seen by Mani, the founder of Manichaeism. Mani started his prophetic mission when he saw the angel. Biruni, in his *al-Athār,* refers to the ascension of Jamshid, the great Iranian mythic king, to Heaven. His journey was about defeating death and demons. See De Fouchécour, in *The Encylopaedia of Islam* (2), under Mi'rādj.

lack.[344]

During this Night Journey, the prophet could "bear the vision" because he did not accept the heavenly offers, such as "fantastic wonders, towering angels and heavenly rivers."[345] He was offered the opportunity to talk with the prophets and angels, but when he realized that they are veils over God's face, he rejected the offer. Therefore, he obtained a spiritual perfection that led to the divine vision. On this account the Qur'ān says: "He revealed to His servant what He revealed" (53:10).[346]

The prophet's ascension to the heavens has been a subject of controversy among various groups of scholars. The mystics and philosophers treat it as an allegory; and Sufis explain the ascension as detachment from the world of sensuality to achieve divine knowledge.[347] Hojviri asserts that the prophets' rank is higher than the mystics' position because the mystics must follow the prophets' path until they attain to the presence of God.[348] 'Attār interprets the prophet's ascension in his mystical work *Elāhi-nāme*. The poet uses the image of the union of "two arches into one single arch." This image symbolizes God's oneness (*towhid*).[349] He asserts that an arrow removed the letter 'm' from the term Ahmad (the prophet's title) and transformed it into *Ahad* (a name of God, meaning unity).[350] Nezāmi of Ganja (ca. 1141-1209) developed the motif of ascension in his romances, to emphasize the spiritual elevation of the soul. For him, the prophet's ascension is an example of spiritual perfection and detachment from the world of nature.[351] In his *Haft*

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[344] For Hāfez's view on angel's incapability of understanding love see A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, "Waxing Eloquent"… in *Metaphors and Imagery in Persian Poetry*, pp. 115-6; also see idem, "The Erotic Spirit: Love, Man and Satan in Hāfez's Poetry," in *Hafiz and The School of Love in Classical Persian Poetry*, ed. L. Lewisohn, London: I.B. Tauris, pp. 107-21.

[345] F. S. Colby, "The Subtitle of the Ascensions: al-Sulamī on the Mi'rāj of the Prophet Mohammad," *Studia Islamica*, no. 94, 2002, p. 175.

[346] Ibid., pp. 175-6.

[347] B. Schrieke, & J. Horovitz, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Mi'rādj, In Islamic exegesis and in the popular and mystical tradition of the Arab world.

[348] Abo al-Hasan 'Ali Ebn Othmān al-Jollābi al-Hojviri al-Ghaznavi, *Kashf al-Mahjub*, corrected by V. Zhukovsky, p. 307.

[349] C.H. De Fouchecour, "The Story of the Ascension (*Mi'rāj*) in Nizāmī's Work," in *The Poetry of Nizāmī Ganjavi: Knowledge, Love, and Rhetoric*, eds. K. Talattof & J. W. Clinton, Houndmills: Palgrave, 2000, p. 181.

[350] C.H. De Fouchecour, *in The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Mi'rādj.

[351] For further information on mystical explanations of nature in Nezāmi's *Haft Paykar* see A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, "A Mystical Reading of Nizāmī's Use of Nature in the Haft Paykar," in *A Key to the Treasure of the*

peykar ('Seven Beauties'), Nezāmi shows how Mohammad intercedes for Muslims. The prophet receives the letter (*barāt*) through which he rescues the Muslims from punishment in the hereafter.[352]

The war poets connected the concept of ascension with the death of *Hallāj* to further connect it to death at the front line. For this purpose, they use the gallows of ascension motif. The motif is used by Parviz Beygi Habibābādi in a poem titled 'They are Coming from Karbalā' (*az Karbalā miāyand*).

Hallāj-o dār-e me'rāj, khunin-tarin hemāse-ast
ey kheyl-e nābekārān in qowm sarbedār ast[353]

The bloodiest epic is that of Hallāj, and his ascension on the gallows
O filthy army, this people's head is on the gallows (*Sarbedār*)

In this poem, the motif of the gallows of ascension (*dār-e me'rāj*) refers to Hallāj execution. Blood (*khun*) is one of the significant symbols that Habibābādi employs to depict his death as cruel. Both red and blood symbolize martyrdom. The image of spilling blood on the ground, or on the rocks represents blood is of no use for the body.[354] Rather the blood infuses life to the community. The poet signifies Hallāj execution as the bloodiest epic because before his death, his hands and feet were cut off. The poet draws an analogy between Hallāj's execution and Mohammad's ascension to assert that his death has united him with God. Thus, a soldier who emulates his way of life and dies on the battlefield will

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Hakīm: Artistic and Humanistic Aspects of Nizāmī's Khamse, eds. J.Ch. Bürgel & Ch. van Ruymbeke, Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2011, pp. 181-93. A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn*, p. 184; C.H. de Fouchécour, "Les Récits d'ascension (Me'râj) dans l'œuvre de Nizami" in *Études Irano-aryennes Offertes à Gilbert Lazard*, eds. C.H., de Fouchécour & P. Gignoux, Paris, 1989, pp. 99-108.

[352] Nezāmi Ganjavi, *Haft Peykar*, noted by B. Thervatiyān, Tehran: Mo'assese-ye enteshārāt-e Amir Kabir, 1387/ 2008, p. 88, bayts 70-74. For further information on the ascension in Nezāmi's romances see, *Leyli va Majnūn*, corrected and annotated by B. Thervatiyān, Tehran: Tus, 1364/1985; Nezāmi Ganjavi, *Makhzan al-Asrār*, corrected, annotated and noted, and proverbs by B. Thervatiyān, Tehran: Tus, 1363/1984. *Dāstān Khosrow va Shirin*, by 'A.-M. Āyati, Tehran: Mo'assese-ye enteshārāt-e Frānklin, 1353/1974.

[353] *Gozide-ye she'r-e jang va defā'-e moqaddas*, p. 183. For more examples of the concept of sarbedārān in the war poetry see S. H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, pp. 14, 72.

[354] D. Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, p. 117.

become a companion of God in the Hereafter.

The mystics assert that man originates from God in a movement of "cosmic descent" and is intended to return to Him in "mystic ascent." The return is possible if man realizes that he is made in God's likeness, and can achieve eternal salvation in unity with Him. To this end, he should consciously experience God's presence in his every act, and strive for moral perfection through ascetic disciplines.[355] The mystics refer to the prophet's ascension to the heavens to set an example for man's spiritual progress, which is also an ascent, i.e. breaking the bounds of the physica life and moving upwardly toward God. Because the prophet Mohammad is the 'perfect man' (e*nsān-e kāmel*), he attains to the presence of God. However as a human being, he is similar to other people in nature and creation. Therefore, every person may experience such an ascent if he cleanses his soul from negative traits. For instance, the mystic Abu Yazid Bastāmi claimed that he ascended to the heavens and experienced God's presence. He said, "'Thy obedience to me is greater than my obedience to Thee'; 'I am the throne and the footstool'; 'I am the well-preserved tablet.'" He could make such assertions because "In meditation he made flights into the supersensible world."[356]

Later, the mystics called Hallāj's death ascension toward God. The war poet Habibābādi compares Hallāj's death to the prophet's ascension and holds that one who dies a mystic's death ascends to God's throne. Iranian soldiers should follow Hallāj's example and sacrifice their lives in the path of perfection, which for them is self-sacrifice on the front. The poet implies that death is the beginning of a heavenly journey toward God and companionship with Him. It is worth noting that the concept of ascension is connected to a return to the physical world. Prophet Mohammad returned from heaven to the physical world and became a model for the Muslims. Not surprisingly, as David Cook puts it, "a number of Hallāj's followers believed that he would return from the dead after a period of forty days."[357] Without a doubt, Hallāj believed in spiritual annihilation in the Beloved, and because of his love for union with God, he prayed to die. Qāzi Ebn Haddād recounts that

[355] G. Böwering, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica,* under Ensān-e Kāmel.
[356] H. Ritter, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Abū Yazīd (Bāyazīd) Ṭayfūr b. ʿ Īsā b. Surūshān al-Biṣṭāmī.
[357] D. Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, p. 68.

Hallāj went to the cemeteries and prayed "…I am asking from you do not return me to myself, after having robbed me of myself… increase the number of my enemies in Your cities, and the number of those among Your faithful who clamor for my death!"[358] According to the citation, Hallāj did not expect to return to the physical world after his death. In the war context, a soldier, like Hallāj, achieves the same mystical elevation that the prophet Mohammad achieved. However one who falls in battle does not return to life, but he becomes a blessed holy figure and the archetype of altruism, which the community should imitate.

In the ascension narratives, it is asserted that on the night of ascension, God allowed the prophet to intercede (*shefā'a*) on behalf of Muslims in the hereafter.[359] Accordingly, one who experiences ascension may intercede on behalf of the Muslim community. During the Iran-Iraq war, the concept of ascension was applied quite literally. A key was hung on the neck of a youth who was going to walk on the minefields, or who went into battle against the Iraqis. The Iranian authorities told the soldiers that it is the key to paradise. They were promised they would meet the master of the martyrs (imam Hosein) in paradise.

In the second line, Habibābādi employs the compound word *sarbedār*. Literally this means 'one's head on the gallows,' in the sense of, laying one's neck on the executioner's block. The poet says that Iranians are ready to offer their lives to preserve Islam. However, the word Sarbedār also refers to a 14th century Shiite movement called the Sarbedārān, who established a state in Sabzevār, a district in the province of Khorāsān in North West of Iran. This movement was shaped to limit the power and influence of the Mongol ruler in Khorāsān.[360] They were a movement that anticipated the coming of the Mahdi and sought to establish an ideal moral kingdom that would please the Lord of the Age when he came. The presence of the Shiite Sarbedārāns in Sabzevār became a problem for the Sunnis in that region, and a struggle developed between the Sunnis and the Sarbedārān. The Sunnis asked the Mongol ruler to assist them. The Sarbedārāns taught one should act justly and honestly,

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[358] Ibid., p. 66.

[359] According to C.H. De Fouchecour, Surābādi in his *Tafsir* has added the features of the prophet's intercession (*shefā'at*) and bara't (Persian *barāt*) "key to deliverance." For further information see De C.H. Fouchecour, "The Story of the Ascension (*Mi'rāj*) in Nizāmī's Work," in *The Poetry of Nizāmī Ganjavi: Knowledge, Love, and Rhetoric*, p.181.

[360] C.P. Melville, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Sarbadārids.

and be ready to fight for the cause of religion.[361] By saying "this people's head is on the gallows (*Sarbedār*)" the poet is saying that Iranian soldiers are also ready to lay down their lives to preserve Shiite Islam, and are prepared for the inevitable struggle against the enemies of the Mahdi who will return from occultation before the Last Day. He creates a dichotomy between Iranian Shiites, waiting for the Mahdi's return, and the Iraqi Sunnis, equivalent to the Mongols, who do not believe in his return.

The war poet, Seyed Hasan Hoseini employs the motif of ascension on the gallows in a *robā'i*:

dar sangar-e haqq hamāre peykār khosh ast
Mansur sefat 'oruj bar dār khosh ast
ānjā ke resad bāng-e Mohammad bar gush
raftan be rah-e Buzar-o 'Ammār khosh ast[362]

Fighting constantly in the trench of truth is joyful
Ascending the gallows like Mansur is joyful
Wherever Mohammad's call is heard
Following the path of Buzar and 'Ammār is joyful.

The poet uses the notions of truth (*haqq*) versus void or futile (*bātel*) to legitimize Iranians' fight against the Iraqis. Iranians are fighting on the trench of truth (*sangar-e haqq*), and God will support them in the fight against the enemy who is identified as *bātel*. Thus, if Iranians are killed they will receive their rewards in the hereafter. The poet refers to Hallāj as one who is killed for the sake of truth to introduce him as a model for Iranian soldiers. He connects Hallāj's death with the lives of two of Mohammad's companions: Abuzar al-Ghaffāri (d. 652), and 'Ammār Ebn Yāser (d. 657). Both fought in a number of battles, and the latter was killed in the battle of Saffin.[363] In this poem, Hallāj's death for the sake of

[361] J.M. Smith, *The History of the Sarbadār Dynasty 1336-1381 A.D. and its Sources*, The Hague & Paris: Mouton, 1970, pp. 55-60.
[362] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 144.
[363] H. Reckendorf, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under 'Ammār b. Yāsir.

divine love is parallel to al-Abuzar and ‘Ammār efforts for the sake of Islam. In short, one who fights against the enemy will achieve the same spiritual elevation that a mystic attains when he resists his carnal soul and its desires.[364]

OFFERING ONE'S HEAD

The war poets often employed the mystical motif of ‘head-offering’ (*sar dādan*) to encourage young Iranian men to fight and sacrifice their lives. In their treatises, the mystics used the motif to symbolize self-purification and self-mortification to achieve unity with the Beloved. The motif is associated closely with Hallāj's execution in Baghdad. ‘Attār refers to Hallāj's spiritual position and his dramatic death so artfully that he transforms “the universal metaphor of headlessness” into a Hallājian motif.[365] On the one hand, the war poets used the motif to mobilize the young men for the military front, and on the other hand, the Iranian state employed the motif to propagate, and to define death for the sake of the Islamic Revolution as a praiseworthy act. The state created such an atmosphere that almost everyone longed to acquire such a trait. Many young men laid down their lives, the most famous example being a twelve-year-old youth called Mohammad Hosein Fahmide (d. 1980) who blew himself up under an Iraqi tank in Khorramshahr.[366] He was praised by Ayatollah Khomeini, in the following words: “Our leader is that twelve-years-old child who threw himself with his little heart against the enemy. He is worth more than a hundred pens and a hundred tongues”[367] This statement presents the necessity of self-sacrifice on the battlefield and why other people should take Fahmide as an example.

In the following quatrain by Seyed Hasan Hoseini, there is an analogy between death on the battlefield and achieving spiritual perfection:

sar-dāde manam ke sar-farāzam guyand

[364] For more instances on the subject see *Mosābeqe-ye she'r-e jang*, p. 26.
[365] C.W. Ernst, “On Losing One's Head: Hallājian motifs and authorial identity in poems ascribed to Attār,” p. 333; A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Layli and Majnun,* pp. 130-38.
[366] M. Ruthven, *Islam in the World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 415.
[367] J.M. Davis, *Martyrs: Innocence, Vengeance, and Despair in the Middle East*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 49.

āheste be in-o ān cho rāzam guyand
chon āye-ye razm dar jahādam khānand
chon sure-ye hamd dar namāzam guyand[368]

They call me the exalted one because I have given my head
They say whisper my secret to everyone
They recite me, like fight verse at the time when *jehād* is performed
They recite me like the verse praise *(hamd)* in prayer.

The poet speaks in the first person, referring to himself as one who has sacrificed his life (*sar- dāde)*. The word is derived from the compound verb *sar-dādan.* Literally, it means 'giving up one's head' usually in the path of love. Metaphorically it means abandoning rational thinking. The poet says that one who gives up rational thinking is not afraid of death because he becomes *sar-farāz*, exalted (literally 'one's head raised'). The compound *sar-farāz* refers to Hallāj's death on gallows. This concept is reflected in the war poetry, emphasizing how those who sacrifice their lives become famous, gaining honour and respect from their community. Using the mystical motif of revealing the secret (*rāz goftan*), Hoseini connects the death of Hallāj with the death of a soldier. The mystics made Hallāj's death an example for a lover who unveils the secrets of love. The poet uses the motif to identify the soldier with Hallāj. *Sar-bāz* (literally 'to gamble one's head or to play on one's head') is the common Persian word for a soldier. One who gambles will lose his wealth; a soldier who gambles, will lose his head. In the modern Iranian war context, the reward for this offering 'the head' is union with the Beloved, in the same way as a mystic would achieve his goal. The poet creates a dynamic setting that allows the soldier to equate himself with Hallāj; therefore, he sacrifices his life to achieve a higher spiritual station.

In Persian mystical love literature, 'to make one's head one's foot' (*sar qadam kardan*) indicates that the first step on the path of love is to be prepared to offer one's life. This motif is used in a *ghazal* entitled 'The Smell of Apples' (*bu-ye sib*) by 'Ali-Rezā Qazve:

[368] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 137.

emshab az in ku-ye bon-bast bā pā-ye sar mitavān rast
rowshan cherāgh-e del-o dast bā nur-e am-man yojib ast'[369]

Tonight, one may leave this blind alley if one goes with the feet of one's head
The heart and hand are illumined by the light of *am-man yojib*

The poet draws an analogy between a man's lifetime and a blind alley (*ku-ye bon-bast*). One can leave this blind alley, the world, if one offers one's life. The compound *am-man yojib* refers to the Qur'ān: "He who answers the constrained, when he calls unto Him, and removes the evil" (*amman yojib-o al-moztara ezā do'ā-ho va yakshef-o su'*) (27:63). In the same verse God promises the caliphate of the earth to one who remembers Him: "And appoints you to be successors in the earth." The verse is popular among the Iranians. They would recite the verse when they are in trouble, and soldiers recited it on the battlefield in the hope of divine assistance. The poet's reference to the verse gives the good news that evil, meaning Iraq, will be destroyed thanks to divine assistance, and also that the Iranian soldiers will be the successors of God on earth. One who gives up his life would become free from the blind alley (the physical world). In the second line, the poet's reference to the illumination of the heart and the hand reminds the reader of the time when the soldier was praying, and he raised his hands toward the heavens. Symbolically, he asked for help. Thus, he is eternally illumined by reciting the verse and offering his soul.

These various ways of indicating the necessity of offering one's life derive from classical Persian poetry, in which all these concepts also relate to subordinating the intellect, expressed through a wide range of metaphors. To give one example, in his mystical work *Hadiqat al-Haqiqat*, Sanā'i says that self-denial unites the lover with the Beloved.

avval az bahr-e 'eshq-e deljuyash
sar qadam kon cho kelk-o mijuyash[370]

[369] *Gozide-ye she'r-e jang va defā'-e moqaddas*, p. 53.

Firstly, for the sake of the Beloved's love that seeks the heart
make your head your foot as the pen does, and then seek Him.

The motif of transforming head to foot in a Sufi framework may be explained as a mystic's ecstasy and yearning for unifying with the Beloved, which overcomes his intellect. He first renounces the world, then he denies himself. The compound *sar qadam kardan* symbolizes self-sacrifice. In mystics' view, self-denial is the prerequisite for self-sacrifice. The pilgrim in the path of love may not offer his life unless he has denied his self. In the second line, the word *kelk* refers to a pen made of reed. It is used for writing when its head is cut off. Using the word pen (*kelk*), Sanā'i implies that the lover should offer his head in the hope of unity with the Beloved. The pen's movement depends on the calligrapher. In mystical treatises, the pen symbolizes man and the calligrapher is the Creator. Similarly, in the path of love, the lover should obey the Beloved like a self-less pen. To attain such a spiritual level, the mystic lives an ascetic way of life, he renounces the world, he becomes blameworthy, and he gambles his possessions including his head to become one with the Beloved.[371]

LITERARY MOTIFS OF ASCENSION

The war poets draw comparisons between martyrdom and ascension. They relied on every single aspect of the narrative of ascension to inspire the Iranian crowd to fight against the Iraqi enemy. To equate death on the battlefield with the prophet's ascension, Seyed Hasan Hoseini uses the motif of ascension in a poem couched in the form of 'new poetry' (*she'r-e now*), entitled 'The Third Song' (*sorud-e sewwom*),

…
me'rāj-e mardān rā
qāmat basti
be zakhm-e Hosein

[370] Sanā'i Ghaznavi, *Hadiqat al-Haqiqat*, p. 30.
[371] A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn,* p. 300.

dar zohr-e ʻĀshurā[372]

You rise up to ascend, as a man does
You are wounded like Hosein
On the day of ʻĀshurā, at noon

By employing the word man (*mardān),* Hoseini compares a soldier to a 'perfect man' (*ensān al-kāmel*) who may ascend to the heavens. The 'perfect man' represents a mystical concept of spiritual perfection, developed by the mystic Ebn al-ʻArabi. He asserts that an individual who follows the Sufi path and annihilates his attributes in the attributes of God will become one with the universal spirit. The Sufis consider all prophets and imams and sheikhs to be perfect men, but their paradigm is the prophet Mohammad. Man is God's vicegerent on earth (2:30), and he accepted the role of *amānat*, trusteeship, when other creatures refused it (33:72). In his nature, man has two poles; he can ascend toward the angels by purifying his soul through ascetic training, or he can descend to the lowest level if he attaches himself to the terrestrial world. Ebn al-ʻArabi explains the concept of the 'perfect man' in his *Fosus al-Hekam* (*'*The Rings Stones of Wisdom*'*). He relies on the Qurʻanic verse that asserts, "man is the vicegerent (*khalife*) of God on earth."[373] After creating the world God created Adam and polished him by means of the divine command to be a mirror in which His image could be reflected.[374] Ayatollah Khomeini was fascinated by the concept of the 'perfect man' as explained by mystics such as Ebn al-ʻArabi. It allows for the possibility that man can reach the highest level of perfection and remain in constant communion with God. It is important to note that a Shiite Muslim is allowed to identify himself with the imam of the age (*imām-e asr*) who is known as a perfect model for human beings.[375] Ayatollah Khomeini added one intermediary step to man's spiritual journey to God. He says, "by establishing rightful policies, the government of absolute justice and a

[372] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmāʻil*, pp. 67-8.
[373] R. Amaldez in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under al-Insān al-Kāmil.
[374] Ibid.
[375] B. Moin, *Khomeini: Life of the Ayatollah,* London: I.B. Tauris & Co, 1999, (reprinted in New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2000.) p. 47.

reign of divinity, the 'perfect man' will guide society towards absolute perfection."[376] Khomeini compares the 'just government' to the 'perfect man', who is responsible for guiding the community and purifying it to reach the stage of perfection.

In the above poem, the poet compares imam Hosein who lay down his life to establish a just state, to the 'perfect man'. Thus, the soldier who is following the path of Hosein and sacrifices his life will attain the station of the 'perfect man'. One may conclude that the ideals introduced by Ayatollah Khomeini are reflected in the war poetry.

The poet refers to the wounds that Hosein suffered on the day of 'Āshurā to say that his death made him ascend to the heavens. According to the historian Abu Ja'far Mohammad Ebn Jarir Tabari, the battle between imam Hosein and Ebn al-Ziyād's soldiers lasted a long time, until a group of the soldiers attacked and killed him. Such symbols (i.e wounds) remind Iranians of Hosein's martyrdom. Thus the poem asserts that the soldier may not ascend to the heaven unless, like imam Hosein, the enemy kills him.

Returning from the heavenly journey to the physical world is another aspect of ascension treated in the above poem. The prophet returned to the physical world to lead the Muslim community. But the return of a soldier killed in the fight is not possible. Thus the martyr is introduced, as an archetype of the holy figure who leads the community to spiritual progress towards eternal salvation. To achieve such a stage of perfection, Iranians should emulate the martyr's act of sacrifice. In sum, in mystical treatises, spiritual progress may lead to the mystic's ascension to the heavens, whereas in war poetry, death on the battlefield may lead to the soldier's ascension.

In war poetry, another motif that identifies death as ascension is the witness of ascension (*shāhed-e Me'rāj*). Hosein Esrāfili applies the motif in a poem entitled 'My City Khorramshahr' (*shahr-e man Khorramshahr*).[377]

shahr-e man ey shāhed-e bidār-e 'eshq
shahr-e man ey ma'zan-e por-bār-e 'eshq
khāne-vo kāshāne gar tārāj shod

[376] Ibid., p. 49.
[377] For the city of *Khorramshahr* see p. 123-24 present study.

kuche-hāyat shāhed-e me'rāj shod
shāhed-e me'rāj-e ensān tā khodā
'arse-ye peymān-e ensān tā khodā[378]

O my city! You are love's wakeful witness
O my city! You are a place where love may reveal itself
Although the houses and apartments have been plundered
Your alleys bear witness to [the soldiers'] ascension
[You are] the witness to man's ascension to God
[You are] the field where man fulfills his pledge to God.

Hosein Esrāfili asserts that in Khorramshahr love reveals itself; therefore, the lovers sacrifice their lives for its sake. They ascend to the heavens while the city witnesses their journey. The poet personifies the city, calling it a wakeful witness of love (*shāhed-e bidār-e 'eshq*). The poem is associated with the 22 September 1980 invasion of Iraq when Iraqi soldiers occupied Khorramshahr. Iranians regained control of the city on 23 May 1982.[379] During the fight many Iranians were killed, the city was bombarded, and reduced to ruins. The poet compares the people who fought against the Iraqi soldiers street by street to the lovers who offer their heads in the path of love. The soldiers' act of sacrifice originates in the spiritual progress they have achieved. The city of Khorramshahr witnessed the hardships they have endured to free the city, and their self-sacrificing acts of altruism. In Persian literature, love kills the lover to make it possible for him to attain union with the Beloved. In this poem, the city as the place where love reveals itself, and Iranian soldiers hurry, out of love, to free the town and to be united with the Beloved: love of homeland and mystic love are combined.

In this poem the rank of the soldiers killed in defense of the city is elevated to that of the prophet during his ascension (*me'rāj*). When Khorramshahr was occupied, the human-wave attacks by the Iranian soldiers forced Iraq to abandon its military equipment

[378] *Mosābeqe-ye she'r-e jang*, p. 52.
[379] E. Goldstein, *Wars and Peace Treaties 1816-1991*, New York: Routledge, 2005, p.125.

and leave.[380] The poet refers to this historical fact in saying that the city's alleys witnessed the ascension of the soldiers. By using the word ascension, the poet avoids referring to the bloody deaths of Iranian soldiers, and instead draws an analogy between the soldier and a mystic who overcomes the temptations of his lower soul in a spiritual battle and experiences ascension. Such a definition of death motivates the soldier to sacrifice his life in the hope of attaining the presence of God. The poet combines the witness of ascension motif to the Qur'ānic concept of the primordial covenant (7:171). The Qur'ān also says that at the time of the primordial covenant, God commanded the children of Adam "you should not serve Satan, surely he is a manifest foe" (36:60). The soldier keeps that ancient promise when he offers his life on the battlefield, in fighting the enemy.[381]

To legitimize the war, the concept of renewing the covenant was propagated during Friday prayers. For instance, in a Friday sermon, Ayatollah Tāleqāni (1911-1979) addressed the martyrs of the war and said: "Today we are standing above their tomb, we are visiting their shrines, but this presence is different from a normal visit and the traditional reciting of the Opening (*fātehe*).[382] The reason for our presence is that we want to renew our commitment. O youth! Sleeping under this soil… after one year we have come to renew our covenant with you. We keep our covenant by avenging your blood, and keeping alive your cry: 'God is the Greatest.' … Know that we renew our covenant to show our opposition to oppression, deception and colonialism for the sake of humanity and all peoples' freedom. We renew the covenant to implement the principles of Islam and the Qur'ān, which had been covered by dust and used only for recitation …."[383] These words mean that one may renew one's covenant with God if one follows the martyrs' example and sacrifices one's life. It should be added that after the Islamic Revolution the West and the United States of America, were presented as deceiving the people and establishing colonialism.

The poet Mohammad-Rezā Abd al-Mālekiyān draws an analogy between death on

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[380] A.H. Cordesman & A. R. Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War,* vol. II, The Iran- Iran War, Boulder, & San Francisco: Westview Press, 1990, p. 138.

[381] For future information on the concept of covenant between man and God see chapter on mystic love in Iran-Iraq war poetry in present study.

[382] *Fātehe* is the first verse in the Qur'ān. This verse is recited to wish the blessing of God for the deceased.

[383] *Dar maktab-e jom'e: majmu'e-ye khotbehā-ye namāz-e jom'e-ye Tehran*, compiled and ordered by markaz-e madārek-e farhangi-ye enqelāb-e eslāmi, vol. 1, week 1-25, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e chāpkhāne-ye Vezārat-e Ershād-e Eslāmi, 1364/1983, p. 48, (sermon of 16/06/1358).

the military front and ascension to the heavens, in a poem entitled 'The Letter' (*nāme)*.

man bā do cheshm-e khish
didam ke didebān-e jebhe-ye mā bā do bāl-e sabz
parvāz kard-o raft
tā bi-karān-e 'arsh
tā khalvat-e khodā[384]

I saw with both my eyes
That the watchman on the front line
Ascended by means of two green wings
So far as the infinity of the throne
So far as the private chambers of God.

The poet uses several motifs and metaphors to define the death of a lookout as a heavenly journey. Martyrdom is compared to ascension; the watcher is compared to a winged angel. The images of flying to the infinity of the throne of God and to His private chambers signify ascension to heavens. The watchman flies on two green wings: green symbolizes martyrdom, and points to the martyr's eternal life in heaven. A famous *hadith* says of those who are killed in the path of God (*jehād*) "Allah puts their souls into the bodies of green birds, which quench their thirst in the rivers of Eden, and eat of its fruits."[385] Most Shiites are familiar with such prophetic traditions, so the poet's reference to green wings will assure the reader that the watchman now resides beside God.

During the war, the leaders of the Islamic Republic used the concept of the martyr's presence beside God to exalt the spiritual position of death on the battlefield. For example, in his sermons, Ayatollah Khāmenei compares the soldiers killed by the enemy to "martyrs who have settled beside God (*javār-e khodā*)".[386] This sentence originates from the

[384] *Gozide-ye she'r-e jang va defā'-e moqaddas*, p. 269.
[385] A. Morabia, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Lawn (a.). For future information on the symbolic meanings of the color green, red and yellow see Ibid.
[386] *Dar maktab-e jom'e: majmu'e-ye khotbehā-ye jom'e-ye Tehrān*, compiled and ordered by markaz-e

Qur'ānic verse (3:169) in which God promises that those who are killed in his path will reside beside His throne. Ayatollah Khāmenei assures his audience that the martyred youth are blessed, they are enjoying the bliss of the garden (i.e heaven).

Another element in the theme of ascension in modern war poetry is 'the prophet's companionship with the archangel, Gabriel.' It is narrated that on the night of ascension, Gabriel guided the prophet to the heavens, but he was not allowed to go beyond the limits of the throne.[387] The war poets relied on this to draw an analogy between the prophet and the volunteer soldiers (*basijis*) who sacrifice their lives at the front. For instance, it may refer to one who runs into minefields to clear the way for the artillery.[388]

The war poet, Sheikh Hosein-Ali Rahmāni applies the motif of the angel's companionship (*ham-'enān dāshtan-e malak)* in a *ghazal* called 'The Basiji's Station' (*maqām-e basiji*):

shab-e me'rāj andar bazm-e ekhlās
malak rā ham-'enān dārad basiji [389]

On the night of ascension, in the banquet of sincerity
The Basiji rides [his horse] beside the angel.

Here, Rahmāni states that an angel guides a martyred basiji to heaven. He likens a *basiji*'s death with the prophet's ascension. The poet compares the battlefield to the banquet of sincerity (*bazm-e ekhlās*). *Ekhlās* is a Qur'ānic word meaning purity and salvation. It is defined as "dedicating, devoting or consecrating oneself to something." Such a profound devotion refers to the sincerity and purity in performing religious principles, "absolute

madārek-e farhangi-ye enqelāb-e eslāmi, vol. 3, week 71-113, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e chāpkhāne-ye Vezārat-e Ershād-e Eslāmi, 1365/ 1984, p. 53.

[387] B. Schrieke & J. Horovitz, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under "Mi'rādj", In Islamic exegesis and in the popular and mystical tradition of the Arab world; W. Madelung, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Malā'ika.

[388] E.L. Daniel, *The History of Iran,* Westport, Connecticut, London: Westwood Press, 2001, p. 208.

[389] *Kuche por az 'atr-e nāme to: majmu'e-ye ash'ār-e defā'-e moqaddas*, ed. A. Binā'i, p. 39.

devotion to God and to the community of the Believers."[390] The image refers to the soldier's profound devotion to the Islamic Revolution and its religious principles. He is fighting against Iraqi soldiers, called unbelievers by the state. The *basiji*'s death is identified as participating in the banquet of sincerity, since he proves his fidelity by his death. In sum, the poet creates a dynamic setting to encourage the youth to participate in the fight. He asserts that the death of the young men on the military front is a means through which his soul ascends toward heavens, and he begins a new life beside God.

In a *ghazal* entitled 'The Scent of Clothing' (*rāyehe-ye pirāhan*), 'Abbās-'Ali Mahdi combines martyrdom with the concept of Gabriel's accompanying the prophet:

emruz be hengām-e 'oruj-e to malā'ek
goftand be man qesse-ye par-par zadanat rā [391]

Today, at the moment of your ascension, the angels
Told me how you were flying while offering your life

In this poem, the angels are witnessing a soldier's death. The poet employs the infinitive *par-par zadan* to refer to the soldier's unexpected death. Literally, *par-par zadan* or *par-par shodan* means 'fluttering with wings,' i.e. sudden death without illness or after a short period of illness. The infinitive symbolizes flattering the upward movement of the soldier's soul. The poet identifies the angels (*malā'ek*) as those who bear witness to the soldier's death. They guide him to the heavens and finally tell the community that the soldier has ascended.

The Borāq of love (*Borāq-e 'eshq*) is another motif associated with the prophet's ascension. The war poets employ this motif to equate death on the battlefield to Borāq, the winged horse that carried the prophet during his night journey. It also relates ironically to the angel of death (*Malak al-Mowt*) who takes the soul to the presence of God. In the war poetry, the mount Borāq is merged with the angel of death. A soldier who dies is mounting

[390] L. Gardet, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Ikhlāṣ.
[391] *Gozide-ye she'r-e jang va defā'-e moqaddas*, p. 187.

on Borāq to begin his journey toward heaven. In mystical love literature, the Borāq of love motif identifies love as the means through which the prophet ascended to the heavens. The mystics hold that one must purify one's heart until it becomes a place where love is manifest. Then, he may unite with the Beloved. For instance, Jalāl al-Din Rumi signifies the roles that love plays in attaining spiritual perfection: "Love is ascension towards the roof of the Sultan of Beauty."[392] Rumi holds that when one purifies his heart, and fills it with love he will see the beauty of God.

I will explain a poem by Seyed Hasan Hoseini to show how the Borāq of love motif was used in a modern Persian literature to motivate the Iranian population to go to the battlefield. In his 'Narrative of the Martyrs' (*mathnavi-ye shahidān*), Seyed Hasan Hoseini uses this motif to assert that martyred soldiers are taken from the battlefield to heaven:

chābok Borāq-e 'āsheqi rā zin nahādand
pā dar rekāb-e bāre-ye dirin nahādand
...
bā Zo al-Jenāh-e nur tā me'rāj rāndand
tā va'de-gāh-e 'eshq tā Hallāj rāndand[393]

They saddled the light-footed *Borāq* of love
They put their feet in the stirrups of the ancient horse
…
Mounting on *Zo al-Jenāh* of light, they ride to the ascension
They went to love's promised place, to Hallāj

The poet links Hallāj's death with the prophet's ascension and a soldier's martyrdom. In the second line, he stresses that one who dies for the love of God, like Hallāj, will be taken to love's promised place, meaning heaven. Hoseini relies on the mystical motif of the Borāq of love to equate death with mounting Borāq.

[392] A. Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun, A Study of the Works of Jalāloddin Rumi*, p. 336.
[393] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 40.

Hoseini asserts that the Iranian soldiers saddle Borāq, meaning they prepare themselves for death. The verb *zin nahādan* (to saddle a horse) is used as a metaphor for beginning a journey. The soldier knowingly begins on a journey towards the Beloved that requires self-sacrifice. The poet uses the adjective ancient (*dirin*) to indicate that the soldier's death is a heavenly journey.

In the third line quoted above, Hoseini employs the idiom *Zo al-Jenāh* to equate imam Hosein's martyrdom with ascension. *Zo al-Jenāh* means 'one who has two wings.' It is the name of imam Hosein's horse during the battle of Karbalā. It is reported that his horse returned to the women's tent after Hosein's death. In this line, *Zo al-Jenāh* is compared to light (*nur*). One who is killed by the enemy will be lifted to the heavens by light. In Islamic terminology, light is God's manifestation on earth. He is pure light; therefore, one who purifies his soul receives His Light in his heart.[394] In the last line, Hallāj is introduced as one to be encountered in the promised place (*va'de-gāh*) of love. The implication is that the gallows where Hallāj was executed is the promised place (*va'de-gāh*) where the lover meets the Beloved. In Persian literature, *va'de* means promise or a vow that one undertakes to fulfill. *Va'de-gāh* is a place where the promise is fulfilled.[395] In the war context, the battlefield is *va'de-gāh* where the lover is united with the Beloved. The union is impossible unless the lover sacrifices his life, like Hallāj. It may be said that in this poem, imam Hosein's martyrdom is compared to the mystical death of Hallāj. Death is the *Zo al-Jenāh* of light that ascends with the lover to the throne of the Beloved. During the war the verse "Count not those who were slain in God's way as dead, but rather living with their lord, by Him provided" (3:169) was repeatedly broadcasted on the radio to assure the soldiers that they were entering paradise.

Borāq appears in 'Ali Mo'allem's narrative poem 'By Dawn that Sun is Behind the Gate' (*qasam be fajr, sobh posht-e darvāze ast*).

Borāq-e hādethe zin kon 'oruj bāyad kard

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[394] *The Niche of Lights (Meshkāt al-Anwār): A Parallel English –Arabic Text*, by Mohammad Ghazāli, pp. xxxii-xxxiii.

[395] 'A.A. Dehkhodā, *Loghat nāme*, under Va'de.

tolu'-e sobh-e degar rā khoruj bāyad kard[396]

Put the saddle on the Borāq of events
one should bring out a different dawn

Mo'allem says that the soldier should be prepared to go forth against the enemy, putting the saddle on the Borāq of events and mount it. The word *hādethe* means 'an event, or an accident or incident referring here to the events of the war. The word derives from the root ha-da-tha referring in Persian love mysticism to the accidental nature of profane love and how profane love can be transformed to transcendental love. The word *hadethe* in Modern Persian means accident or tragic event, but this meaning of transformation of accidental love to a spiritual is also implicit here. The 'tragic events' are represented as Borāq which ensure the soldier's presence before the throne of God.

The two bows length (*qāb-e qowsein*) is another motif that links the story of the prophet's ascension to a soldier's death. The motif originates in the Qur'ān, verse 53:9, which says that when the prophet approached God's throne: "[He] was at a distance of but two bow-lengths or (even) nearer." The motif of *qāb-e qowsein* is frequently used in *me'rāj-nāmes* ('The Books of Ascension'), especially by mystic poets such as Nezāmi, showing how the prophet ascends higher than the Throne, entering the circle of God's nearness. In this station, he sees God and hears His word. Nezāmi says that this nearness happened when the prophet disregarded worldly existence.[397] In Nezāmi's poems, the prophet's spiritual perfection is the main reason for his nearness to God. Therefore, one may attain to extreme nearness if he abandons worldly pleasures and purifies his soul, according to the mystics.

In the war poetry, the motif of *qāb-e qowsein* implies that the soldier will arrive at God's presence at the moment he is killed. The war poet 'Ali-Rezā Qazve employs the

[396] M. 'A. Mo'allem Dāmghāni, *Rej'at-e sorkh-e setāre*, p. 19.
[397] Nezāmi Ganjavi, *Leyli va Majnun*, with notes and annotations by B. Thervatiyān, Tehran: Tus, 1364/1985, p. 37, *beyts* 36-40; for further information about the reason that the prophet "drew close" to God see F. S. Colby, "The Subtitles of the Ascension: Al-Sulamī on the Mi'rāj of the Prophet Mohammad," in *Studia Islamica*, no. 94, 2002, p. 174.

motif in a *mathnavi* entitled 'So many Josefs' (*in hame Yusof*).

hame mastān-e bazm-e qāb-e qowsein
hame nur al-qolub-o qorrat al-'eyn
hamānhāi ke bā u mineshinand
kharāb az sokr-e kenz al-'Ārefin-and[398]

They are drunkard in the banquet of "two bows lengths"
They are "the light of the heart" and the sight of the eye
The ones who are in company with Him
Are ruined by the intoxication of the "treasury of Gnostics"

'Ali-Rezā Qazve compares the martyred soldiers to one who is drunk from nearness to God. In the first line, the poet uses the Qur'ānic motif of *qāb-e qowsein* to say that self-sacrifice on the battlefield transports the soldier to a banquet with God. The word banquet (*bazm*) shows the happiness and pleasure that the martyr enjoys in the Garden of Eden. Because the soldier achieves the same spiritual progress that the prophet did, he experiences the same nearness to God that the prophet experienced on the night of ascension.

In the last line, 'Ali-Rezā Qazve employs the motif of the treasury of the hearts (*kenz al-qolub*) to illustrate how perfectly the soldier knows God. *Kenz al-qolub* alludes to the prophetic tradition (*hadith-e qodsi*) in which God compares Himself to a treasure that wants to be known.[399] In mystical treatises the tradition refers to the necessity of purifying the heart from negative character traits because God wishes to reveal His beauty in the heart of His servant. When the heart is ruined (*kharāb*), God reveals Himself. In Persian literature, the word ruined (*kharāb*) alludes to the treasury hidden in a ruined place. The gnosis of God is a treasury hidden in man's heart. It cannot be revealed unless man ruins his heart by inflicting pain and suffering upon himself, which purify the soul and elevate it into

[398] 'A.R. Qazve, *Qatār-e andimeshk va tarānahā-ye jang*, p. 110.
[399] For further information see: A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 189.

divine state. Similarly, participating in the fight is considered as a discipline that cleans man's soul.

CONCLUSION

My purpose in writing this chapter has been to show how the Hallājian and ascension motifs in the war poetry encouraged the Iranians to sacrifice their lives on the military front. The war poets draw an analogy between the fight against the enemy and spiritual perfection and ascension.

Using Hallājian motifs and comparing imam Hosein to Hallāj reminds the Iranians that the mystic's death was cruel. This comparison provides the opportunity for the soldiers to believe that the battle of Karbalā was a spiritual fight as well as a political battle, and the imam Hosein's fight against illegitimate ruler, Yazid, resulted in his spiritual perfection. Thus, Iranians' fight against the tyranny of Saddam Hosein would lead to their own spiritual perfection and higher status in the hereafter. Comparing the soldier to Hallāj makes the former equate his fight against the Sunni enemy with the protests of Hallāj, against the Sunni authorities of his time. With this assumption, the soldier who is killed by the Sunni authority is dying in the path of mystical love and will reach the highest mystical elevation.

Using the concept of ascension, the war poets compare the soldiers' deaths on the military front to the prophet's ascension. Having the accounts of the prophet's ascension in mind, the soldier believes that one who gives up his life in the path of God is a favored one and he will ascend directly to the heavens and stands before the throne of God. The soldier who attains such a spiritual stage will not only survive eternally and enjoy the heaven, he may also intercede on behalf of his family and his companions. Thus, he, like the prophet brings salvation to his community. This assumption helps to overcome the fear of death, motivating the soldier to fight eagerly until he dies. The soldier is also transformed into a model who teaches the rest of the community how to sacrifice their lives to attain such a spiritual position. The cycle of belief in being guided and favored by God repeats for the next generation. They are prepared to lay down their lives. The soldiers' continuing witness (for example in murals) encourages the Iranian public to emulate their path of self-sacrifice.

To define the war as a religious and spiritual battle, Iraq is called Satan, the enemy of God and of His prophet. Iranian soldiers fighting against Satan may attain the same spiritual progress that a mystic achieves through self-purification and self-mortification. The ideal of spiritual progress was a strong motivation that led the soldiers to fight against the enemy. Although the idea of self-sacrifice for a higher cause was not typical to Iranians and their fight against Iraq, the associations with the unfortunate death of the prophet grandson, Hosein, at Karbalā that the war poets applied gave their work a unique connection to Iranian-Shi‘ism, which is the topic to which we turn next.

CHAPTER FOUR

‘ĀSHURĀ PARADIGM IN IRAN-IRAQ WAR POETRY

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed the important role that the Hallājian motifs and the concept of ascension played in the war poetry for motivating the Iranian soldiers. The objective of this chapter is to discuss how the event of ‘Āshurā is introduced as a model for the Iranian soldiers in the war poetry, and how the fight between Iran and Iraq was compared to the battle of ‘Āshurā to legitimize the former.[400] The event of Karbalā and the execution of imam Hosein is commemorated annually in Iran, and is effectively used in war poetry. During the war, the war poets referred to the events of the day of ‘Āshurā, when the third Shiite imam, Hosein, was killed at Karbalā on the orders of the Umayyad caliph, Yazid. The leaders of the Islamic Republic, and the war poets, referred to the event to link the war to imam Hosein’s fight at Karbalā. On the one hand, the poets intended to introduce him as a perfect role model of moral behavior. The figure of Hosein as one who died for his beliefs in the fight against an unjust ruler was applied directly and literally to the Iran-Iraq war. On the other hand, they wanted to link Iranian soldiers to those early Muslims killed at Karbalā. To legitimize Iran’s fight against Iraq and emphasize on the necessity of participating in the fight, the leaders of the Islamic Republic, in their sermons, relied on Qur’ānic concepts such as righteous and legitimate authority (*haqq*) versus false (*bātel*) authority. The same concepts are used in the Persian Passion Play (*ta‘zi*ye), where imam Hosein stands up for his legitimate authority (*haqq)*, while Yazid is called *bātel.* Iranians familiar with these concepts believed that Iran had legitimacy, because Iranians are Shiite Muslims and supporters of imam Hosein. Sunni Iraq’s authority was false and invalid (*bātel*), since it derived from Yazid. The fact that the majority of the Iraqi population is

[400] The word *‘Āshurā* is derived from Arabic word *‘ashr*. It means ten and refers to the10th of Moharram 680 when imam Hosein was killed at Karbalā.

Shiite Muslims was ignored by the leaders of the Islamic Republic.[401]

The following sections will illustrate how the 'Āshurā paradigm is a living tradition in Iran, and how it is used as a model for the fight of Shiites against the Sunni Saddam Hosein, the various meanings of Karbalā and of service to imam Hosein, and the comparison of imam Hosein to a cupbearer, and of martyrdom to mystical drunkenness.

THE 'ĀSHURĀ PARADIGM

On the day of 'Āshurā, the prophet's grandson, imam Hosein and his companions were killed in fight against the soldiers of the Umayyad caliph, Yazid. Their families were captured and taken to Yazid's court in Damascus. Imam Hosein's followers, the Shiites, believe that they should revenge his blood and support his descendents to achieve their legitimate claim to lead the Muslim community. During the war, Iranian poets drew on the events of 'Āshurā as a source of inspiration for everyone, to fight against Iraq. My objective in this part is to illustrate how the 'Āshurā paradigm was used as a political tool to legitimize the war and the political demands of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The poets, and the leaders of the Islamic Republic, use the language of 'Āshurā to assert that there is a similarity between the war and imam Hosein's fight against Yazid's senior commander, Ebn al-Ziyād.

The events of Karbalā have been kept alive in Shiite Islam for more than a millennium. Each year, during the first ten days of Moharram, Shiites commemorate the death of imam Hosein and his companions at Karbalā. Almost three centuries after this event, on the tenth of Moharram 963, the death of imam Hosein was officially commemorated, by the order of the Buyid rulers (945-1055). For the first time, the mourning processions passed through the streets and markets. In the following year, the participants beat themselves on the head and face, reciting elegies and begging water in imitation of imam Hosein and his companions.[402]

Under the Safavids (1501-1722), the ta'ziye performance was developed and

[401] C. Hunt, *The History of Iraq*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 2005, p. 6.
[402] J.G.J. ter Haar, "Ta'ziye: Ritual Theater from Shiite Iran," in *Theater Intercontinental: Forms, Functions, Correspondences*, eds. C.C. Barfoot & C. Bordewijk, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993, p. 159.

reached its highest point. The Safavids have had a significant effect on Iran's history because Iran converted to Shiite Islam under their rule. A political reason for the conversion and for propagating imam Hosein's martyrdom was the Ottoman invasion of Iran (1533-1548). The first Safavid king, Shāh Ismā'il (1501-1524), used the event of 'Āshurā to stimulate mass mobilization in the fight against the Sunni Ottoman Turks. Shāh Ismā'il maintained that through his rule, the principles of the religious law (*Shari'at*) were being implemented. In his poems, Shāh Ismā'il says, "We are Hosein's men, and this is our epoch/ in devotion we are the slaves of the imam; Our name is 'zealot' and our title 'martyr.'"[403]

In the Safavid period, imam Hosein's martyrdom became a national icon. The commemoration of imam Hosein's death during the month of Moharram made him a model of self-sacrifice emulated by Iranians. The popularity of ta'ziye reached a peak during the Qājār dynasty (1779-1925). Because Nāser al-Din Shāh Qājār was very fond of ta'ziye, the ta'ziye ritual performance developed dramatically during his reign (1848-96).[404] In modern Iran, in the Pahlavi period, the ta'ziye performance declined because Rezā Shāh was seeking to modernize the country, on a Western model. During the Islamic Revolution, the 'Āshurā paradigm was revived to stimulate the people to participate in demonstrations. Ayatollah Khomeini, in *Velāyat-e faqih* ('The Guardianship of the Jurisconsult') tells Iranian Muslims that they should "create 'Āshurā in their struggle to launch an Islamic state."[405] He implies that protesting against the Pahlavi monarch (i.e. Yazid of the time) is a religious duty that should be fulfilled by Iranians. Slogans referred to 'Āshurā: one example is "this is the noon of 'Āshurā / the Pahlavis are shamed today (*zohr-e 'Āshurā-st emruz/ Pahlavi rosvāst emruz*). In this slogan, the Pahlavi monarch is compared to Yazid and his men, and Iranian activists to imam Hosein and his companions. Motivated by such slogans, Iranians participated in the revolts at the risk of their lives. They gave a new meaning to the 'Āshurā paradigm, based on their historical need.

During the war the leaders of the Islamic Republic emphasized the importance of

[403] R.P. Mottahedeh, *The Mantel of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985, p. 173.
[404] J.G.J. ter Haar, "Ta'ziye: Ritual Theater from Shiite Iran," pp. 164-5.
[405] H. Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1982, p.194.

the taʻziye rituals because they commemorate self-sacrifice and martyrdom for the sake of Shiite Islam. During the war, there was a great need for manpower because the Islamic Republic was not equipped with military weapons. Motivating the crowd to offer their lives at the front was the best solution. To encourage the young men to fight against the enemy, the leaders of the Islamic Republic made numerous references to the events of ʻĀshurā, and imam Hosein's martyrdom. Even in the most remote villages, Iranians knew perfectly well that imam Hosein was killed unjustly. They internalize this when they participate in taʻziye performances. The taʻziye audiences are not passive observers; they show their grief at imam Hosein's death, and the afflictions that his family endured during and after the battle. Their identification with the Shiite party in the drama, and the teaching that participation in the war was a religious duty, prepared them to fight the enemies of imam Hosein. The newspapers of the time show that there was a widespread motivation to engage in the war.[406]

ʻĀSHURĀ IN THE WAR POETRY

By comparing the Iran-Iraq war to the battle of ʻĀshurā, the war poets legitimize the fight, and assimilate the former to the latter. This comparison brings a religious and moral dimension to the fight, leading Iranian soldiers to believe that they are imam Hosein's companions on the plain of Karbalā.

In the war poetry, ʻĀshurā is a paradigm of suffering and love, and the symbol of self-sacrifice to preserve Shiite Islam, and the struggle of faithful Muslims against unbelievers, including the Sunnis. The leaders of the Islamic Republic created an image of the infidelity of the Iraqi Sunni state, calling the Iraqis Yazid's heirs who had seized the caliphate from the prophet's family. In their sermons to the masses, Iranian leaders emphasized that Iranians were willing to participate in the fight, and to die following Hosein example. Ayatollah ʻAli Khāmenei, who was the President of the Islamic Republic from 1981-1989 and later the *rahbar* (ʻleader of the Islamic Republic'), says, "Every one of the soldiers who, yearning for *jehād*, went to the front like the soldiers of Hosein the son of

[406] S.M. Gieling, *Religion and War in Revolutionary Iran,* p. 119.

'Ali during 'Āshurā, is longing to sacrifice himself … the spirit of 'Āshurā, of Moharram, the Hoseini spirit shows itself in our youths everywhere along this broad front… in the month of Moharram blood must become victorious over the sword, and so it will be."[407] Ayatollah Khāmenei holds that imam Hosein's self-sacrifice on the day of 'Āshurā can be characterized as a longing for death. Therefore, Iranians should emulate him. In addition, by repeating the word spirit, Ayatollah Khāmenei makes the day of 'Āshurā an ideal beyond time and distance, a living tradition.

The poets employed the religious concept of martyrdom (*shahādat*), and in particular the martyrdoms of the day of 'Āshurā, to motivate the community to participate in the fight against the Iraqi enemy. In this respect, the war poetry develops out of the poetry of the 1979 revolution, when Mohammad Rezā Shāh was identified with Yazid. For instance, in a poem from 1985, 'Ali Musavi Garmārudi, who was raised in a religious family, likened the Pahlavi monarch to Yazid in a poem entitled the 'Blood Line' *(khatt-e khun*):

…
marg-e sorkhat
na tanhā nām-e Yazid rā shekast
va kalame-ye setam rā bi-sirat kard
ke fowj-e kalām rā niz dar ham mishekanad …
yā Zabih- Allāh
to Esmā'il gozide-ye khodāi
va ro'yā-ye be haqiqat peyvaste-ye Ebrāhim
karbalā miqāt-e to-st
moharram mi'ādgāh-e 'eshq
va to nakhostin kas …
ke hajj rā nime tamām
dar este'lām hajar vānahādi

[407] Ibid., p. 118.

va dar Karbalā bā buse bar khanjar, tamām kardi…[408]

Your red death
Not only, broke Yazid's fame
But also humiliated the word oppression
It breaks the word's influence
O *Zahbih- Allāh!*[409]
You are God's elect, Ishmael,
And Abraham's dream that comes true
Karbalā is your meeting place
Moharram is love's meeting place
And you are the first one…
Who has left the pilgrimage to Mecca halfway,
At the point of kissing the black stone,
And has completed it at Karbalā, kissing the dagger…

Garmārudi praises imam Hosein's act of sacrifice at Karbalā, and asserts that his death dishonored Yazid, as it revealed the fact that he was an illegitimate ruler. In the revolutionary context, the poem says that the death of a youth in opposing the regime shows that the Pahlavi monarch is an illegal and unjust king, like Yazid. Such poems were written against the Shāh but could easily be used during the war against Saddam Hosein. The soldier who wears his uniform and begins his journey to the military front is comparable to a *hāji* who clothes himself in the *hajj* garment and travels to Mecca.

Khalil Mozanneb employs the 'Āshurā motif to inspire the Iranian young men to offer their lives to preserve the principles of the Islamic Republic.

hamishe ruz-e qiyām-e Hosein-o 'Āshurā-st

[408] 'A. Musavi Garmārudi, *Gozine-ye ash'ār*, selected and prologue by B. Khorramshāhi, Tehran: Morvārid, 1375/1996, pp. 141-48.

[409] The compound word *Zabih-Allāh* is derived from Arabic root z-b-h means to kill and Allāh is a God's name. The word means is killed for the cause of God.

tamām-e ruy-e zamin Karbalā, shahid, Hosein[410]

Always, it is the day of Hosein's rebellion, '*Āshurā*
The entire surface of the world is Karbalā, and the martyr is Hosein.

The poet universalizes the events of 'Āshurā, using the word 'always' (*hamishe*). This means that Muslims everywhere are at 'Āshurā, they face a choice and should protest against injustice. One does not need to wait for a specific time, or be in a specific place, to begin to resist injustice. In this poem, Karbalā is a symbol of strength and self-sacrifice, and Iranians' willingness to fight. By saying that every day is 'Āshurā, he also compares the soldiers already killed on the battlefield to imam Hosein.[411]

The war poet, Now-Bahār refers to 'Āshurā in a poem entitled 'The Revolution of 'Āshurā' (*enqelāb-e 'Āshurā*)

…
hanuz rāyehe-ye lālehā-ye khun ālud
nasim āvarad az khāk-o āb-e 'Āshurā
hanuz mishenavam sowt-e delrobāy-e Hosein
pey-e hedāyat-e khalq az khetāb-e 'Āshurā[412]

Still the wind brings the pleasant odor of bloody tulips
from the soil and water of 'Āshurā (i.e. Karbalā)
Still I hear Hosein's heart-ravishing voice
in order to guide the people through the discourse of 'Āshurā.

Now-Bahār uses the images of tulips' smell to assert that the martyrs of Karbalā are still present. Their sweet odor is spreading everywhere, which reminds the soldier of their

[410] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2*, selected by M.'A. Mardāni, p. 25. For more examples see Ibid. p. 22.
[411] The slogan was used during the Revolution (1979) when the youth were killed during demonstrations by the Shāh's forces. See K.M. O'Connor, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, under Iranian Revolution of 1978-1979, ed. J. E. Campo, New York, NY: Facts On File, c2009.
[412] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2*, selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 79.

bloody deaths, and that one should emulate their act of self-sacrifice. In the third and fourth lines, one reads of the fact that today imam Hosein is guiding the people, giving the same instructions that he gave on the day of 'Āshurā. The poet uses the literary device of repetition (*takrir*) on the word 'still' (*hanuz*) to signify that the Iran-Iraq war is the continuation of imam Hosein's battle on the day of 'Āshurā. The poet goes on to specify the events: imam Hosein and his companions were killed brutally; the enemy mounted their heads on lances; they carried the women and children into captivity and imprisoned them in a ruined mosque in Damascus. All these events are still experienced by Shiite Muslims, thus, they are responsible for avenging the martyrs of Karbalā. "Still the song of God's unity (*towhid*) and the cry of freedom/ are heard, because of the pure message of 'Āshurā (*hanuz naghme-ye towhid-o bāng-e āzādi/ resad be gush ze peyghām-e nāb-e 'Āshurā*). The event of Karbalā sends two messages to the people of the world. One is the oneness of God, meaning everyone should testify to God's unity and submit to His religion, presumably Shiite Islam. The second is self-sacrifice for freedom. Since *towhid* is the essence of Islam, the poet implies that imam Hosein struggled to protect Islam from false beliefs and inappropriate practices. According to Shiite readings, the Umayyad caliph, Yazid, did not respect Islamic law (*shari'at*). Read in the war context, the poem is saying that Iranian soldiers are fighting against infidels to revive the *shari'at* and expand Shiite Islam. After the Revolution, the leaders of the Islamic Republic propagated the necessity of exporting the Islamic Revolution.

This political usage of 'Āshurā, during the revolution and the war, draws on the work of 'Ali Shariati. Shariati says, "The martyr teaches and sends a message against oppression and tyranny … with his death, he defeats the enemy, and if he cannot break the enemy, disgraces him."[413] The martyr's blood conveys a message to the people that they are members of the community and should emulate the martyr in protesting against injustice and violation.

The motif of the book of 'Āshurā (*ketāb-e 'Āshurā*) in Now-Bahār's poem is another way of saying that the battle of 'Āshurā continues eternally, and is essential to the

[413] 'A. Shariati, "Pas az shahādat," in *Hosein vāreth-e Ādam, majmu'e-ye āthār 19*, Tehran: Qalam, 1367/1988, p. 204.

survival of the Shiite religion.

hanuz fāje'e-ye qatl-e zāde-ye Zahrā
be khun neveshte shavad dar ketāb-e 'Āshurā [414]

Still, the tragic event of the execution of Zahrā's grandson
Is written in blood on the book of 'Āshurā.

The death of the grandson of Zahrā is written on the book of 'Āshurā, according to Now-Bahār.[415] In this poem, several religious and mystic concepts are used to assert that the death of imam Hosein and his companions will never be erased from the book of 'Āshurā. The poet refers to the commemoration, which is performed from the 1st to the 10th of Moharram in Shiite countries. Thus, one who dies following imam Hosein's way of life will also be remembered, and consequently will survive eternally.

To show the influential and everlasting role of the 'Āshurā events among Shiites, Nowbahār asserts indirectly that imam Hosein's death was preordained by God on the day of *alast*, when God determined the fates of all creatures. Because his death is written on the heavenly tablet, it will be preserved from destruction. To indicate the manner of his death, stabbed by the enemy's daggers, the poet writes that his death is written in blood. The poet links the day of 'Āshurā to the preserved tablet, to illustrate the importance of self-sacrifice on the battlefield. In short, Now-Bahār suggests that Āshurā was ordained, and robed in honour, at the time of predestination.

The war poet Javād Mohaddethi introduces the motif of 'Āshurā in a poem to remind the reader that Hosein's example also means sacrificing one's loved-ones in the struggle.

darsi ke ze 'Āshurā āmukhte-im in bud

[414] M.'A. Mardāni, *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2*, p. 79.
[415] Zahrā is a title of the prophet Mohammad's daughter, Fāteme.

qorbāni-ye rāh-e din farzand-o pedar kardim[416]

The lesson that we have learned from ʻĀshurā
Is that we should sacrifice our children and fathers in the path of religion

This poem emphasizes, self-sacrifice for the cause of the Shiite Islam. Mohaddethi personifies ʻĀshurā as a teacher guiding Muslims to offer what is most precious, their family and their own lives, to revive the religion. ʻĀshurā is a metonym for imam Hosein, the teacher whose example all should follow.[417] According to Shiite sources, on the day of ʻĀshurā, imam Hosein sent the male members of the household, and his companions to battle against the enemy. The scholar Mahmoud Ayoub writes, "The special status of the imam Hosein in Muslim piety and devotion has in large measure been due to the imam's great sacrifice of family, wealth and life itself in the way of God…. Above all, however, the imam Hosein's martyrdom became a source of strength and endurance for Muslims in times of suffering, persecution and oppression. He has stood with every wronged man or woman before oppressive rulers, reproaching wrongdoers and encouraging the oppressed to persist in their struggle for freedom and dignity."[418] Ayatollah Khāmenei, in a sermon at Friday prayers at the University of Tehran campus said, "… He [imam Hosein] is the source of inspiration for our revolutionary movement; he inspires (*elhām-bakhsh*) our children, and our youth to sacrifice their lives and strive for martyrdom. This yearning for martyrdom guarantees the victory of Islam and the Muslims."[419]

War poets made several references to the sufferings that imam Hosein endured on the battlefield. Mohaddethi holds that imam Hosein suffered from the death of his family. However, Iranians should follow the act, and sacrifice one who they love for the cause of Islam, and suffer in the same way and to the same degree that imam Hosein suffered at

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[416] J. Tajlil, "Vizhegihā'i az she'r-e enqlāb-e eslāmi," *Majmu'e-ye maqālehā-ye seminar-e barrasi-ye adabiyyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*, Tehran: Samt, 1373/1994, p. 100.

[417] See the motif of the teacher of love in chapter 2 of the present study.

[418] M. Ayoub, "The Imam Hosein in Sunnī Tradition," in *al-Serāt*, vol. XII, Paper from Imam Hosein Conference London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986, p. 67.

[419] *Dar maktab-e jom'e: majmu'e-ye khotbehā-ye namāz-e jom'e-ye Tehran*, vol. 3, p. 237, (sermon of 15/03/1360).

Karbalā. There is no doubt that through voluntary suffering and enduring pain the soldier will receive rewards in heaven. The martyr's families benefited from the governmental benefits. They were supported by the organization called the Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs (*bonyād-e shahid va omur-e jānbāzān*) that was founded in 1980 to tend families of the war's victims. The bonyād got the right to prioritize university admission and job employments offer other benefits to the martyr's families such as paying for a wedding ceremony.[420]

During the war, the leaders of the Islamic Republic made many references in Friday prayers to the battles between Muslims and infidels in early Islamic history, to teach their audience that they should act like the early Muslims. For instance, a year after the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war in 1981, Ayatollah Hāshemi Rafsanjāni told the following story to participants at Friday prayers: "We have read stories about the Muslims' behavior at the dawn of Islam; they astonished us. For instance, Nasibe Jarrāhe in the battle of Ohod[421] saw that her son was fleeing from the battlefield. She stopped him and said, "O my son! I do not make my milk lawful to you (*shiram rā halālat nemikonam*)[422] unless you go to the battlefield and become a martyr." She returned her child to the battlefield to die a martyr's death. He goes on to give another instance, when the mother of a youth put a shroud on his neck at Karbalā and said, "Proceed to the battlefield to be martyred before 'Ali Akbar becomes a martyr."[423] Ayatollah Khomeini praised the mothers of martyrs he said, " Often we hear our women … cry out loud, saying that they have given children in the path of God and Islam and are proud of it. They realize what they gain in return is far above the blessing of the Heaven, let alone the material things of this world."[424]

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[420] See S. Maloney, "Agents or Obstacles? Parastatal Foundations and Challenges for Iranian Development," in *The Economy of Iran: The Dilemmas of an Islamic State*, ed. P. Alizadeh, New York NY: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2000, p. 151.

[421] Usually transliterated 'Uhud, but the vowels are short. A Meccan force sought revenge for their defeat in the battle of Badr, and was successful. For further information see C.F. Robinson, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Uḥud.

[422] This does not imply that the child was actually breast-feeding. In Iranian culture the construction *shir rā halāl nakardan* is used when a mother is angry with her child or to encourage him or her to do something that he/she has no interest in doing.

[423] *Dar maktab-e jom'e: majmu'e-ye khotbahā-ye namāz-e jom'e-ye Tehran*, vol. 3, p. 354. It is not possible to vouch for the historical accuracy of these stories.

[424] J.M. Davis, *Martyrs: Innocence, Vengeance, and Despair in the Middle East*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 51.

KARBALĀ: SYMBOLIZING THE PLACE OF MARTYRDOM

After discussing the events that happened on the day of 'Āshurā, in the ensuing paragraphs, I will explain how Karbalā as a physical place functioned in Iran's modern war poetry and on the battelfield. Karbalā was both literally and metaphorically the destination of the Iranian soldiers. They aimed to conquer Iraq, to enter Karbalā and go to the sanctuary of their beloved, imam Hosein. Then, I will illustrate how the war poets pictured Karbalā as a captive waiting for Iranians to be freed from the power of Saddam Hosein. The war poets equated Iran with Karbalā, in the sense that if Iranian soldiers did not defend their country it would be occupied by the Sunnis, like Karbalā. They also referred to Karbalā as the gateway to Jerusalem and said after conquring Iraq the soldiers should continue their fight to overthrow the Israel regime in Jerusalem. Finally, I will examine the motif of the path of Hosein (*rāh-e Hosein*).

For Shiites, Karbalā is a third holy city, after the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. Since imam Hosein was buried in Karbalā, Shiites have considered it a holy land. Throughout history, the Karbalā paradigm has been attractive to diverse groups opposing the state, and to states seeking to strengthen their legitimacy.[425] An instance of the use of Karbalā to legitimize power is in the Safavid period in Iran when Moharram rituals were performed to stimulate both religious devotion and a sense of national identity and dedication to Safavid ideals.[426]

Although the motif of Karbalā was not popular with the mystic poets before the Safavid dynasty, there are some references to Karbalā, imam Hosein, and his act of sacrifice, which is used as a metaphor for the necessity of self-purification. While the war poets, extensively, used the motif to inspire self-sacrifice on the military front, Rumi uses Karbalā to encourage the reader to follow Hosein's way of live and purify his lower soul

[425] K. Scot Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran*, Washington, the University of Washington Press: 2004, p. 10. Scot Aghaie asserts that Abu Moslem from Khorāsān (718/19 or 723/27-755) appealed to Shiites' emotional attachment to the prophet's family to encourage them to revolt against the Umayyad dynasty, in support of the 'Abbāsids (r. 750-930). See Ibid.

[426] F.J. Korom, *Hosay Trinidad: Muharram Performances in an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora*, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003, p. 35.

from negative attributes. Rumi writes that the importance of the battle of Karbalā is not Hosein's death at the hands of oppressors, but that he had defeated his lower soul. To understand love, man has to fight against his carnal soul; this is called the Greater War.[427] On this account, Rumi writes,

bezan shamshir-o molk-e 'eshq bestān
ke molk-e 'eshq molk-e pāydār ast
Hosein-e Karbalā-i āb bogzār
ke āb emruz tigh-e ābdār ast[428]

Strike with a sword and take away the land of love
Because the land of love is an eternal land
You are Hosein at Karbalā, leave water!
Today a sharp blade is water.

Rumi asserts that one should fight against one's lower soul in order to achieve the land of love. The word *pāydār* means literally 'having feet,' 'constant,' and 'firm.' Rumi refers to imam Hosein and his death while he was suffering from thirst to encourage the reader to extract himself from all worldly needs. Rumi says that, like imam Hosein, one should not think of water.

For Rumi, what distinguishes Hosein is that he had purified his self from negative attributes. He had become ideal enlightened to be emulated. Thus, the rest of the community should follow in his footsteps. In Chittick's words, "suffering and tribulation of the spiritual journey as exemplified in the outward world by trials of the imam Hosein and his family that man can attain the perfection for which he was created."[429] In this poem, the word water is of great significance.

Visiting Hosein's shrine is a pilgrimage (*ziyārat*), and the pilgrims are believed to be

[427] W.C. Chittick, "Rumi's View of the Imam Hosein," in *al-Serāt*, vol. xii, Paper from Imam Hosein Conference, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986, p. 8.
[428] Mowlānā Jalāl al_Din Rumi, *Kolliyyāt-e Shams yā divan-e kabir*, *moshtamel bar qasāed, ghazaliyyāt, qat'āt-e Fārsi va 'Arabi, va tarji'āt va molamma'āt,* vol. 1, with corrections and explanations by Badi' al-Zamān Foruzānfar, Tehran: Enteshārāt-e Daneshgāh-e Tehrān,, 1336/1957, p. 203, no. 3661-3662.
[429] W.C. Chittick, "Rumi's View of the Imam Hosein," p. 9.

rewarded in the hereafter. It is said that Zeynab, Hosein's sister, was the first to visit his tomb. The first group who commemorated imam Hosein's death were the so-called Penitents (*tawwābun*): people from Kufa who had invited Hosein to come to lead their community, but did not support him at the crucial time. After his death, ashamed of their shortcomings and past mistakes, they tried to take revenge on Hosein's blood against the Umayyad commander, Ebn al-Ziyād. The Penitents movement was defeated by his soldiers at 'Ayn al-Wardā.[430] At various times, the access of Shiite pilgrims to imam Hosein's sanctuary has been restricted. The Sunni Caliph al-Motavakkel (r. 847-861) destroyed the tomb in 850, but it did not lose its importance for Shiites.[431] In 1927, Rezā Shāh Pahlavi banned Iranian pilgrims from visiting the holy cities,[432] but such restrictions have not stopped Iranians going to Karbalā to visit Hosein's tomb, or longing to do so. For Shiites, visiting his shrine is a renewal of their commitment to Shiite Islam.

In the war years participating in the fight against Iraq with the goal of entering imam Hosein's shrine was another means of proving love for the imam. Iranian soldiers fought selflessly in the hope of visiting the shrine, and in the belief that, in Paradise, imam Hosein would host those who are died in the fight.

During the war between Iran and Iraq, Karbalā played a role in the rhetoric of Iran's campaign against Iraq. Karbalā is situated in Iraq but Iranians focused on the cultural and religious aspects of Karbalā, presenting it as a Shiite Iranian city that had been occupied for centuries by Sunni rulers. The time had come to free the city from the infidels. The leaders of the Islamic Republic encouraged young men to go to the battlefield to free Karbalā.[433] In their sermons, they pictured it as a holy place waiting for Iranians to be liberated from the authority of a Sunni state: Saddam Hosein. They used various propaganda techniques to lead people to believe that Iranian forces were on the verge of entering Karbalā.

Soldier's testaments expressed the wish to occupy Karbalā and to visit imam

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[430] E.A. Ghareeb with the assistance of Beth K. Dougherty, *Historical Dictionary of Iraq*, pp. 180-81.
[431] E. Honigmann, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, under Karbalā; for further information about the history of Karbalā see Ibid.
[432] *Middle East and Africa: International Dictionary of Historic Places*, vol. 4., ed. T. Ring, associate editor, R. M. Salkin; photo editor, Sh. La Boda, Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1996, p. 402.
[433] S.C. Pelletire, *The Iran-Iraq War: Chaos in a Vacuum*, New York: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1992, p. 137. Eight Iranian campaigns were named after Karbalā. See Ibid. n. 1-4.

Hosein's shrine. For instance, the revolutionary guard martyr 'Azim Motuli Habibi writes to his family, "My wish from God is that He not take me from this world until I have visited the shrine of imam Hosein, so that I may enter the shrine on my own, and that if death should not allow me the opportunity, and the wish of God is that I die, that my spirit be taken there."[434]

Another political usage of Karbalā was in the code names for battles and military operations, such as 'Karbalā five.' Expanding on this paradigm, the nights before these big battles were called the night of 'Āshurā (*shab-e 'Āshurā-i*), during which the soldiers would mourn for imam Hosein, and for themselves, wishing to be killed to be united as martyrs with Hosein.[435] Signs placed on the battlefield showed the direction to Karbalā and soldiers recited the slogan 'Karbalā Karbalā, we are coming' (*Karbalā Karbalā mā dārim miyāim*). According to Shiite traditions, imam Hosein's blood gave the soil of Karbalā a sweet smell, and the body of a soldier killed in the fight is supposed to smell of musk, which is the smell of the houris of paradise and shows that the angels have taken the martyr to heaven.[436] Ayatollah Motahhari quotes from the Shiite imams, "It is better to prostrate oneself on earth from the graves of a *shahid*. If possible, the earth of Karbalā should be obtained, for it emits the smell of the *shohadā*."[437] For this reason, clay tablets are brought from Karbalā and are available in Shiite mosques, for use in prayer.

In the war poetry, Karbalā is connected with enslavement, as the holy city is in the hands of the enemies of God and of the prophet. In 'The Cheerful Days at the front line' (*ruzhā-ye khosh-e jebhe*), the poet 'Ali-Rezā Qazve personifies Karbalā as one who is enslaved:

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[434] N. Nazemi, "Sacrifice and Authorship: A Compendium of the Wills of Iranian War Martyrs," in *Iranian Studies*, vol. 30, no. 3-4, (Summer-Fall 1997), p. 270.

[435] R. Varzi. *Warring Souls: Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-revolution Iran*, Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2006, pp. 102-103.

[436] D. Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, p. 119. For more information on the Islamic traditions about the smell emanating from a martyr's grave see ibid.

[437] A.M. Motahhari, "Shahīd," in *Jihad and Shahadat, Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam*, p. 144. According to Shiite jurisprudence, in prayers one is not allowed to prostrate oneself on any object other than earth or what is growing from earth. The small clay tablets (*mohr*) they use are made from the clay of Karbalā. See A. M. Motahhari, "Shahīd," in *Jihad and Shahadat Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam,* p. 151, n. 33.

Zendegāni bu-ye 'ādat midahad
Karbalā bu-ye esārat midahad[438]

Life smells like a habit
Karbalā smells like captivity.

The poet condemns the man who lives a routine life, who makes no change in it and does not strive for a higher goal, but who only seeks to fulfill his bodily needs, and bodily desires. In the war context, the higher goal is to fight to free Karbalā from the power of infidel Sunnis. The poet's reference to Karbalā as a captive alludes to the events of Karbalā. When the male members of the family were killed, the women and children were taken into captivity, and marched to the court of Yazid in Damascus. The poet says that a Shiite Muslim has a duty to abandon his family and land, and journey to the battlefield.

Seyed Hasan Hoseini also personifies Karbalā in a poem called 'Farewell' (*vedā'*):

miravam mādar ke inak Karbalā mikhānadam
az diyār-e dur yār-e āshenā mikhānadam[439]

O mother! I am leaving; at this moment Karbalā is calling me
From a land far away from here, a familiar friend is calling me

In this poem, Karbalā is a leader calling to Iranian soldiers and those who love him for support. The smell of imam Hosein blood and that of his companions drags the poet toward Karbalā. The Iranian soldiers are listening to the calling to avoid being treated as Kufans who did not assist imam Hosein.

[438] *Kuche por az 'atr-e nāme to: majmu'e-ye ash'ār-e defā'-e moqaddas*, ed. A. Binā'i, p. 22.
[439] S.H. Hoseini, *Hamsedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 33.

THE PATH OF JERUSALEM GOES THROUGH KARBALĀ

During the Iran-Iraq war, the leaders of the Islamic Republic stressed the importance of al-Aqsā mosque in Jerusalem, to mobilize the soldiers to continue fighting against Iraq. They said that Palestine has been captured by a 'Zionist' state, although the holy sites in Jerusalem should be governed by a Muslim state. In the same way, a Sunni power occupies Karbalā. This link in the propaganda lies behind a slogan of the war: 'to conquer Qods (Jerusalem), we have to pass through Karbalā' (*az barāy-e fath-e qods az Karbalā bāyad gozasht*). The slogan says that after defeating the Iraqi regime, they would fight to free the holy mosque of al-Aqsā. Signs were posted on the battlefield, showing the direction of Jerusalem.[440] The city is called al-Qods by the Iranian leaders, literally meaning 'the holy' and the war against Iraq was regarded as part of a holy war against the West, including Israel. In the first years after the beginning of the war, Ayatollah Khomeini called for *jehad* (holy war) to prevent Saddam Hosein from wresting actual, or even nominal, Islamic revolutionary leadership from Iran."[441]

From a historical point of view, the Temple Mount in Jerusalem is important for Jews, Muslims and Christians. Jews believe that, in obedience to a divine command, the prophet Abraham constructed an altar on the mount to sacrifice his son Isaac. For Muslims, Jerusalem is also a sacred site because of its association with Abraham. The Temple Mount, known as the Haram al-Sharif (Noble Sanctuary) contains two very early and important sacred places of Islam: the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqsā Mosque. According to Islamic accounts, the prophet Mohammad ascended from Jerusalem to the heavens, and returned to Mecca. Although al-Aqsā commemorates that event, it was built as a congregational mosque.[442] The conflict between Muslims and Jews over the Temple Mount emerged after the Six Day War (in 1967), when Israel captured the Old City of Jerusalem. Jewish control

[440] S.A. Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran under his Successors*, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 135. Arjomand writes: "General Shirazi, commander of the ground forces, declared that 'the Islamic combatants of Iran' would soon be praying with the oppressed Iraqi nation in Karbalā and attempt to eliminate the "Zionist regime" and liberate Jerusalem. Thus, 'God willing, the ground would be prepared for the appearance of Imam Mahdi, the Hidden Imam.'" See S. A. Arjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran under his Successors*, p. 135

[441] Ibid., p. 140.

[442] R.W. Stump, *Boundaries of Faith: Geographical Perspectives on Religious Fundamentalism*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000, pp. 161-62.

of the sacred site, and especially the possibility of Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount, was seen as a threat to core Muslim values, making the defence of the holy sites a sacred responsibility.[443]

BEYOND KARBALĀ, THE WORLD

The war poets referred to Karbalā as a model for all oppressed people, and to persuade Iranians that they are fighting in support of all oppressed people. Seyed Hasan Hoseini employs the motif of Karbalā in a poem entitled 'The Narrative of Martyrs' (*mathnavi-ye shahidān*):

> *tā verd-e labhāshān sorud-e sorkh-e lā shod*
> *har jā zamini bud ānjā Karbalā shod*[444]
>
> As soon as the red song of 'no' became the mantra on their lips
> Wherever there was a land, it became Karbalā.

Hoseini describes death on the battlefield as the red song of 'no,' which is defiance of an illegitimate ruler at the price of one's life. In this poem, the word *lā,* meaning 'no,' refers to the Qur'ānic verse, 'there is no god but God' (*lā Elāha ela Allāh*) (20:8), which is part of the Islamic profession of faith (*shahādat*).[445] In *Hadiqat al-Haqiqat*, Sanā'i writes that man moves toward Truth when he goes beyond the beauties and temptations of the world. This is only possible by means of self-denial.[446] In Hoseini's poem, red (*sorkh*) signifies bloodshed and refers to death on the battlefield. The profession of faith is recited, when possible, at the point of death to ensure that one dies a Muslim. The blood of the soldiers is pictured as reciting this verse, signifying both defiance to injustice, and readiness for death.

In a *robā'i*,Hoseini states that one should draw a comparison between the world and

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[443] Ibid., p. 164.
[444] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 40.
[445] L. Gardet, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, under Allāh.
[446] A. Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalāloddin Rumi*, p. 238.

Karbalā. This comparison gives him the insight to protest against illegitimate rulers.

'ālam hame khāk-e Karbalā bāyade-mān
peyvaste be lab khodā! khodā! bāyade-mān
tā pāk shavad jahān ze abnā-ye Yazid
hamvāre Hosein moqtadā bāyade-mān[447]

We want the whole world to be the soil of Karbalā
All the time, on our lips, should be: God! God!
We should follow the example of Hosein
Until the world is cleansed from Yazid's sons

The struggle between justice and injustice, fidelity and infidelity is not restricted to Karbalā, according to the poet. He universalizes Karbalā and asserts that every individual is responsible for fighting against injustice. According to the poet, the Umayyad caliph, Yazid, is the archetype of a tyrant, and other rulers, like his sons, are following his example. Martyrs' testaments also refer to Yazid in this way. The poet stresses the importance of defying oppressors. Although the 'sons of Yazid' govern the world, a Muslim should follow the principles prescribed by imam Hosein. It is worth noting that Ayatollah Khomeini is introduced in this poem as a descendant of imam Hosein. Thus, one should follow his orders. The martyr 'Ali-Asghar Nuri writes, "… Even if the world were to overflow with Yazids, it is inconceivable that we would turn our back on the leader of the martyrs [Hosein] and the imam of the Islamic community."[448] Nuri holds that nothing can prevent a community from overthrowing an unjust ruler, if they follow imam Hosein's example and obey the principles of the leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini.

[447] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 111.
[448] N. Nazemi, "Sacrifice and Authorship: A Compendium of the Wills of Iranian War Martyrs," p. 266.

IRAN AS KARBALĀ

In a poem entitled 'In the Howdah of Martyrdom' (*dar howdaj-e shahādat*), the war poet Soleymān Farrokhzād compares Iran to Karbalā.

dar karbalā-ye khun gerefte-ye Iran
Allāh-o Akbarat
inak
selāh-e kāri –yo kubande ist
bar farq-e kāferān[449]

In Iran, which has become a blood stained Karbalā
Your cry, "God is most great"
Now
Is an effective and striking weapon
On the middle of the infidels' heads.

Farrokhzād holds that the expression 'God is most great' (*Allāh-o Akbar*) is a weapon that defeats the enemy. He compares Iran with Karbalā to show the status of Iranian soldiers in comparison to the Iraqis. The former are Shiites, defenders of imam Hosein, and the latter are Sunni, supporters of Yazid, whose authority is illegitimate according to the Shiite tradition. The poet refers to the enemy (Iraq) as an infidel (*kāfer*) because he not only did not follow imam Hosein's example, he is fighting with his heir, Ayatollah Khomeini.

The polarity of good versus evil is also found in martyrs' testaments (*vassiyat-nāme-ye shohadā*). For instance, the martyr Bizhan Mohammadiyān, writes, "The present war is a conflict between truth and falsehood and since truth is the victor, we are victorious."[450] The overwhelming belief in Iran was that Iranians are victorious, whether the enemy kills them or not. If they are killed, they shed their blood to reveal the enemy's falsehood. The soldiers also compared Iran to Karbalā. For instance, in his last will,

[449] *Mosābeqe-ye she'r-e jang*, p. 70.
[450] N. Nazemi, "Sacrifice and Authorship: A Compendium of the Wills of Iranian War Martyrs," p. 266.

Fathhollāh ‘Araji writes to his mother, “… You are not present to see that this land is truly Karbalā and it has been proven that it is always the best amongst us who are martyred.”[451]

IMAM HOSEIN: THE ARCHETYPE OF MARTYRDOM

The fight between imam Hosein and his companions, and the soldiers of the Umayyad caliph were used as political tools during the Revolution and during the war by the state of Iran. The conflict between justice and injustice, good and evil became topical elements in Khomeini’s sermons. In 1963, in the month of Moharram, Ayatollah Khomeini preached a sermon and compared the Shāh to the Umayyad ruler, Yazid. Afterwards, Khomeini was arrested and was sent to exile to Najaf.[452] In 1978, during the Revolution, in his sermons, Ayatollah Khomeini compared the Shāh to Yazid more effectively, and other revolutionaries took up the comparison.[453] Khomeini’s speech implied that the Iranian youth killed by the Shāh’s secret police were like the martyrs of Karbalā. This comparison connected all the people opposed to the regime: university students, the members of the Mojāhedin-e Khalq, communists, and others who protested against the Shāh for a variety of reasons. In the Pahlavi era, imam Hosein had been presented as a quietist, the innocent victim of oppression whose silence was a sign of his piety.[454] Since this model was not suitable for inflaming the Revolution, in this period, the events of Karbalā were politicized. Rather than an oppressed innocent one, he was presented as struggling against Yazid to re-establish a just government. To reach the objective, he offered his life.[455] This interpretation of his act increased Iranian’s willingness to revolt against the Shāh. In the same period, Iranians compared Ayatollah Khomeini to imam Hosein who fought against the illegitimate Umayyad caliph, while Iranian activists were like imam Hosein’s companions.

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[451] Ibid., p. 269.
[452] T.R. Mattair, *Global Security Watch Iran: A Reference Handbook*, Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008, p.152.
[453] S.A. Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown*, p. 100; N. Yegana & N.R. Keddie, “Sexuality and Shiite Protest in Iran” in *Shi‘ism and Social Protest*, ed. J.R.I. Cole and N.R. Keddie, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1986, p.122. Also see J. Afray & K. B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005, p. 57.
[454] D. Pinault, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992, p. 173.
[455] J. Afary & K.B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution,* p. 64.

During the Iran-Iraq war, imam Hosein and Yazid were used as symbols of good and evil respectively. The Iranian state compared Iraq's Sunni president with Yazid, calling him not Saddam Hosein but Saddam Yazid. The leaders of the Islamic Revolution emphasized that the ancestors of the Sunni authorities killed imam Hosein; thus Iranians should avenge the act as the followers and supporters of the Shiite imams. The notion has been popularly propagated among the people in annual commemoration of imam Hosein's martyrdom during the month of Moharram, in the *taʻziye* ritual, in which participants identify themselves as the companions of imam Hosein.[456]

THE PATH OF HOSEIN

Another motif allied in the war poetry to that of imam Hosein's martyrdom is the path of Hosein (*rāh-e Hosein*). The poets identified death on the military front with the path of Hosein to link those who fell on the battlefield to Hosein companions. The war poets treat Hosein's act of sacrifice as a lesson in altruism (*ithār*). He offered his life for the sake of Shiite Muslims without expecting any reward. He wished to protect oppressed people from tyrannous authority, and to teach the oppressed population groups to protest against their oppressors. On the basis of this aspect of Hosein's protest, the leaders of the Islamic Republic said that Iranians were fighting against Iraqi for the sake of the oppressed nation of Iraq, expecting no reward. The war poets also characterized Hosein's path as a mystical way that leads to eternal salvation. For the war poets, the path of Hosein is the path of love. Hosein, like a mystic, detached himself from the world and its interests to purify his soul and seek annihilation in the Beloved. In addition, imam Hosein fought oppression because he had turned away from the world and its pleasures for the sake of Islamic principles. The concept of self-sacrifice for the sake of the Beloved was promoted in war propaganda, so that Iranian youth thought of the path of Hosein as the mystical path of love, and believed that death on the battlefield would unite them with the Beloved. Wearing the headband with Hosein's name identifies the soldier as Hosein, the Beloved. Thus his union with Hosein is

[456] Imam Hosein as a model for a Muslim having reached the highest stage of perfection and the archetype of a martyr are also discussed in chapter 3 and 5 of this book respectively.

like the union of Hosein with the Beloved.

Because the motifs of mystical love and the divine Beloved are so prominent in Persian literature and Iranian culture, it was natural to see imam Hosein as the spiritual beloved. The lover, in both metaphoric and mystic sense, yearns for union with the Beloved. This longing ends in self-sacrifice for the sake of the Beloved. During the war imam Hosein was seen as the beloved and union was thought to be possible through self-sacrifice on the military front. Soldiers would wear a headband on which imam Hosein's name was written. They would call his name when attacking, and name him before drinking water, using the phrase, "O Hosein the martyr!" (*yā Hosein-e shahid*).

Another concept associated with imam Hosein death, and propagated during the war, is that he chose death to save Shiites from eternal punishment in the hereafter. A soldier who dies on the front becomes a martyr, and like imam Hosein he would guarantee the eternal survival of his loved ones in Paradise.

Imam Hosein's self-sacrifice sacrifice also served to protect righteousness from falsehood. A soldier's death likewise will save righteousness from destruction. From imam Hosein's behavior, the soldier learns to lay down his life to defeat the enemy, symbolizing falsehood, to save Islam and preserve the principles of the Islamic Republic. In the following *robā'i* by Seyed Hasan Hoseini, the path of Hosein motif refers to his self-sacrifice:

yāri ke por az khun-e jegar shod jāmash
in bud be ruz-e vāpasin peyghāmash
ān kas ke rah-e Hosein rā mipuyad
shahd ast sharang-e 'āsheqi dar kāmash[457]

A friend whose cup has been filled with the blood of the liver,
This was his message at the last day of his life:
One who walks on the path of Hosein
Finds the bitterness of being in love like honey.

[457] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p. 133.

In this quatrain, the poet asserts that one who has been initiated to Hosein's path endures bitterness and hardships but it is as if he is eating honey. In the first line, Hoseini uses the compound "cup filled with blood," referring metonymically to the mystic concept of the 'cup of love.' In mystic poetry, if God pours the wine of love into a man's heart, he will remain drunk eternally. His love transforms his attributes to those of God, until nothing remains of his own self. He hears through Him, speaks through Him, sees through Him and moves by His power. At this stage, duality disappears and One Reality remains.[458] Mystic references to the cup symbolize the spiritual intoxication that results from profound love for the Beloved. In this poem, the motif of the cup filled with blood alludes to the martyr's portion, which is the blood of his liver, indicating pain. As he has been chosen to be martyred, his cup is filled with blood by the divine decree.[459] The poet holds that the martyr sends a message to the community, stating that Hosein's path is the path of love.

In the fourth line, the poet employs the concept of love to draw an analogy between imam Hosein's path and spiritual progress in the path of love. In mystical love literature, the lover suffers hardships and afflictions, but he is satisfied with those. In this poem, the calamities that the lover endures are called the bitterness (*sharang*) of being in love, which for the lover are as sweet as honey (*shahd*). Although in mystical treatises, the path of love is a metaphor for spiritual progress, imam Hosein's path of love is identified as self-sacrifice on the battlefield. Following the path of Hosein unites the lover with the Beloved. For this reason, suffering and death in the struggle are sweet and desirable for the lover.

Seyed Hasan Hoseini creates a dynamic setting through which, on the one hand, the soldier equates himself with Hosein's supporters and is ready to offer his life on the battlefield. On the other hand, he compares Hosein to a mystic master who teaches his pupils that if they follow the disciplines of self-sacrifice they will reach the summit of spiritual perfection.

In classical love poetry, imam Hosein's death is seen as a means through which the soul develops to higher states of perfection. In his *Divān,* the poet Sanā'i illustrates how the

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[458] M. Smith, *Al- Ġazāli the Mystic*, p. 194.
[459] For further discussion on the motif of the cup of madness see pp. 229 in this study.

soul progresses to the stage of eternal subsistence in God. He refers to Hosein and Hasan as "martyrs who were dead but are alive."[460] The main reason for attaining to eternal subsistence is his love for the Beloved. Sanā'i places Hosein in a mystic context, holding that imam Hosein is the archetype of bravery and selflessness, and a prototype of the martyr:

din Hosein-e tost āz-o ārezu khuk-o sag ast
teshne in rā mikoshi vān har do rā miparvari[461]
Your religion is your Hosein, greed and wishes are your pigs and dogs.
You kill the one, thirsty, and nourish the other two

The poet compares the negative traits of the lower soul to dogs and pigs; they amuse man and distract his attention from his religion. These negative traits are seen as spiritual diseases that need to be treated: otherwise, they weaken man's soul and man's religion remains thirsty and hungry like Hosein and his companions who were left without water and food in the desert of Karbalā.[462] Rumi too compares man's religion to Hosein and his negative traits to Hosein's enemies. If a man does not mortify his soul it is like helping the enemy to destroy the faith.

SEIZING HOSEIN'S CUP

The poets often compare martyrdom to drunkenness, to soften the fear of death. Various motifs such as the attraction exerted by Hosein's cup (*jazbe-ye jām-e Hosein*) are employed. Using this trope enables the poet to avoid using the word martyrdom, emphasizing instead the attraction of the wine in the cup, which attracts the drinkers who lose their conscious by no longer being concerned by worldly affairs. The war poet Ramezān-'Ali Goldun employs the motif of martyrdom as drunkenness in a poem entitled

[460] A. Schimmel, "Karbala and Hosein in Literature," in *al-Serāt*, vol. XII, Papers from Imam Hosein Conference, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986, p. 31.
[461] Sanā'i, *Divān*, with introduction, noted and contetns by Modarres Razavi, Tehran: Ketāb-khāne Sanā'i, 1372/1962, p. 655.
[462] A. Schimmel, "Karbala and Hosein Literature," in *al-Serāt*, vol. XII, p. 30. The translation of the poem is derived from Schimmel.

'His Holiness Hosein, the Master of the Martyrs' (*sālār-e shahidān, hazrat-e Hosein*), to illustrate the effects of the day of 'Āshurā on the world. The youth who are ready to offer their lives for the goals of the Islamic Revolution are like drunken men:

shur-o sheydā'i-ye 'ālam hame az 'Āshurā-st
masti-ye mā bovad az jazbe-ye jām-e to Hosein[463]

The world is intoxicated and insane because of *'Āshurā*,
O Hosein! We are drunkards through the attraction of your cup.

The poet employs cliché mystical vocabulary such as drunkenness (*shur*) and insanity (*sheydā'i*) to indicate the soldiers' passionate love, and their mystical drunkenness. He uses these emotionally laden words that are rooted in Iranians' thoughts and hearts to promote the sense of self-sacrifice in the masses. In this poem, the day of 'Āshurā is likened to a cup of wine that belongs to Hosein. One who drinks one sip from the cup becomes intoxicated with the wine of 'Āshurā and offers his life. The poet implies that on the day of 'Āshurā, when imam Hosein was killed, he was actually drunk from the divine love. Thus, he passionately offered his life for the sake of the Beloved. Hosein is seen as a medium between Shiite Muslims and the Divine.

In their treatises on love, Persian mystics used the motif of the cup of wine, saying that the wine increases the lover's drunkenness or thirst. The mystics refer to the cup as a mediator through which God increases intoxication in the mystic's heart. Mohammad Ghazāli writes that when God pours out "a draught from the cup of His love," thirst increases in the heart of the mystic. The lover's self is removed, he becomes selfless and intoxicated. In the stage of selflessness, he attains such a spiritual level that he "hears by Me and sees by Me."[464] The mystic ascends to the highest stages of spiritual progress, where the eternal Cupbearer offers him the wine of love.

In Goldun's poem, cited above, imam Hosein is compared to a mystic master who

[463] M.'A. Mardāni, *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2*, p. 52.
[464] M. Smith, *Al-Ġazālī the Mystic*, p. 194.

offers one sip from the wine of ʻĀshurā, and intoxicates not only the Shiites but also the people of the world. One who drinks from this wine becomes selfless, and is detached from the world as well as from his existence. He strives to follow Hosein example to become a martyr. In the war context, the cupbearer, Hosein, offers the wine of love to make the soldiers drunk, to guide them to the frontline. Drunkeness makes them daring and brave. By using the concept of selfless love, the poet motivates the youth to easily leave behind their parents, family, and belongings to fight against the enemy. The soldier becomes a mystic on the path of union with the beloved, denying himself, leaving the material world and its concerns.

SELF-REPROACH FOR NOT ASSISTING IMAM HOSEIN

A central theme in the Persian war poetry is Iranians' regret that they were not present at Karbalā to assist imam Hosein, some 1300 years ago. According to several Shiite sources, on the day of ʻĀshurā, imam Hosein had 72 male companions. This was a small group in comparison to Ebn al-Ziyād's soldiers. From the beginning of the fight, the outcome was obvious. Imam Hosein's helplessness at the battle of Karbalā is illustrated in Persian Passion plays. Surrounded by the enemy, he is thirsty, but no one offers him water or assists him. The plays also show how his family was taken as captives to Yazid's court, and are treated brutally by Yazid's men. These images show the helplessness of imam Hosein and his family at Karbalā. Hosein's isolation and lack of helpers in the battle is associated with the motif of the stranger (*gharib*).[465] He is as a stranger among enemies at Karbalā. Iranians have become familiar with these concepts when they commemorate imam Hosein martyrdom during the first ten days of the month of Moharram. The concept of having no helpers (*bi-yāvari*) is developed in the war poetry, along with the identification of modern Iranians as Hosein's helpers (*yāvar*).

Iranians' regret for Hosein helplessness at Karbalā is reflected in various sources such as the elegies written about the death of Hosein, and the texts of the Passion plays

[465] For further information see H. Sālehi Rād Darbandsari, *Majālis-e Taʻziye*, vol. 2, Tehran: Soroush, 1380/2002, pp. 51, 84, 199.

(*ta'ziye*), and in the war poetry. These sources show that Iranians' regret for not being present at Karbalā has a historical root in Persian literature that begins with the advent of the Safavids in Iran. Iranians blamed themselves for imam Hosein's death. Every faithful Shiite wants to be known as one who suffers for the cause of Hosein. The war with Iraq provided an opportunity for Iranians to avenge imam Hosein's blood on Yazid's descendants.

Soleymān Farrokhzād emphasizes that imam Hosein was helpless at Karbalā because of the small number of his companions, but now the Iranian soldiers are his assistants:

ey yāvar-e Hosein
ey peyrov-e imam
az dasthā-ye pāk-e to
dirist
mā jelvahā-ye rowshan-e piruzi rā
dar rāh dide-im
dar jebhe-ye nā-barābar-e bātel[466]

O supporter of Hosein
O follower of the imam [Khomeini],
From your pure hands
For a long time past
We have seen on the way
The lightening manifestation of victory
In the unequal trench of falsehood.

Here, the poet, Soleymān Harāti, defines the soldier, the potential martyr, as a supporter (*yāvar*) of imam Hosein. *Yāvar* means both supporter, assistant and friend.

[466] *Mosābeqe-ye she'r-e jang,* p. 70.

In this poem, 'the unequal trench' (*jebhe-ye nā-barābar*) in the last line refers to the small number of imam Hosein's companions compared to the number of Umayyad troops. Yet, he says, the light of victory can be seen. The image of fighting a stronger enemy is applicable to the Iran-Iraq war. While the Iranian soldiers may be outwardly defeated, they are victorious because they are standing for a righteous cause (*haqq*), and fighting against falsehood and illegitimacy (*bātel*). The notion of the struggle between *haqq* and *bātel* was propagated by the Iranian state. *Haqq* and *bātel* are Qur'ānic (8:8) concepts. For the Shiites, the fight between Hosein and Yazid is the battle between the truth, and falsehood. Therefore, Iranians, as imam Hosein's followers, fight against evil-doers. To ensure that Iranians knew the reason for the continuation of the war, Ayatollah 'Ali Khāmenei refers in a Friday sermon to Qur'ān 8:8 to assert, "God wants to establish truth (*jā oftādan-e haqq*) in the world and remove falsehood (*bar oftādan-e bātel*) which is bound to vanish, to be abolished completely." The leaders of the Islamic Republic repeated his words during the war, teaching that it was a struggle between righteousness and falsehood (*nabard-e haqq 'alayh-e bātel*).[467]

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have explained how during the war between Iran and Iraq, the poets employed the event of 'Āshurā and Hosein's martyrdom as language of symbols to inspire the soldiers to fight against the Iraqi enemy.

During the Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini had used the potential of 'Āshurā to teach that protest against the Pahlavi monarch, whom he equated with Yazid, was a religious duty. The Shāh was compared to Yazid for several reasons: Firstly, his father, Rezā Shāh Pahlavi politicized the veil (*chādor, rusari)* when he banned its use in public in 1963.[468] The revolutionaries of Iran compared his act to the unveiling of imam Hosein's sister, Zeynab, during the period of imprisonment and at the court of Yazid. Secondly,

[467] S.M. Gieling, *Religion and War in Revolutionary Iran,* p. 93.
[468] J.E. Tucker, "Women in the Middle East and North Africa: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: Resorting Women to History,* eds. N. Keddi & J.E. Tucker, Bloomington: Indian University Press, 1999*,* p. 126.

Mohammad Rezā Shāh did not follow the principles prescribed by Ayatollah Khomeini. He killed Iranian youth to preserve his own authority, which was compared to Yazid's killing of imam Hosein and his companions at Karbalā. Such comparisons motivated the Iranian youth to protest and give up their lives for the sake of the Revolution.

The theme of fighting tyranny was applied to the poetry of Iran-Iraq war. When the Sunni ruler of Iraq, Saddām Hosein, was compared to Yazid. This comparison made the soldiers believe that Ayatollah Khomeini, a descendant of the prophet Mohammad, was following the path of Hosein. Thus, Iranian youth were imam Hosein's companions when they fought against the Sunni regime to establish a just Islamic state and to revenge imam Hosein's blood on Yazid's heir. In the war poetry, the soldiers are called the supporters and assistants of Hosein (*yāvar-e Hosein*). The symbolic use of narrative elements of time, ʻĀshurā, and setting, Karbalā, provided the soldiers with the opportunity to transcend time and space, and suppose that they were real helpers of Hosein.

Karbalā, where Hosein's shrine is located, is used as rhetoric in the Iran-Iraq war poetry to encourage the soldiers to fight, and to free the city from the Sunni authority. Karbalā is also connected to Qods in another way. Similar to Karbalā, Iranians were fighting for the freedom of all Muslims. The soldiers yearned to capture Karbalā and to visit the shrine of Hosein. Karbalā was presented as the place where their beloved imam is buried. The soldiers believed that if they sacrificed their lives on the military front, imam Hosein would be their host in paradise.

For Shiites, the name of imam Hosein is associated with divine love and self-sacrifice for its cause. The war poets identified death on the battlefield as martyrdom in the path of love. The soldiers believed that following Hosein's example is similar to initiation into the mystical path of love. For the soldier, going to the battlefield means abandoning all worldly concerns such as family and possessions. Therefore, the battlefield is a shortcut to spiritual perfection, and the soldier's death guarantees his eternal salvation. [469]

[469] For more information on imam Hosein's role in mystical symbolism see the chapters 2 and 3 in this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

DEATH AS A PATH FOR PERFECTION AND SALVATION

INTRODUCTION

The concept of martyrdom, long existing in Islam was applied to Iran-Iraq war poetry. The poets used the concept to mobilize the Iranian public to offer their lives in the fight against the enemy. Martyrdom (*shahādat*) is a pivotal idea in Shiite Islam, and a Qur'ānic concept (5:117), that literally stands for the act of witnessing.[470] According to traditional beliefs recounted by Kohlberg, the martyr is rewarded by God: His sins are forgiven, he is excused from punishment, marries seventy two houris, is blessed with God's grace and given the right to intercede on behalf of his community. Some traditions assert that, on the Day of Judgment, the martyrs' spirit will enter paradise.[471] Broadly speaking, there are two main types of martyrs. The first are battlefield martyrs (*shohādā' al-ma'rake*): their bodies do not need to be washed. They are called the martyrs of this world and the next (*shohādā' al-donyā va al-ākherat*). The second type is those not killed directly by wounds received on the battlefield: they are called the martyrs of the next world.[472]

In modern Iran the concept of martyrdom is used as political tool. For instance, during the Revolution, the belief that martyrdom is the path to heavenly rewards and the grace of God was used to motivate Iranians to protest against the Pahlavi monarch at the risk of their lives. Later, during the war against Iraq, martyrdom was propagated as a major element of Iranian identity. One strove to die a martyr's death. It is also connected to mystical and Karbalā themes discussed above.

To show the important role of intellectuals in propagating this concept of martyrdom, the following paragraph explains the ideas of two Iranian theorists of the

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[470] For more discussions on the act of witnessing see the chapter one, p. 38,49; for the motif of the primordial covenant and its witnesses see chapter two, pp. 99-104.
[471] E. Kohlberg, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Shahīd.
[472] Ibid.

Revolution, ‘Ali Shariati and Ayatollah Mortezā Motahhari (1933-1979). During the Revolution, their works played a major role in persuading the population to revolt against the Pahlavi regime. During the war, their theories were used to inspire the Iranian young men to participate in the war in various ways. I will then show how the concept of martyrdom is used in the war poetry to convince Iranians to wage *jehād* against the faithless and unbeliever Sunni enemy, and to die as martyrs.

TYPES OF MARTYRDOM

After the advent of Islam, martyrdom was identified as an honorable and rewarding action. There are several references to martyrdom in the Qur’ān. Verses 3:169-71 identify who is killed in battle as a martyr, while verse 57:19 says that the one who truly believes in Allah, and His prophets are witnesses (martyrs) in the eyes of God.[473] That creates considerable ambiguity, with the result that not only those killed in battle are classified as martyrs. One who converted to Islam, and suffered for its cause, such as Belāl Ebn Rabāh (d. 638,639,641 or 642), is called a martyr. He was the first slave to accept Islam, and was being tortured for this by his master, Abu Sofyān (d. 653), when Abu Bakr (570-634), one of the first believers, and later the first caliph, bought and freed him. Belāl gained the status of a martyr after his death.[474] One who is tortured or killed because he is connected with the Muslim community, but not for his beliefs, is also called a martyr.

There are Islamic traditions that accord the status of martyrdom to several other types of death. Jalāl al-Din al-Soyuti (1445-1505) quotes the prophet Mohammad, “The one who dies of a stomach complaint is a martyr, the one who drowns is a martyr, the one who dies of plague is a martyr, the one who dies in a structural collapse is a martyr, the one who dies in a fire is a martyr, the one who dies of pleurisy, and the woman who dies in childbirth are a martyr.”[475] Another tradition states, “Whoever dies from stabbing (*to‘ina*) or in a plague is a martyr.” Another type of martyr is one who is tortured by a non-Muslim state

[473] D. Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, pp. 31-32; also see Seyed-Gohrab, “No Reward – Martyrdom as Piety, Mysticism and National Icon in Iran,” in *Der Islam: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur des Islamischen Orients*, issue 1-2, 87, 2012, pp. 248-73.
[474] D. Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, pp. 13-14.
[475] Ibid., pp. 33-34.

for his belief.[476] There is no doubt that the aim of narrating this tradition is, as Cook puts it, "to move the focus of martyrdom away from its most basic sense: that of dying in the battle."[477]

Another type of death that is called martyrdom is the death of mystics who have suffered, and are killed, in the path of spiritual perfection. The most famous of these is the martyr mystic Hosein Mansur Hallāj.

During the war, the leaders of the Islamic Republic described several types of death as martyrdom, although the victims did not die in battle: Iranians killed when Iraqi air forces bombarded the cities, and the passengers of the plane downed by a US Navy vessel, USS *Vincennes,* in 1988. However it was still maintained that the divine reward is bestowed on martyrs who participate in the fight.[478]

During the war, a youth who blew himself up to stop an Iraqi tank was called a martyr. Although killing oneself is suicide, and strongly condemned in Islam, the leaders of the Islamic Republic differentiated this from the self-sacrifice of Mohammad Hosein Fahmide.[479] In the years of the war, youths as young as nine and old men voluntarily walked onto the minefields to clear the way for Iranian military equipment.[480] This was considered self-sacrifice for the cause of religion. Ayatollah Khomeini said "[As] Shiites we welcome any opportunity to sacrifice our blood. Our nation looks forward to an opportunity for self-sacrifice and martyrdom."[481] To illustrate the pivotal importance of martyrdom as a fundamental element of Shiite Islam and to emphasise the people killed during the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini praised the Iranians killed during the Revolution in the first speech he delivered after returning to Iran, in *Behesht-e Zahrā* cemetery in south Tehran.[482] His utterance lead the audience to believe that someone killed for the principles of the Revolution would be treated as a martyr. Khomeini made the image of the martyrs public to

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[476] Ibid., pp. 21-30.
[477] Ibid., pp. 33-34; for future instances see Ibid., p. 35.
[478] S.M., Gieling, *Religion and War in Revolutionary Iran,* p.57.
[479] For Mohammad Hosein Fahmide and his act of sacrifice in the battlefield see p. 155 in this study.
[480] For the account of the key to paradise see p. 153 of this study.
[481] J.E. Alagha, *The Shifts in Hizbullah's Ideology: Religious Ideology, Political Ideology, and Political Program*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006, p. 92.
[482] A.M. Ansari, *Modern Iran Since 1921*, p. 212.

revive and to cultivate the culture of martyrdom among Iranians.

To mobilize the youth, and to remind the Iranians of the brave men and women who had offered their lives for the cause of Islam, and for the sake of the country, the leaders of the Islamic Republic established museums to show the pictures of the war martyrs.[483] The entrance of the martyrs' museum in Tehran, for example, is carpeted in blood red, and there is a sign that says, "In the Name of God of the Martyrs and the Honest."[484] Rooms are filled with the photos of young martyrs, and their personal possessions, with copies of the Qur'ān. The museum is a memorial to the masses killed during the revolution and eight years of war against Iraq.[485] To praise the soldiers for giving up their lives, and to remind the people of their responsibility to the Islamic Republic, streets and alleys are named after the martyrs, their pictures are hung from lampposts, and the walls of cities throughout the country are decorated with paintings of the martyrs. Artists make memorials to honor those called the martyrs of Islam, and religious leaders regularly praise those who offered their lives to establish the Islamic Republic. Numerous cemeteries were dedicated to the martyrs' memory.[486] They are called 'the Rose Garden of Martyrs' (*Golestān-e shohadā, Golzār-e shohadā*). The martyrs are compared to the rose that stands for the beloved in literary texts. In the city of Tehran, the cemetery containing the tombs of thousands killed during the war is called 'The Paradise of Zahrā' (*Behesht-e Zahrā*). Fāteme Zahrā was the daughter of the prophet Mohammad, and imam Hosein's mother. The cemetery, located near to imam Khomeini's gold-domed tomb, is a center of pilgrimage for Iranians from across the country. It is decorated with paintings from the Iran-Iraq war and the bloody bodies of the martyrs.[487] A fountain spouting red water symbolizes the martyrs' blood. The cemetery is not intended to stand for death and destruction, but to be a source of eternal light and inspiration. It memorializes an honorable way to save one's motherland, according to Seyed

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[483] J.M. Davis, *Martyrs: Innocence, Vengeance, and Despair in the Middle East*, p. 45.
[484] Ibid.
[485] Ibid.
[486] Ibid., p. 46. Alseo see, Ch. Gruber, "The Martyrs' Museum in Tehran: Visualizing Memory in Post-Revolutionary Iran," in *Unburied Memories: Politics of Sacred Defense Martyrs in Iran*, ed. P. Khosronejad, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013, pp. 68-97.
[487] Ibid., p. 47. For further information on commemoration of war and the martyrdom see: P. Khosronejad, "Introduction: Unburied Memories," in *Unburied Memories: Politics of Sacred Defense Martyrs in Iran*, ed. P. Khosronejad, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013, pp. 1-21.

Afzal Haider.[488] The death of the young martyr Mohammad Hosein Fahmide is honored by naming schools, hospitals, sport clubs and streets after him.[489] The images of martyrs are also printed on the currency and stamps[490] to be a constant reminder of the Iranians' responsibility and to cultivate the culture of martyrdom among them.

The period of 'Āshurā (tenth of Moharram) is an emotional time in Iran, when mourning processions commemorate imam Hosein's death, and the war martyrs are honored. The leaders of the Islamic Republic take advantage of these rituals to point to one's responsibility to support the state. They praise death and suffering for the cause of religion, Ayatollah Khomeini encouraged the 'Āshurā rituals. In his sermon on June 1982, Ayatollah Khomeini said: "These mourning sessions have developed young men and youths who voluntarily go to the war fronts seeking martyrdom and feel unhappy if they don't achieve it. These 'Āshurā mourning gatherings develop such mothers who urge their sons to go to the war fronts and if they do not return, the mothers wish they had more sons to send, or they say, we have other sons to send to the war fronts."[491]

'ALI SHARIATI ON MARTYRDOM

In the years leading up to the Revolution, 'Ali Shariati's ideas and sermons had a profound impact on motivating the community to act against the Pahlavi regime. His lectures at Mashhad University attracted many students. Because he was politically charged at Mashhad, in 1967, he moved to Tehran and became a lecturer-preacher at Hoseini-ye Ershād, an institution founded to establish modernized Islam, where his lectures attracted a large audience of university students and leftists.[492] It is worth noting that, in the mid-

[488] S.A. Haider, *Velayat-e Faqih, Imam Khomaini and Islamic Revolution*, Lahore: Gautam Publishers, 1996, p. 165.
[489] J.M. Davis, *Martyrs: Innocence*, pp. 49-50.
[490] R. Varzi. *Warring Souls,* p. 26.
[491] J.M. Davis, *Martyrs: Innocence,* p. 49.
[492] K. Matin, "Decoding Political Islam, Uneven and Combined Development and Ali Shariati's Political Thought," in *International Relations and Non-Western Thought, Imperialism, Colonialism, and Investigations of Global Modernity*, ed. R. Shilliam, London & New York: Routledge, 2011, p.115. For more information on Shariati and his views see A. Rahnema & F. Nomani, "Competing Shi'i Subsystems in Contemporary Iran," in *Iran after the Revolution: Crisis of an Islamic State*, eds. S. Rahnema & S. Behdad, London: I.B Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1996, pp. 65-93.

1960s, the Hoseini-ye Ershād became an important center where modernist Islamists such as Mehdi Bāzargān (1907-1995), ʻAli Shariati, and Ayatollah Mortezā Motahhari delivered their lectures to show the important role of clerics in preserving Iranian culture, which, according to them was being destroyed by Western cultural influences. The lecturers played an active role in increasing the political awareness of Iranians, particularly of the middle and lower classes.[493] The Hoseini-ye Ershād became "a center of opposition to the Pahlavi regime during 1960s and 1970s."[494] In 1977, it was closed by an order from the Shāh.[495]

After his death in 1977, Shariati's works became a source of inspiration for the poets who wrote to legitimize Iran's war against Iraq, and self-sacrifice. Shariati emphasizes martyrdom as the only means through which the masses may free themselves from the oppression and injustice imposed upon them. He wrote a pamphlet on this topic, which became very popular among the Iranians, linking imam Hosein's death to political developments in Iran, calling for a culture of martyrdom. It implies that to fight injustice action is needed. Shariati relies on verse 2:143 in the Qur'ān: " … We have made you a just nation, so that you may bear witness unto the rest of mankind …" to say that the martyr offers his life to revive forgotten truths. By that he means matters such as the doctrine of the *imamate*, which was neglected during the ʻAbbāsid Caliphate (750-1258). Shariati holds that one who sacrifices his life for a sacred cause will receive all its sacredness. Thus, martyrdom does not mean death. It is eternal life (*baqā*), a martyr awakens the community to demand justice, then he, like the prophet Mohammad, bears witness for this oppressed community. Shariati highlights the martyr's role to assert that each of the faithful should endeavor to become a role model for his community. The prophet is witnessing us, and we should be a witness (role model) for other people.[496] The martyr is one who chooses the red death (*marg-e sorkh*) over the black death (*marg-e siyāh*), meaning, an ordinary death.[497]

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[493] A. Sreberny-Mohammadi & A. Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution: Communication, Culture, and the Iranian Revolution*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, p. 87.

[494] E.J. Hooglund, *Twenty Years of Islamic Revolution: Political and Social Transition in Iran*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002, p. 78.

[495] A. Sreberny-Mohammadi & A. Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution,* p. 87. For further information on Hoseiniye Ershād and the lectures there, see A. Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopia,* pp. 226-79.

[496] ʻA. Shariati,"bahthi rāje' be shahid,"in *Hosein vāreth-e Ādam, majmu'e-ye āthār 19*, Tehran: Qalam, 1367/1988, pp. 218-9.

[497] ʻA. Shariati,"Pas az shahādat,"in *Hosein vāreth-e Ādam,* p. 203.

His articulation of the purpose of martyrdom inspired the crowd to rise against the Pahlavi regime. They believed that their protest was their moral and religious duty to their community.

To show the importance of remaining active in society, Shariati praises self-sacrifice and condemns those who follow the mystics' path of spiritual progress, or who simply obey leaders of religion for the sake of personal salvation, while remaining silent about tyranny and the oppression of the community. He asserts that those people weave the dress of piety to clothe the oppressors (*bāfande-ye jāme-ye taqwā bar andām-e zur-and*).[498] In other words, Shariati holds that two groups support tyranny: the mystics and the clerics. To propagate martyrdom, Shariati cites a saying from Sheykh Khalife, the founder of the Sarbedārān movement, that a community may free itself from tyranny and oppression if it is committed to "the religion of protest and martyrdom."[499] Shariati's faith in the power of militant protest drew on the examples of revolutionary movements in Cuba and Algeria (1954). In Algeria, the leaders of the revolutionary party had called upon Algerian students, in London, Paris, and Brussels, asking them to cease their studies and return to the mountains of Algeria for military training and to fight colonialism. In the end they gained victory (Algeria became independent in 1962). Shariati suggested a revolutionary plan to dethrone the Shāh and overthrow the regime. He believed that the political awareness in Iran's future generation must be improved. On 15 February 1962 he wrote to a limited number of his political friends stating that because Iran is potentially ready for a political change, they will gain victory. Following the example of the Algerian National Liberation Front, he suggested that the leaders of the revolution should call upon Iranian students studying abroad, and divide them into two groups. The first group should be sent directly to revolutionary training camps, and the other should act as liaison personnel.[500]

Shariati effectively builds on the martyr cult of Hosein elaborating on it to make it into a very effective tool to convince and promote Shiite Muslims to protest. He introduced

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[498] 'A. Shariati, *Tashayo'-e 'Alavi, Tashayo'-e Safavi*, Tehran: Ketābkhāne-ye dāneshjui-ye dāneshgāh-e adabiyyāt va 'olum-e ensāni, 1366/1977, p.15.

[499] Ibid., p.16.

[500] A. Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopia,* p. 104. For *Shari'ati's* letter to Ibrahim Yazdi and his suggestion for organizing a militant cadre see A. Rahnema, "Ali Shariati: Teacher, Preacher, Rebel," in *Pioneers of Islamic Revival*, ed. A. Rahnema, London & Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Zed Books, 1994, p. 223.

the concept of 'the culture of martyrdom' (*farhang-e shahādat*), which in his view, was a means through which members of an oppressed community can rescue themselves from the tyrannies imposed upon them by an illegitimate and unjust government i.e., a foreign power (*solte-ye khāreji*). [501] Self-sacrifice for a higher cause should be cultivated among the Muslims, using the role model of imam Hosein. During the war, the leaders of the Islamic Republic continued to use Shariati's concept, the Qur'ānic verse (i.e., 2:143), and the belief that a martyr will be rewarded in paradise to propagate the culture of martyrdom. They put emphasis on fighting as the only accepted way that would end to enlightenment comparing to spiritual self-mortification.

In many of his works, Shariati refers to the event of 'Āshurā and its important role in inspiring the Shiite Muslims. In *Hosein vāreth-e Ādam* ('Hosein the Heir of Adam'), Shariati globalizes the day of 'Āshurā, and removes the limitations such as time and place, when he asserts, "each month is Moharram, each day is 'Āshurā, and each land is Karbalā."[502] Later Ayatollah Khomeini used the slogan in several of his speeches. During the War, Iranians used the quotation as a slogan: 'each day is 'Āshurā, each land is Karbalā' (*har ruz 'Āshurā har zamini Karbalā*). This slogan is a reminder of imam Hosein's martyrdom. Since he was the legitimate leader of the Muslim community, Shiite Muslims may avenge his blood.

Shariati explains that the day of Āshurā is the continuation of historical injustice. Injustice and oppression began when the son of Adam, Cain, killed his brother Abel. This unjust behavior has been repeated throughout history by the sons of Adam. For instance, the prophets and the pious men have been killed by their enemies. The former symbolize Abel and the latter Cain. This brutal act of killing an innocent person happened again in 680, when the soldiers of Yazid killed imam Hosein. This cycle of revenge that began from the sons of Adam will continue until the Last Day, according to Shariati.[503]

Shariati effectively refers to commemoration of Hosein's martyrdom to inspire Iranians to see Shiite Islam and martyrdom as a source of dynamic force in modern society.

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[501] 'A. Shariati, *Tashayo'-e 'Alavi, Tashayo'-e Safavi*, p. 20.
[502] 'A. Shariati, *Hosein vāreh-e Ādam, majmu'e-ye āthār 19*, Tehran: Qalam, 1367/1988, p. 34.
[503] Ibid., pp. 35-57.

He builds on the martyr cult of Hosein, explains and elaborates on it to make the martyrdom a very effective tool that should be publicized to inspire the public to give up their lives for a higher cause. He says: "martyr means 'one who is present, a viewer, a witness, who testifies…, one who attracts everyone's eyes', and finally, [martyr] means 'example' and 'model.'" He asserts that: "martyrdom in our culture is not a tragic bloody incident."[504] The martyr is alive in the people's hearts and memory. The enemy can "conquer the body of the martyrs but not their thoughts… martyrdom is a mission, not fighting, it is not a weapon, but a message, it is a word that is pronounced by the blood… it is a light that illuminates in the overwhelming darkness (*zolmat-e 'ām*), it lightens the environment (*fazā*), and unveils betrayal."[505] He asserts, "…In our [Iranian] culture, martyrdom is a stage; it is not a means, but it is a target, it is nobleness. It is perfection, and loftiness. Dying a martyr's death is a responsibility; it is a short cut toward the choicest human destiny, and it is culture."[506]

Shariati criticizes those who say, "Hosein was eager to be killed, 'to sacrifice his life for the cause of the community,' to intercede on behalf of the lovers of *ahl al-beyt* (literally 'the people of the house' i.e., of the prophet, Fāteme, 'Ali, Hasan, and Hosein). People who are committing sins and believe that [he gave his life] to change their 'sinful acts' to 'praiseworthy acts' in the hereafter…." He asserts that those who believe that imam Hosein offered his life to rescue them from punishment in the hereafter have been influenced by the spirit of mysticism (*ruh-e sufiyāne*), and by Christian ideology (*binesh-e masihiyyat*).[507] Christians believe that Jesus sacrificed his life to rescue his people from sin and the hell.[508] Shariati holds that Hosein's death was not a planned sacrifice for the sake of the eternal salvation of the community, but when there was no way out, he chose death over life. He did this to awaken the community, not to preserve sinful Muslims from eternal punishment.

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[504] 'A. Shariati,"Shahādat,"in *Hosein vāreth-e Ādam, majmu'e-ye āthār 19*, Tehran: Qalam, 1367/1988, pp. 171-2.
[505] Ibid, p. 188.
[506] Ibid., p. 195.
[507] 'A. Shariati,"Shahādat,"in *Hosein vāreth-e Ādam,* pp. 188-9.
[508] T. Davis, "Is Jesus Superior to all Other Religious Leaders?" in Evidence for God, 50 Arguments for Faith from the Bible, History, Philosophy and Science, ed. M. R. Licona & W. A. Dembski, Grand Rapids, MI: Bakers Books, 2011, p. 187.

His death conveys a message that one should not live under the authority of an illegitimate and tyrannical ruler. Shariati goes further saying, "to believe, regarding Hosein's martyrdom, that he was predestined to die relieves his killer of responsibility."[509] Such beliefs mean that his killer merely performed what was predestined for him, and for Hosein.

Imam Hosein's way of fighting and his martyrdom is a model that should be emulated to build an Islamic community (*ommat*), to uproot injustice, and to cultivate the freedom and equality of all individuals. Each member has to protest against an unjust and oppressive ruler. If one has no power to kill the tyrant, he should sacrifice his life (*agar mitavāni bemirān agar nemitavāni bemir,* literally, if you have power, kill; otherwise, die), according to Shariati.[510] He holds that people should seek vengeance their prophets, and their imams´ blood from dictatorial rulers. In *Thār* (which literally means, to pour out the victim's blood, to avenge blood) Shariati says that one should avenge the blood of an innocent person who is killed. He makes a modern model of the Arab tribal custom of blood revenge. The custom is that if a member of a certain tribe is killed by someone from a rival tribe, any member of the first tribe is allowed to kill the killer.[511] Shariati calls the victim *thār* and says that his spirit flies around the heads of members of his tribe until his blood is avenged.[512] The chain of revenge began when Cane killed Abel. Thus, world history is based on two poles: killing, and avenging the act. Shariati cites, "When does this history end? Again, it is *thār* … the title of the last human savior who rescues man from killing (*thār-koshi*) and being killed (*thār*), who shapes the whole history of humanity. His title is 'the Avenger.' Who is he avenging? Everyone has said, 'the killers of *Seyed al-Shohadā*. No, he is avenging the blood that is on the shoulders of Abel's sons."[513] Therefore, the Shiite responsibility is not limited to avenging imam Hosein's blood, they

[509] 'A. Shariati,"Shahādat,"in *Hosein vāreth-e Ādam,* pp. 188-9. With respect to the purpose for which imam Hosein sacrificed his life, M. Dorraj, quotes from Hamid Enayat "Husayn allowed himself to be killed on the plain of Karbalā to purify the Muslim community of sin." (M. Dorraj, "Symbolic and Utilitarian Political Value of a Tradition: Martyrdom in the Iranian Political Culture," *The Review of Politics*, vol. 59, no.3, Non-Western Political Thought (Summer, 1997), p. 495.
[510] Ibid., p. 195.
[511] 'A. Shariati,"Thār,"in *Hosein vāreth-e Ādam,* p. 115.
[512] Ibid.
[513] Ibid., p.120.

should "avenge the *thār* that is put on Abel's shoulders."[514] Shariati says blood revenge is a responsibility. He encourages the Shiite Muslims of Iran, instead of waiting for the return of the twelfth imam, the Mahdi who will defend them against the unjust ruler, to begin a revolt against despotic rulers. Shariati played a major role in effecting a revolutionary change in Shiite Islam, from quietism to activism.[515] For Shariati religion is an idealism that inspires its followers to struggle against unjust rulers. He uses imam Hosein's saying, life is faith (*'aqide*) and struggle (*jehād*) in various ways. In addition, Shariati uses the anecdote of Cane and Abel, recorded in Muslim traditions, to highlight the need to eliminate economic and class status. Cane and Abel came after all from the same family background, parents and cultural environment and neither class nor their economic background figured in their struggle. Shariati classifies people into two poles: the pole of Abel, consisting of the people (*nās*) and God (Allāh), in contrast to the pole of Cane: ownership (*melk*), the owner (*mālek*), plutocracy (*mala'*), and priesthood (*rāheb*). The conflict between these poles ends with a revolution.[516] Dabashi says that Shariati was inspired by Franz Fanon when he said that the "Third-World" countries should abandon their religion to stand against imperialist power or protest against their governments, Shariati intended to introduce the revolutionary "true Islam." He transformed the universal faith into a universal ideology.[517] He referred to 'Ali and Hosein as models of a revolutionary way of life. He attacked the doctrine of *taqiyye*, that the believer should conceal his religion when in danger of execution. He referred to *taqiyye* as an outdated way of thinking.[518] Shariati relies on Iranians' collective memory and the interwoven religious narrations, historical events and doctrines to motivate them to begin a revolutionary movement and replace the Shāh with a just authority, instead of waiting for the savior of the age, the Mahdi (*Emām-e Zamān*). Roxanne Varzi asserts that Shariati's writing on the hidden Imam (*Emām-e Ghāyeb*) motivated Iranians to protest

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[514] Ibid.

[515] Hamid Dabashi writes that Shariati transformed Shi'ism into a "revolutionary ideology." See H. Dabashi, *The Theology of Discontent,* pp. 110-11.

[516] H. Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought*, Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1982, pp. 156-58. H. Dabashi in his work *The Theology of Discontent* asserts that for Shariati, seeing a well digger's work in a *Kariz* (a subterranean canal*)* and the struggle of the drops of water to join together and come to the surface was the first inspiration for his understanding of the way a revolutionary movement takes shape.

[517] H. Dabashi, *The Theology of Discontent,* pp. 110-11.

[518] Ibid., p. 114.

against the regime and to welcome Ayatollah Khomeini returning from exile in 1979. She quotes from Shariati: "Human intervention is needed for his (hidden imam) final coming. People need to begin the imam's work of overthrowing oppression and implementing universal justice in order to occasion his ultimate return and revolution."[519] Shariati's words prepared the Iranian population to rise and become prepared for the return of Ayatollah Khomeini, although he was not the 'hidden imam.'[520]

In what follows, I explain how the concept of historical injustice, discussed above, is used in the war poetry. The use of this concept leads the public to sacrifice their lives believing their martyrdom will put an end to the injustice and tyranny. The war poet Seyed Hasan Hoseini employed the concept in a quatrain entitled 'An Unspoken Secret' (*serr-e magu*):

gar bar setam-e qorun bar-āshoft Hosein
bidāri-ye mā khāst, be khun khoft Hosein
ānjā ke zabān mahram-e asrār nabud
bā lahje-ye khun serr-e magu goft Hosein[521]

Hosein opposed tyranny imposed upon man through the centuries
To awaken us, he slept in his blood
Where the tongue was not an intimate for the secrets
He revealed the secret in the language of blood.

In the first line, Seyed Hasan Hoseini uses the word centuries (*qorun*) to show that Hosein could not bear the oppression and injustice imposed upon human beings throughout history. This citation universalizes imam Hosein's death. It shows that cruelty and injustice are universal phenomena and both Muslims and other believers endure oppression.

In the third line, the phrase tongue is not intimate (*mahram-e asrār nabudan-e*

[519] R. Varzi. *Warring Souls,* p. 37.
[520] Ibid., p.37.
[521] S.H. Hoseini, *Ham-sedā bā halq-e Esmā'il*, p.111.

zabān) alludes to the execution of Hallāj in Baghdad. The mystics say he was killed because he revealed the secret of divine love. The poet links this mystical myth with 'the tragedy' of imam Hosein at Karbalā. Just as Hāllāj became a model for mystics, Hosein became an example for Shiites. Moreover, Hosein's death is placed in a mystic context by comparing him to Hallāj. Hosein's blood is compared to a mystic guide: when it is shed, it shows the path of salvation to the Shiite.

Other war poets relied on Shariati's view about historical injustice. One poem bears the title 'O brother! Wear Black, they have Killed the Dawn' (*siyah bepush barādar sepide rā koshtand*) by Mohammad 'Ali Mo'allem from Dāmghān. The poem refers to imam Hosein's death. The poet names the prophets and those who killed them, to create a chronological chain consisting of the oppressive powers and the oppressed. It begins from Abel's assassination by Cane, and ends with imam Hosein's execution by Yazid's men.

…
do rud-khāne ravān tā karān-e sāhel-e dur
yeki be bestar-e zolmat yeki be bestar-e nur …
yeki be hey'at-e Hābiliyān rahrow khosh
yeki be hey'at-e Qābiliyān barādar kosh
yeki sabur dar ātash chonān ke Ebrāhim
yeki 'anud na, Namrud-e kine-var dezhkhim …
yeki 'Ali gowhar-e āfarinesh-e azali
yeki Mo'āviye khasm-e khodā-vo khasm-e 'Ali
yeki Hosein ke mirāth-dār-e Ebrāhim
yeki chonān ke che guyam Yazid yā dezhkhim …
biyā be nām-e shahidān-e rah be kār shavim
kafan bepush ke bā yekdegar savār shavim.[522]

Two rivers streaming to the far seashore

[522] M. 'A. Mo'allem Dāmghāni, *Rej'at-e sorkh-e setāre,* pp. 63-4

One of them is streaming on the bed of darkness, the other on the bed of light …
One like [the tribe of] Able is a cheerful follower
Other like [the people of] Cane is killing his brother
One is like Abraham patient when he is put in fire
One is not only rejecting the truth, but he is like Namrud resentful executioner …
One is ʻAli the pearl of the eternal creation
Another one is Moʻāviye the enemy of God and ʻAli
One is Hosein, Abraham's heir
One, what should I say about him, is Yazid or an executioner …
Come, let us start our activity in the name of the martyrs of the path
O brother! Put on a shroud that we may mount together.

In this poem Moʻallem contrasts righteousness with falsehood, protagonists with antagonists. The antagonists are Qābiliyān, Namrud, Moʻāwiye and Yazid. They are responsible for killing the protagonists; Hābiliyān, Ebrāhim, ʻAli, and Hosein. The poet uses Shariati's historical injustice view to assert that the violent and oppressive actions of the antagonists, which began at the beginning of history, continue until today, and Iranians are duty bound to take revenge. The poet uses familiar historical figures to inspire Iranians to participate in the war. He links the antagonists to the Iraqi regime, and the protagonists to Iranian soldiers. In the last line he asks the soldiers to wear a shroud and follow the path of martyrs. In Persian literature, the compound verb to wear a shroud (*kafan pushidan*) stands for preparation for death. During the Islamic Revolution and during the war, Iranians going to the military front wore shrouds to show that they were ready to lay down their lives for a higher cause.

What distinguishes Shariati from his contemporaries is that he condemns those who mourn and lament for Hosein's suffering and his death without understanding his mission. He says they have changed this historical movement (*nehzat*) into 'the school of mourning.' Therefore, we [Iranians or the Shiite Muslims] commemorate it, mourn, and wail for it, but

we know nothing about it, and we do not understand its importance, Shariati says.[523] He implies that every Shiite Muslim should learn about why imam Hosein journeyed from Mecca to Kufa, although he knew that he would be killed. Knowing the reason imposes a responsibility on the Shiites and encourages them to protest against a tyrant regime.

Other writers before Shariati had elaborated on the events of ʻĀshurā and imam Hosein's martyrdom. In 1968, Neʻmatollāh Sālehi Najafābādi politicizes the event of Karbalā in his *Shahid-e jāvid* (ʻThe Eternal Martyr'). He introduces imam Hosein as a courageous soldier fighting for the Faith, not one who simply wants to be killed.[524] In his work, Sālehi Najafābādi criticizes the traditional Shiite view of imam Hosein's martyrdom, as good only for making people cry because it does not give any model to the believers. He asserts that imam Hosein's protest against the Umayyad caliph, Yazid, was a military action with the aim of overthrowing an unjust authority.[525] In his work on martyrdom, Shariati consciously or unconsciously used *Shahid-e jāvid*. But he disagrees with Sālehi Najafābādi, who says that imam Hosein's protest was a political uprising against Yazid. Shariati uses a quotation attributed to imam Hosein to assert that he fought to be killed: "Death is as beautiful for the son of Adam as the necklace upon the neck of a beautiful young girl."[526]

Another book written in 1960s is *Tahlili az nehzat-e Hosein* (ʻAn Analysis based on Hosein's Movement') by the Mojāhedin guerrillas led by Masʻud Rajavi and Ahmad Rezā'i, the founder of the *Mojāhedin*. In this book, imam Hosein's protest against the Umayyad caliph is identified as a model that the masses should emulate. He teaches them to stand up to a tyrant ruler, in this case the Pahlavi monarch.[527]

AYATOLLAH MORTEZĀ MOTAHHARI

One influential cleric who prepared the ground for the 1979 Revolution in Iran is Ayatollah

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[523] ʻA. Shariati,"Shahādat," in *Hosein vāreth-e Ādam,* p. 172
[524] E. Siegel, "The Politics of *Shahid-e Jāwid*," in *The Towelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture and Political Culture,* eds. R. Brunner & W. Ende, Leiden & Boston: Koln, 2000, p. 160.
[525] Ibid., p. 163.
[526] Ibid., pp. 163-64.
[527] Ibid., p.170.

Mortezā Motahhari. He gave several lectures before the Revolution in a building called the Hoseini-ye Ershād, to motivate the Iranians to protest against the Pahlavi monarch. Motahhari did not speak in complicated philosophical language. He was "a simplifier of classical Shi'i learning."[528] Therefore, it may be assumed that Motahhari's lectures were understandable to all those who attended.

In his lectures on martyrdom, Ayatollah Mortezā Motahhari says that people who serve humanity in various walks of life, such as scholars, philosophers, and teachers, are indebted to the martyrs while they are indebted to none.[529] The martyr's act of sacrifice provides an opportunity for those servants of society. Motahhari compares the martyr to a candle that burns to light the path for the rest of the community. He distinguishes between a martyr and one who commits suicide: the latter is the worst type of death. Two basic elements make martyrdom an honorable act: "The life is sacrificed for a cause; the sacrifice is made consciously."[530] Ayatollah Motahhari's statement implies one's intention (*qasd, niyyat*) is of major importance, when one lays down one's life. In a theological context, the word intention means that one's works are evaluated base on one's intention. [531] Thus, the martyr who puts his life at risk with the intention of saving the community from unjust ruler will receive divine reward in the hereafter. The martyr chooses honorable death over ordinary life. This notion became a slogan in 1979, *marg-e bā 'ezzat behtar az zendegi-ye bā zellat* ('honorable death is better than a life in abasement').

To illustrate the role of intentionality in the path of martyrdom, Ayatollah Motahhari gives the example of imam Hosein's death at Karbalā. He says: "The imam consciously made the supreme sacrifice." He knew that if he did not give the oath of allegiance to the Umayyad caliph, Yazid, he must fight him.[532] This quotation implies that Iranians should oppose the regime and knowingly lay down their lives if necessary, like imam Hosein. One who does not fight against the Shāh has implicitly given an oath of allegiance to him and submitted to his authority.

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[528] H. Dabashi, *The Theology of Discontent,* p. 152.
[529] A.M. Motahhari,"Shahīd,"in *Jihad and Shahadat, Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam*, p. 126.
[530] Ibid., pp. 126-8.
[531] For future information about intention and theological discourses, see A.J. Wensinck, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Niyya.
[532] A.M. Motahhari,"Shahīd,"in *Jihad and Shahadat Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam,* p.128.

Ayatollah Motahhari refers to the martyr's dignity before God in his literary works. He says that the word *jehād*, or striving, and the necessity of fighting against unbelievers is mentioned in the Qur'ān and in *Nahj al-Belāgheh*, a collection of quotes from Imam 'Ali compiled after his death. A Muslim who fights in the path of God, called a *mojāhed*, is God's chosen friend, and will enter paradise immediately after his martyrdom.[533] Ayatollah Motahhari draws an analogy between a martyr and a 'friend of God.' This notion has a mystic origin. For the mystics, *wali* is a friend of God. The word literally means 'to be near.' A *wali* is chosen by God and attains the divine virtues. God bestows particular powers, abilities and authority on him. He knows that he is close to God and he enjoys the eternal bliss of paradise. During his lifetime, God acts through the *wali*. After his death, he acts as a mediator between God, and the world of existence.[534] Motahhari says that one who offers his life in the path of God attains the spiritual-mystical status of a *wali.* Such ideas are interwoven in Persian war poetry, for instance in Abd al-Hamid Ja'fari's allusion in the following couplet, in which the martyr is seen as a sign (*āyat*) of God's throne.

kisti to āyat-e zibā-ye 'arsh-e kebriyā'i
ruh-e peyghāmat konun dar chah-chahey bolbol berizam[535]

Who are you? You are an amazing sign of the throne of God
I pour the essence of your message in a nightingale's song.

In this poem, the martyr is a beautiful sign of God's throne (on earth) who has delivered a message by his death. The poet transmits that message in a 'nightingale's song.' By referring to the *topos* of rose and nightingale, the poet alludes to mystics' passion for union with the Beloved: the rose stands for the beloved and the nightingale for the lover. The poet says that if one knows the purpose for which the martyr sacrifices his life, he will know God.

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[533] Ibid., p.130.
[534] B. Radtke, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Walī, 1. General Survey.
[535] *Kuche por az 'atr-e nāme to: majmu'e-ye ash'ār-e defā'-e moqaddas*, ed. A. Binā'i, p. 62.

Fighting for the cause of God purifies man's soul from negative character-traits, and increases his faith and piety. Ayatollah Motahhari argues that *jehād* is "the garment of piety."[536] Piety is the result of purification of the soul. The practice of religious rituals leads to piety, but one who strives in the path of God (one who is a *mojāhed*), and sacrifices his life on the battlefield gains supreme piety. When he offers his head, he renounces the world, and surrenders himself to God. Thus, he is clothed with the garment of piety. On the contrary, Ayatollah Motahhari warns the audience, one who does not fight in the path of God, will be clothed by God in a garment of humiliation because he is a force for evil.[537] Such sayings encouraged the audience to give up their lives for the revolution. They intended to take the choice that guaranteed their lives in the hereafter.

Longing for martyrdom is another subject treated by Ayatollah Motahhari. He calls it a religious duty for every Muslim. He bases an opinion on a Qur'ānic verse (29:2) which states that the believers will be tested with hardships. Ayatollah Motahhari offers several examples from the fighting between Muslims and their enemies in the first centuries of Islam. The Muslims longed for martyrdom in the service of God, and they prayed to God to give them the opportunity to die a martyr death.[538] These led the audience to draw an analogy between the Iran-Iraq war and each Muslims' battles with infidel enemies. The war between Iran and Iraq provided an opportunity for the believers to prove their faith and fidelity to God.

Another leading cleric is Hosein-'Ali Montazeri (d. 2009), a close friend and companion of Motahhari. The two "shared their personal thought."[539] Montazeri states in a Friday sermon: "O God! We each have just one soul, and we have to submit it; the best is that we offer it in your path and become martyrs. O God! Make ennobling martyrdom our portion."[540]

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[536] A.M. Motahhari,"Shahīd,"in *Jihad and Shahadat Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam,* p.130.
[537] Ibid.
[538] Ibid., pp. 132-34.
[539] G. Abdo & J. Lyons, *Answering Only to God: Faith and Freedom in Twenty- First Century Iran*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2003, p. 134.
[540] *Dar maktab-e jom'e: majmu'e-ye khotbehā-ye namāz-e jom'e-ye Tehran*, vol. 1, (sermon of 11-08-1358). Ayatollah Hosein 'Ali Montazeri was designated as his successor by Ayatollah Khomeini until March 1989, when the latter dismissed him. However, Ayatollah Montazeri would be Iran's religious leader if he moderated his criticisms of the government, according to Houchang E. Chehabi, see H. E. Chehabi, *The*

Ayatollah Motahhari distinguishes between the martyr and a reformer who is determined to make an extreme change in the society. He compares the martyr to a zealous mystic lover who offers his life in the path of divine love. Ayatollah Motahhari asserts that the combination of the logic of a mystic lover and of a reformer is the basis for a martyr's motivation.[541] Through the act of self-sacrifice, the martyr transcends worldly life. This attitude toward martyrdom mobilized both reformers, and those interested in spiritual progress, to go to the front-line.

Throughout his revolutionary career, Motahhari focused on Islamic collective consciousness. He relied on the prophetic narratives and anecdotes to awaken the collective memory. Using simple language, Motahhari sought to guide and advise the Iranian public and to revitalize morality in the Islamic community. Motahhari believed that when a community is corrupted, such stories can lead the crowd to ethical purity and elevation and will percolate to the elites. In spite of criticism, Motahhari continued publishing collections of such anecdotes, saying they are beneficial to the public. Many copies were bought by individuals, libraries, mosques and Hoseinyes, and in 1963, during the month of Ramazān, the stories were broadcast on National Radio. All this also spread Motahhari's ideological discourses among the Iranian population. The stories taught virtues such as patience, love of one's neighbor, and benevolence, which were attached to the familiar names of Qur'ānic prophets and the Shiite imams and to Shiite sacred sites such as Karbalā and Kufa. The connection of the stories to Shiite history offered the masses a sense of honor and place in history, and created nostalgia for the past when virtue held the Muslim community together. Now the Iranian public yearned for a renewal of morality.[542]

Motahhari's view of martyrdom stressed that martyrdom is an act of virtue. He asserts, "*Shahādat* is a virtuous deed as well as a spiritual progress."[543] He implies that

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Liberation Movement of Iran under the Shah and Khomeini, London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 1990, p. 310. See also M. Mahmood, *The Political System of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, India: Kalpaz Publications, 2006, p. 26.

[541] A.M. Motahhari, "Shahīd," in *Jihad and Shahadat Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam,* p.135. On Ayatollah Mortezā Motahhari's philosophical background, see H. Dabashi, *The Theology of Discontent*, pp. 147-60.

[542] H. Dabashi, *The Theology of Discontent,* pp. 158-60. The authenticity of the stories is doubtful and the original source is not applicable.

[543] A.M. Motahhari, "Shahīd," in *Jihad and Shahadat, Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam*, p. 141.

following the path of martyrdom increases morality in the community, and is through which the martyr obtains spiritual elevation. He attains the highest rank in the hereafter and may see God (*ro'yat Allāh*).[544] This is the highest stage a mystic may attain.

THE CONCEPT OF MARTYRDOM

Having discussed the opinions of two important figures who theorized the concept of martyrdom prior to the Islamic Revolution, I will focus on the application of this term and other concepts related to martyrdom. In the period under research, the concept of martyrdom was very widely used by the war poets, for its power to motivate Iranian youth. In the war poetry, death on the battlefield is identified as martyrdom. It brings honor to the martyr. In addition, martyrdom is considered as a rank, or as a position offered to the people at the dawn of creation when God decided the fate of all human beings. The war poet, 'Abbās Khosh'amal writes,

shāhed-e bazm-e alasti-yo shahid-e rah-e dust
dāde zivar be mah-o mehr rokh-e anvar-e to[545]

You are the witness of the banquet of the day of Alast, and the martyr
of the Beloved's path
Your shiny face has adorned the Moon and the Sun

In this poem, the martyr is one who has been chosen; therefore, he sacrifices his life for the cause of the Beloved. The poet relies on the mystical concept of the primordial covenant derived from Qur'ān 7:171 that implies that at the time of *alast* God predestined man's life and death.[546] However, the soldier's death is predestined before his creation, and

[544] S.M. Gieling, *The Sacralization of War in the Islamic Republic of Iran,* (PhD thesis) Ridderkerk: Ridderprint, 1998, p. 65.
[545] *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 2*, selected by M. 'A. Mardāni, p. 27.
[546] On the usage of the concept of primordial covenant in the war poetry see the present study pp. 48, 99,103 - 104, 109 and 162.

martyrdom is his inevitable fate. Because a Muslim is familiar with this myth of our creation, and the concept of his predestined fate, he willingly sacrifices his life; believing this is his fate.

In this poem, Khosh'amal implies that a soldier who offers his life on the battlefield is fulfilling his eternal covenant with God. Martyrdom is a duty under that ancient covenant, and a robe of honor for the martyred. For only a worthy man deserves to become martyr.

During the war, the war poets extolled the martyr's status in paradise. Martyrdom is explained as a means through which one attains eternal salvation (*nejāt, rastgāri*). 'Ali-Rezā Qazve, for example, writes, "Today, we are sitting in the shade of ease/ we owe this to the steadiness of the tall green [cypress] (i.e., Beloved)."[547] Green is the color of the prophet Mohammad and his family, and the color of the angels in Paradise. According to a tradition, in Paradise, the prophet Abraham is clothed in Green. The martyrs are promised a special status in paradise, in Qur'ān 3:169, and this has been elaborated upon in several traditions such as the following: "God places the souls of the martyrs into the bodies of green birds who nest in the lamps on the divine throne and eat of the fruit of the heavenly garden."[548] The martyr's green clothing in these verses is therefore a sign that they are in Paradise and will receive a divine reward.

In the war poetry, the martyr's blood saves (*nejāt, rastgāri*) him from punishment in the hereafter. This is based in the first place on Qur'ān 9:111: "God has bought from the believers their selves and their properties against the gift of Paradise; they fight in the way of God, kill and are killed…" According to this verse, fighters, whether they are killed or not, receive heavenly rewards. The martyrs are with God, "Count not those who were slain in God's way as dead; but rather living with their Lord, by Him provided …" (3:169). Islamic traditions expand on the martyr's privileges: he lives forever in paradise, his sins are forgiven, and his soul is among the souls of the early martyrs of Islam.[549]

Classical Persian poets had treated martyrdom in the context of love. Jalāl al-Din

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[547] 'A.R. Qazve, *Az nakhlestān tā khiyābān*, p. 19.
[548] G. S. Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2010, p. 160.
[549] S. M. Gieling, *Religion and War in Revolutionary Iran,* p. 55.

Rumi combines martyrdom with preserving faith and salvation. In one of his stories, he writes that a Jewish king forced people to bow down before an idol. When one refused the order, the King threw him into the fire. A woman refused to prostrate herself. To punish her, her child was thrown into the fire. When she moved to bow before the idol, the child spoke to her from the fire: "Verily, I am not dead. Come in, O mother: I am happy here, although in appearance I am amidst the fire. The fire is a spell that binds the eye for the sake of screening (the truth)… Come in my mother, and see the evidence of God, that thou mayst behold the delight of God's elect."[550] The child in this story is an example of one who sacrifices his life to be true to his beliefs. He encourages his mother to offer his life and see that the divine words are true. She responds to his call and enters the fire rather than bowing down before the idol. Many members of the community emulate her. Following the Qur'ānic verse, which celebrates martyrdom, they knowingly chose death over life to enjoy the bliss of heaven. In the above story, the child may symbolize a martyr who encourages the community to sacrifice their lives to receive divine rewards.

Because mass participation in the revolution was very important, Ayatollah Mahmud Tāleqāni (1911-1979) compares one killed by the Pahlavi regime to the martyrs. The martyrs of the Revolution are promised eternal life: "Because they [martyrs] have experienced an internal revolution and have envisioned the truth, the *shohadā*, once martyred have been guaranteed the sure gift of eternity by God."[551]

During the war years, the concepts of the martyr's salvation, and his eternal life in paradise were a matter of concern for the leaders of the Islamic Revolution. They referred to the Qur'ānic verse "Count not those who were slain in God's way as dead, but rather living with their lord, by Him provided, rejoicing in the bounty that God has given them…" (3:169-70) to emphasize the martyr's place in the hereafter, and encourage young men to go to the battlefield. The verse was frequently cited in television and radio programs. In a sermon at Friday prayers, in April 1981, Ayatollah Khāmenei refers to a personal testimony written by Rezā Rezāi who killed on the battlefield, and says: "You should know that the

[550] D. Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, p. 70.
[551] A.S.M. Taleqani, "*Jihad and Shahadat*," in *Jihad and Shahadat, Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam*, eds. M. Abedi, & G. Legenhausen, Houston: The Institute for Research and Islamic Studies, 1986, p. 68.

pāsdār (guard) who wrote this testimony is now in paradise, close to God's grace and bounty, and besides the angels of God. He says that he welcomes martyrdom. This is an invitation to the people who are guided."[552] Ayatollah Khāmenei uses the martyr's words to persuade his audience that they will enter paradise if they are killed in battle.

Another implication of martyrdom is that a martyr is permitted to intercede on behalf of his community. Intercession (*shefā'at*) is a Qur'ānic concept. The Qur'ān says that in the hereafter, man is judged by his own acts and his intentions, which allows no room for intercession. Verse 6:51 rejects the possibility of intercession. There are several references to *shefā'at* that show that *shefā'at* belongs to God. Others may intercede, if He gives permission (34:23). In Qur'ān 53:26, God permits the angels, and others acceptable to God, to intercede. According to Shiite tradition, intercession has been granted to the prophet Mohammad and after him to the twelve Shiite imams.[553] Shiites also believe that Fāteme, the prophet's daughter, may intercede on their behalf. Thus the martyr, who can also intercede on behalf of the believers, is being accorded a very lofty rank.

In Islamic tradition, a martyr may intercede on behalf of his family, his friends, his parents and the children who died in infancy.[554] The collector of prophetic *hadith*, Al-Tarmazi (825-892) holds that one of the qualities of the martyr is that "… he gains the right to intercede for 70 of his relatives."[555] Thus, one who sacrifices his life in the path of God will save many from the torments of hell. Motahhari too says that a martyr is allowed to intercede in the hereafter. He writes: According to one tradition, three types of people are allowed to intercede on the Day of Judgment: the prophets, the religious scholars (*'olamā)*, and the martyrs. They can intercede because they have led people to the right path.[556] The martyr's death is a path that leads to eternal salvation for the community.

The concept of intercession is highly developed in the war poetry to elevate the spiritual status of the martyr. The martyr lives eternally, and rescues his family from punishment in the hereafter. During the war, Iranians believed that martyrdom leads to

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[552] *Dar maktab-e jom'e: majmu'e-ye khotbehā-ye namāz-e jom'e-ye Tehran*, vol. 3, p. 185.
[553] A. J. Wensinck & D. Gimaret, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Shafā'a, 1. In Official Islam.
[554] A. Schimmel, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Shafā'a.
[555] D. Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, p. 37.
[556] A.M. Motahhari, "Shahīd," in *Jihad and Shahadat, Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam*, p. 137.

salvation and happiness; thus, they popularized the slogan, "The only path to happiness is faith, *jehād* and martyrdom" (*tanhā rah-e sa'ādat; imān, jehād, shahādat*). Faith leads the believer to fight against God's enemies. If the fight ends in his martyrdom, he will obtain eternal happiness.[557] Happiness in this context means attaining union with God, being close to God, and if man purifies his soul, attaining divine knowledge and to see God.[558]

In addition to attaining to the highest stage in the hereafter, martyrdom purifies the martyr's body so that he does not need to be washed when he dies. Ayatollah Motahhari asserts that the spirit of the martyr affects his blood, body and garments, and purifies them. Thus the martyr's virtue, spirit and sacrifice affect his outward appearance.[559] On this account, the war poet Shahāb writes, "If there is no water, shed tears for my death/ because the martyr's body does not need to be washed."[560] According to Islamic law (*shari'a*), a dead body should be washed and wrapped in a clean shroud. Then, after prayers, he may be buried. But the martyr is buried in his bloodstained clothes because martyrdom cleanses his body and clothing.[561] A pleasant smell given out by the body is a sign that the soul of one who is martyred ascended to paradise. In contrast, the loathsome smell of the enemies of Islam shows that they will go to hell.[562]

The martyr's smell has become a topos in war poetry. Nasrolāh Mardāni, in 'The Lost' (*gomshodegān*), combines the martyr's smell with the smell of the rose.

'atri ke darāmikhte bā fetrat-e golhā
bu'i-st ke az pirhan-e gomshodegān ast[563]

The attar, which is inherent to the nature of the rose

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[557] According to the Qur'ān and tradition, at the time of predestination men are divided into two groups: the happy inhabitants of Paradise versus the unhappy inhabitants in the Hell. For further information see H. Daiber, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Sa'āda.

[558] H. Daiber, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Sa'āda.

[559] A.M. Motahhari, "Shahīd," in *Jihad and Shahadat, Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam*, p. 127.

[560] M. 'A. Mardāni, *Sure-ye adabiyyāt-e 'Āshurā 3*, p. 73.

[561] M. Abedi & G. Legenhausen, "Introduction," in *Jihad and Shahadat, Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam*, eds. M. Abedi, & G. Legenhausen, Houston: The Institute for Research and Islamic Studies, 1986, p. 26.

[562] D. Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam*, p. 118.

[563] *Gozide-ye she'r-e jang va defā'-e moqaddas*, p. 303

Is a scent from the clothing of the lost

In this poem, the rose's scent is borrowed from the martyrs. The word lost (*gomshode*) refers to soldiers killed on the front whose bodies have not been found. In this poem, the martyr's scent may stand for the flowers growing from martys' blood. In Persian literature, the rose is a metaphor for the beloved. The martyr of love offers his life for the Beloved to show His loftiness and superiority.

Another reference to the scent of martyrdom is by the poet Soleymān Farrokhzād, in which he refers to the unique experience of martyrdom, likening it to the prophet's ascension to God's throne, where the nocturnal traveller encounters God in absolute solitude:

... Az marzhāy-e dur
shab bu-ye khun
bu-ye nāb-e shahādat miāyad
insān 'azim parvāz ra
dar bikarān-e khette-ye eslām
hargez kasi sorāgh nadārad...[564]

… Night: from distant borders comes
The smell of blood
And the pure scent of martyrdom.
No one remembers
Such a lofty flight
In the vast bounds of Islam …

Aqdas Binā'i gathered a collection of war poems and called it 'The Alley is Filled with the Perfume of your Name' (*kuch por az 'atr-e nām-e to*). She says that the martyr's name has

[564] *Mosābeqe-ye she'r-e jang*, pp. 68-9.

a scent, which has filled the alley. The title may be connected to the renaming of streets in honour of the martyrs.

STRIVING FOR MARTYRDOM

Striving for a martyr's death (*talab al-shahādat* or *shahādat talabi*) is another theme in the war poetry. Often the poet expresses his own regret that he survived the war. The concept is derived from the Khawārej, who protested against the Umayyad rulers in the first two centuries of Islam. They used the concept of *talab al-shahādat* in their works, celebrated their fighters' martyrdoms with impressive poetry, and praising longing for death, and self-annihilation.[565] Yearning for death is expressed in the war poetry through motifs such as the journey of the companions (*safar kardan-e yārān*),[566] flying (*parvāz kardan*), and making a covenant (*peymān bastan*), all showing the martyr's longing for self-sacrifice and an active death.[567] These motifs occur repeatedly, and negligence and indifference to martyrdom are condemned.

During the war, the leaders of the Islamic Republic praised the martyrs and those who yearned for a martyr's death. For instance, in one sermon, Ayatollah Khāmenei holds that God's power is revealed by miraculous events such as yearning for martyrdom, "The power of faith (*imān*) transforms man to undefeated existence. Striving for martyrdom motivates man to seek death while others are escaping from it. This is the secret power of God."[568] He implies that the divine secret of God is manifest when a soldier intentionally chooses death and goes to the front. Clerics propagated this notion at the Friday congregation prayers. For instance, Ayatollah Musavi Ardebili offers an example of the soldiers' enthusiasm for martyrdom in a sermon: "When I went to the corps of the special guards (*sepāh-e pāsdārān*), I asked them what the name of this corps was. They replied 'the

[565] A. Neuiwrth, "From Sacrilege to Sacrifice: Observation on Violent Death in Classical and Modern Arabic Poetry," in *Martyrdom in Literature*, p. 263.
[566] See M. 'A. Mo'allem Dāmghāni, *Rej'at-e sorkh-e setāre,* p. 42.
[567] See *Kuche por az 'atr-e nāme to: majmu'e-ye ash'ār-e defā'-e moqaddas,* ed. A. Binā'i, p. 40.
[568] *Dar maktab-e jom'e: majmu'e-ye khotbehā-ye namāz-e jom'e-ye Tehran*, vol. 3, p. 87, (sermon of 06/02/1981). For further instances see Ibid. pp. 138-9 and 237.

station of waiting for martyrdom' (*pāygāh-e entezār-e shahādat*)."[569] In the war poetry, the concept of striving for martyrdom is used to mobilize the young men to lay down their lives on the battlefield. In this state, the soldier wishes to become both undefeated, and a means through which God reveals His secret.

The concept of *talab al-shahādat* is treated in the martyrs' testaments (*vasiyyat-nāme-ye shohadā*), their poems, and in the letters of potential martyrs. The martyr Nasrollah Shahābi wrote to his mother, "I have preferred the martyr's path, which is divine prosperity, to mundane hope. I am ready to die."[570] The war poet Jalāl Mohammadi writes:

…
hargez az pā naneshinim ke dar qāmat-e mā
khun-e bidār-e shahidān-e khodā dar jush ast
lezzat-e zakhm-e shahādat na to dāni-yo na man
dānad ān kas ke ze minā-ye jonun madhush ast[571]

We never stop striving because in our bodies
The awakened blood of the martyrs of God is boiling.
Neither you nor I know the pleasure of the wound that causes martyrdom
He who is bewildered by the cup of madness, he knows it.

In this poem, there is a reference to the martyrs' blood boiling in an Iranian's body (literally, his stature). The implication is that Iranians are ready to give up their lives to avenge the martyrs' blood. He says no one knows the pleasure of martyrdom but one who is bewildered because of drinking from the cup of madness. For the poet, martyrdom is something joyful, which few may taste.

In the war poetry, being prepared for self-sacrifice is seen in the themes such as regret for not becoming a martyr. 'Ali- Rezā Qazve regrets his survival in a *ghazal* titled

[569] Ibid., p. 98; also see Ibid. pp. 139, 206 and 247.
[570] N. Nazemi, "Sacrifice and Authorship: a compendium of the wills of Iranian war martyrs," *Iranian Studies*, vol. 30, no. 3-4, (Summer /Fall 1997), p. 269.
[571] A. Makāreminiyā, *Barrasi-ye she'r-e defā'-e moqaddas*, p. 48.

'The Brands' (*dāghdārihā*).

az in meydān khodāyā tak-savārān-e rahā raftand
che khāhad kard tefl-e hemmatam bā ney-savāri-hā[572]

O God! The liberated horseman left this field
What has become of my childish ambition, riding a reed cane

The soldier killed in battle is liberated. One who is detached from worldly pleasures and is metaphorically indicated as a warrior riding on a horse (*tak-savār*). The horse may be seen as martyrdom, through which the soldier reaches the end of the path, which is union with God. In contrast, the survivor is a child whose ambition is worth no more than pretending in play that a stout reed is a horse.

Striving for martyrdom penetrated deeply into the hearts of the Iranians. Very soon after the beginning of the war, young men went to the front-line to sacrifice their lives, simply to die as martyrs. The martyrs' testaments mention several reasons for which they were willing to sacrifice their lives: for the cause of Islam, the revolution, for Iran, or for a reward in the Hereafter. It is important to note that during the war not only those who died in the path of God (*dar rāh-e haqq*) on the battlefield were identified as martyrs, but also those who died for the sake of their country. Thus, self-sacrifice for national goals was identified as martyrdom.[573] This definition transforms martyrdom, originally conceived as dying for the cause of God or in the fight against unbelievers, to a core element in national identity. However this development was foreshadowed in secular literature even before the revolution.

MARTYRDOM IN SECULAR LITERATURE

The Muslim community venerates the martyrs, and identifies them as holy figures. During

[572] 'A.R. Qazve, *Az nakhlestān tā khiyābān*, p. 17.
[573] S.M. Gieling, *Religion and War in Revolutionary Iran,* pp. 56-57.

the Revolution, the concept of death for a higher cause was so strong that secular groups such as Marxists wrote about it. For instance, a leading Marxist theoretician in the early 1970s, Bizhan Jazani (1937-1975) asserts that the sacrifice of blood is a way of initiating protest against a dictatorial regime. Although Marxists were not widely popular among Iranians, their deaths in the Siyāhkal uprising (1971) proved their authenticity. For them, martyrdom was a means towards their goal. In *Iranian Irony: Marxists Becoming Muslims,* Abdy Javādzadeh refers to Khosrow Golsorkhi's last defense in the court before his execution by the Pahlavi regime. Golsorkhi uses the example of imam Hosein's fight and death to say that he was sacrificing his life for the cause of the oppressed.[574] From Golsorkhi's defense and the works of secular writers and poets, it may be concluded that they too strove for martyrdom, or praised the act of martyrdom. In their works, generally, they create a character who is an ideal, entirely devoted to the norms and values of the community. Single handedly, he fights against the oppressor to preserve the community. He may offer his life. Samad Behrangi's 'Little Black Fish' (*Māhi-ye siyāh-e kuchulu*) is an example of this type of literature. This is the story of a hero, the little black fish, who in spite of all odds chooses to fight against the enemy, the Fish Eater. The Black Fish is aware of his fate, but fights for the freedom of the community.[575] Iran's famous writer of the 1960s, Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad (1923-1969) wrote on martyrdom. Rezā Barāheni writes, "… He [Āl-e Ahmad] expected to become a martyr but he did not. I feel he wanted to become a living witness to martyrdom. And those who are put in the position of martyrdom possess charisma."[576] Nevertheless, the poet Ahmad Shāmlu (1925-2000) in his 'Repetition' (*tekrār*) calls the poets prophets and martyrs.[577] The poet tries to awaken people, and shows them that, if they protest, they may achieve at least "material well-being."[578] The poet

[574] A. Javadzadah, *Iranian Irony: Marxists Becoming Muslims*, Pennsylvania: Rose Dog Books, 2011, pp. 51-54.
[575] M. Dorraj, "Symbolic and Utilitarian Political Value of a Tradition: Martyrdom in the Iranian Political Culture", in *The Review of Politics*, vol. 59. no. 3, Non-Western Political Thought (Summer, 1997), p. 513. For more analysis of the *Little Black Fish* see K. Tallatof, *The Politic of Writings in Iran: A History of Modern Persian*, pp. 75-76.
[576] Ibid., p. 514.
[577] Ibid.,
[578] L.P. Alishan, "Ahmad Shamlu: The Rebel Poet in Search of an Audience," in *Iranian Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2/4, Sociology of Iranian Writer (Spring-Autumn, 1985), p. 386.

writes:

> *jangale ā'ine foru rikht*
> *va rasulāni khaste be tabār-e shahidān peyvastand*
> *va shā'erān be tabār-e shahidān peyvastand*
> *chonān kabutarān-e āzād-parvāzi ke be dast-e gholāmān zebh mishavand*
> *tā sofre-ye arbābān rā rangin konand.*[579]
>
> The thicket of mirrors fell off
> And the wearied messengers joined the generations of martyrs
> And the poets joined the martyrs' generation
> Like doves, fly freely; be slaughtered by the hands of slaves
> To make the masters' table-cloth colorful

Shāmlu draws an analogy between the prophets and the poets and likens them to doves, the bird that symbolizes freedom. Perhaps Shāmlu believes that poets are as lonely as the prophets (the 'wearied messengers') when they are conveying the message of freedom, and when they are leading ignorant people to rebel against those in power. The celebration of martyrdom can be seen among leftist groups such as Mojāhedin-e Khalq. In 1975, in a declaration (*bayāniyye*), the Mojāhedin announced that the organization would follow Marxism-Leninism because it is the true path to man's liberation.[580] Yet they maintain that a man distinguishes himself from the animals, and may settle beside God, by means of self-sacrifice. For this reason, during the Revolution when they showed their opposition to the Pahlavi regime, several of them suffered torture, but did not reveal any secrets of their organization.[581] In the poems of war, martyrdom is a means to deliver the soldier to the heaven, and it is prayer that connects them to God. If the soldier is not martyred he will

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[579] A. Shāmlu, *Majmu'e-ye āthār*, vol. 1 (1323-1376), selected by Niyāz-e Ya'qūbshāhi, Tehran: Zamāne, 1378/ 1999, p. 489.
[580] E. Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, p. 145.
[581] M. Dorraj, "Symbolic and Utilitarian Political Value of a Tradition: Martyrdom in the Iranian Political Culture," *The Review of Politics*, p. 516.

regret his survival. These are the themes treated in the following paragraphs.

THE LITTER OF MARTYRDOM

The war poet Soleymān Farrokhzād combines the concept of martyrdom with that of a *howdaj*, a framework placed on the back of camel in which people in the Arab lands traveled.

…
bā hejrat-e to
dar howdaj-e shahādat
'ommāl-e sar-seporde-ye doshman
nābud mishavand[582]
…
When you are emigrating,
in the howdah of martyrdom,
the enemy's devoted agents are becoming non-existence.

In the above poem, martyrdom is called a migration (*hejrat*). The word alludes to the journey of the prophet and his followers from Mecca to Medina in 622.[583] Also a Muslim's act of leaving his homeland to fight in the cause of God (*fi sabil Allāh*) is called *hijrat*. The martyr is pictured as emigrating, mounted on a howdah. The howdah itself alludes to imam Hosein's death at Karbalā, when his family were captured and carried away in a howdah. There is an analogy between the Iranian soldier and *Mohājerun* who, in seventh century, participated in *futuhāt*.[584] They both are fighting to preserve Islamic principles. The combination 'howdah of martyrdom' may symbolize a coffin. In the above poem, martyrdom does not mean death alone, but also victory, because in the last line quoted,

[582] *Mosābeqe-ye she'r-e jang*, pp. 68-9.
[583] See M. Khalid Masud, " The Obligation to Migrate: the Doctrine of *hijra* in Islamic Law," in *Muslim Travellers, Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination*, ed. D. F. Eickelman & J. Piscatori, California: University of California Press, 1990, p. 33.
[584] See P. Crone, "The First-Century Concept of Higra," in *Arabica*, T. 41, Fasc. 3, Nov., 1994, pp. 356-360.

martyrdom guarantees the destruction of the Iraqi enemy, who are *sar-seporde:* this compound would literally mean 'with a beaten head' but it is used in the sense of obedient, submissive and dependent. The poet criticizes the enemy because they are uncritically following an illegitimate ruler. According to the Shiite tradition, imam Hosein and his heirs, the twelve Shiite imams and the leaders of the Islamic Republic are legitimate rulers. Saddam Hosein and his soldiers are on a wrong path, which leads to their destruction. In this poem, there is also an allusion to the religious belief that imam Hosein's martyrdom destroyed and dishonored Yazid. The former gave up his life to bear witness to the latter's illegitimacy. Like imam Hosein, the soldier's martyrdom unveiled the fact that Saddam Hosein's authority is illegal and illegitimate, according to the poet.

THE CRYSTALLINE CALL OF MARTYRDOM

To legitimize the Islamic Republic, and to establish that participating in the war was a religious duty, the war poets used religious elements such as the call to prayer in the context of martyrdom, so as to mobilize the soldiers to fight and to preserve Shiite Islam. 'Abdollāh Giviyān uses the phrase 'the crystal call of martyrdom *(azān-e bolurin-e shahādat)* in a poem entitled 'I Know my Ancestry Well' (*tabār-e khod rā khub mishenāsam*):

pish az ān ke ruznāme-hā benevisand
yā mowjhā beguyand
az me'rāj-e sabz-e pedar
yā forud-e mushak-e noh metri (...)

bozorg-e khānevāde-ye mā
dar dasht-e neynavā
nimehāy-e shab
azān-e bolurin-e shahādat mikhānad

man tabār-e khod rā khub mishenāsam …[585]

Before the newspapers announce,
Or the waves speak,
Of a father's green ascension
Or the landing of a nine-meter missile
…
The ancestor of our family
In the plain of Neynavā
At midnight
Recited the crystalline call to martyrdom
I know my ancestry well.

'Abdollāh Giviyān addresses imam Hosein and his companions as the 'ancestors' or 'origin' of the Iranians. Their fight against the Sunni enemy is justified by stating that imam Hosein calls his companions to support him on the plain of Neynavā (the locality of Karbalā). The poet asserts that he is deeply aware that his 'ancestors' (the founders of Shiite Islam, rather than ancient Iranians) sacrificed their lives in the path of imam Hosein. Therefore, both an Iranian soldier killed in the fight and innocent citizen killed when the enemy attacked the cities are martyrs and will ascend to the throne of God. Such references to the civilian victims of the war cultivate hatred and a desire for revenge in the readers' heart.

In the third line, the poet draws an analogy between death on the military front and a spiritual ('green') ascension.[586] He employs the motif of the crystal call to martyrdom (*azān-e bolurin-e shahādat),* and juxtaposes it with imam Hosein's martyrdom, to assert that martyrdom is a cultural heritage of Iranians (conflated with Shiites) that is handed down from one generation to the next. The compound *azān bolurin* (crystalline call) implies that participation in the fight is as important as daily prayer. The word used for

[585] *Gozide-ye she'r-e jang va defā'-e moqaddas*, pp. 136-7.
[586] For a brief explanation about the concept of ascension in the war poetry see this study chapter 3.

calling (*azān*) usually refers to a call to prayer. Crystalline, in poetic use, connotes hard and unyielding. The compound may refer to the night before the battle at Karbalā, when, according to Shiite accounts, imam Hosein prayed and reminded his followers that they would die as martyrs the next day. As the events of ʻĀshurā are celebrated every year, Iranians are taught by this account that imam Hosein consciously welcomed death at Karbalā. For Hosein, fighting against an unjust ruler was more meaningful than saving his life by keeping silence. This idea is also reflected in Sunni classical chronicles such as *the History of al-Tabari* by Abu Jaʻfar Mohammad Ebn Jarir Tabari. He writes: "When evening came, Hosein and his followers spent the whole night in performing the prayer, in calling on God's forgiveness and in making invocations and humbler entreaties."[587] Thus imam Hosein and his followers prepared themselves to stand before the throne of God, because they knew they would not survive. By using such references, which are familiar to an Iranian audience, ʻAbdollāh Giviyān compares the Iran-Iraq war to imam Hosein's battle, and asserts a bond of blood between Iranian soldiers and imam Hosein or his companions. To show that Iranians are imam Hosein's heirs, he uses the word ancestry (*tabār*). What they have in common is that they are not afraid of death, are eagerly waiting to see God, and therefore do not flee the battlefield and desert their leader (Ayatollah Khomeini). In this poem, imam Hosein's prayer and recitation of the Qur'ān is compared to Ayatollah Khomeini's call to participate in the war. The poet asserts that it is a duty for the Iranian community to fight against the enemy. Ayatollah Khomeini used this rhetoric during the Islamic Revolution to motivate Iranians to protest against the Pahlavi monarch and he continued to do the same during the war

REGRET FOR SURVIVAL

The war poets also express their regret that they have survived, even as they use that opportunity to inspire the population to offer their lives passionately, and die a martyr's death. In the following excerpt, ʻAli-Rezā Qazve shows a deep sense of nostalgia:

[587] Abu Jaʻfar Mohammad Ibn Jarir Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, p.119.

gol-e ashkam shabi vā mishod ey kāsh
hame dardam modāvā mishod ey kāsh
be har kas qesmati dādi khodāyā
shahādat qesmat-e mā mishod ey kāsh[588]

I wish the rose of my tears would blossom at night
I wish all my pains would cure,
Everyone received his portion, O God!
I wish, martyrdom had been my portion.

The poet wishes that martyrdom would be his portion. The word *qesmat* means "The portion of fate, good or bad, specifically allotted to and destined for each individual."[589] In this poem, martyrdom is considered as a cure for all pain, and as the portion bestowed by God on certain individuals as an act of grace. God elects the martyrs in Primordial time, making them special persons with a special relationship to the Creator. Although the poet presumably believes that there can be no change in God's decision, he complains and asks why he was given an unfavorable portion, meaning, why he survived when his companions were martyred.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have explained how the concept of martyrdom, a pivotal element in Shiite Islam, was used in the war poetry to motivate the sense of self-sacrifice in the Iranian population. To offer a backdrop, I discussed how, during the Revolution the lectures given by 'Ali Shariati and Ayatollah Mortezā Motahhari presented a new meaning for martyrdom, and the necessity of overthrowing the Pahlavi monarch through direct action. Under their influence, Iranians sacrificed their lives to achieve a higher goal, 'Ali Shariati popularized the concept of the culture of martyrdom. He refers to imam Hosein's self-sacrifice at

[588] 'A.R. Qazve, *Az nakhlestān tā khiyābān*, p. 37.
[589] C.E. Bosworth, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2), under Ḳisma.

Karbalā presenting it as a model for the youth to emulate. In the 1980s, their literary works re-introduced the concept of active martyrdom, reminding Iranians of its vital role in preserving Shiite Islam, Iranian Shiite culture, and resisting the Western cultural invasion by fighting the Pahlavi regime.

Because martyrdom is supposed to bring joy and happiness in the hereafter, the secular writers who opposed the Pahlavi regime referred to it, as a useful tool to inspire popular protest against the Shāh, and to inspire their followers to sacrifice their lives rather than reveal the secrets of the revolutionary organizations.

During the war, to cultivate a readiness for self-sacrifice, the leaders of the Islamic revolution propagated the concept of striving for martyrdom. In their sermons, they made many references to Hosein's death, to assert that he consciously chose death over life because he wanted to convey a message to the oppressed nations: every individual is responsible for participating in the fight against the tyrant ruler. Imam Hosein's example inspired Iranian soldiers to self-sacrificing behavior to defeat the enemy. They chose the path of martyrdom in hope of being united with God, and becoming the companions of the Master of Martyrs, imam Hosein, in paradise. The war poets used religious motifs to identify death in battle as religious martyrdom. The soldier believes that when he sacrifices his life he will not only contribute to military victory but also will witness the illegitimacy of Saddam Hosein and the righteousness of the leaders of Iran. In addition, he receives heavenly rewards, and may intercede on behalf of his community on the Last Day.

General Conclusion

This book examined how modern Persian war poets relied on classical mystical motifs and religious events to legitimize the war against Iraq and to encourage Iranians to fight the enemy. It illustrates how Iran's literary tradition has been used extensively in the politics of the twentieth century to inflame a sense of self-sacrifice in the public. In this book, I explored how war poets and leaders of the Islamic Republic used mystical and religious poetry to motivate Iranians to lay down their lives. Most Iranians have extensive knowledge of classical literary traditions and Shiite religious history. Their familiarity with the life of known mystics and religious figures prepared the way for a new interpretation of mystical motifs and religious metaphors. They came to believe the new message, propagated by the leaders of the Islamic Republic, defining the front-line as a shortcut to spiritual perfection and eternal salvation. Some soldiers came to believe that death on the battlefield was a way to unite themselves with the Beloved. For other soldiers the war transformed into a fight between Shiites and the Sunni authorities. Shi'a Iranians were encouraged to see Saddam's army of Sunni Iraqis as responsible for the death of the prophet Mohammad's grandson, Hosein. Thus Iranian soldiers, in the their minds, fought to avenge the blood of their holy imam.

The war poems were published to celebrate martyrdom and self-sacrifice. They were recited in a variety of public gatherings, such as the poetry of Sacred Defense. Local radio stations and broadcasting networks broadcast the poems to activate the collective memory of Iranians. Soon after the beginning of the war the institutions and organizations that supported the Islamic Republic began to propagate its principles by holding conferences, exhibiting photos of war trenches, martyrs, and holding exhibitions at street corners. War poems were published and distributed in book stores as well as through newly founded organizations which propagated committed and revolutionary literature. Many newspapers had columns written about the war, along with martyrdom narrations and poetry. In addition to universities and schools, where religious practices were fostered, a

large number of organizations supporting the Islamic Republic offered cultural and religious programs to disseminate notions that supported the war.

Culturally, many Iranians are interested in medieval mystical tenets as a means to develop their moral and ethical values. They keep this tradition alive when they recite literary works by poets such as Rumi or Hafez, venerating them as holy figures. Concerning the role of mysticism among Iranians, Ridgeon quotes the Iranian scholar Sa'id Nafisi who asserts, "This [mystic] wisdom has settled so deeply in the peoples of these two countries [Iran and India], that they themselves do not know to what extent they are Sufis."[590]

It is taken for granted the Iranians have been inspired by mystic sentiments for centuries. During the war mystical motifs were introduced into a military context, and made the soldier recall these motifs in wartime. He believed that he was a mystic walking the path of spiritual growth. Spiritual elevation, achievable through self-mortification and self-denial, was fundamentally changed. For Iranian soldiers, such ascetic principles could be achieved on the front line when they bid farewell to life. Iranian soldiers based their physical and spiritual lives on these principles, allowing the war to be interpreted as a spiritual endeavor. Thus, soldiers identified themselves with the medieval mystic Hallāj who sacrificed his life to experience self-annihilation.

As I demonstrated in this book, classical literary and religious traditions have been in the foreground in Persian culture, forming an indispensable aspect of being Iranian. It was not farfetched for the Iranian government to utilize cultural and literary motifs in a modern war setting, persuading young and old to hasten to the front line and give meaning to their lives. Even dying became a goal.

While poetry is everywhere in Iran, Shi'a religious stories are ingrained in the minds of Iranians from early childhood. They are intimately familiar with the one-sided battle between imam Hosein and Ebn al-Ziyād, Yazid's commander. Since the Safavid dynasty, Iranians have commemorated the death of Hosein and his companions in *rowza-khāni* gatherings. Certain elements of the story of Karbalā are emphasized. Iranians hear every year during the annual celebration how Hosein was killed, his family taken prisoner

[590] L. Ridgeon, *Sufi Castigator: Kasravi and the Iranian Mystical Tradition*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2006, p.14.

and humiliated. During the war, Iranian clerics offered a new interpretation in their sermons recounting the events of Karbalā. They compared the war between predominantly Shiite Iran and Sunni-governed Iraq, to the fight between imam Hosein and his companions with the soldiers of Yazid. During the sermons and commemoration of Hosein's death in passion plays, Shi'a Muslims can show their sympathy by weeping loudly, beating their head and chest and cursing the executioner of Hosein. When Shi'a Iranians drink water, they may say: "O Hosein the martyr!" (*yā Hosein-e shahid*), to remember how the imam and his family were denied water from the Euphrates. In this regard, Iranians were receptive to the message that the war was analogous to the battle of Karbalā. The Iranian government invoked these types of religious feelings in Iranians, adapting these religious memories and events to new situations. It was in this context that Iranians became ready to show their faithfulness to imam Hosein. It was due to this strong emotional bond that Iranians were ready to fight Sunni Iraq and avenge their holy imam, marching towards Hosein's shrine in Karbalā.

Another way of encouraging Iranians onto the battlefield was to compare the battle to mystical elevation, encountering the Beloved. Their familiarity with mystical poetry and concepts provided the opportunity for soldiers to compare their struggles to initiation into the spiritual path of perfection, and even equating their battles to ascension into heaven, modeled on the prophet Mohammad's journey to the Throne of God.

Employing mystical and religious motifs was not unique to the war poetry. These motifs were used during both the Constitutional Revolution (1906-1911), and the Islamic Revolution of 1979. What characterizes the war poetry is that by using the motifs and metaphors, during the war, the soldiers were encouraged to lay-down their lives. Although during the above mentioned revolutions death for a higher cause was praised, it did not mean that the revolutionaries were duty bound to choose death over life. In the years of the war, a soldier who survived believed that he did not perform his duty.

Casting a glance at Iran's history, there are several anti-mystic writers who were not interested in pursuing the mystical path of spiritual elevation. The most prominent writer on this account is Ahamd Kasravi (1890-1946). His works inspired 'Ali Shariati who criticized Islamic mysticism, saying that it leads society to quietism and remaining indifferent

towards social injustice. Following the mystic path of salvation did not meet the need for active participation in demonstrations against the Pahlavi regime. According to Shariati, a more fitting alternative was elaborating on the concept of martyrdom and the death of imam Hosein: an active model, which he introduced to motivate Iranians to protest against the Pahlavi monarch.

In this study, several complimentary themes were studies. Firstly, the Shi‘a religious appeal for establishing a Shiite state, implying that a Sunni state is illegitimate. There is a responsibility on the shoulders of the Shi‘a to overthrow Sunni authorities. The Shiites of Iran viewed the battle of Karbalā and imam Hosein’s death as an example, believing that the imam fought against the Sunnite Yazid because he did not respect the *shari‘a*. This idea is propagated by the Islamic Republic of Iran to stress the superiority of Iranians as a representative of Shiite Islam over Iraqis as the archetype of Sunni Islam. Throughout the war, Iranian regime asserted that Iran not only wanted to preserve the ‘truth of Islam’ but also to free the holy sites of the Shiites and establish just authority. Surprisingly, during this period, references to the Shiites of Iraq were meagre.

Secondly, to implement the ideals of the leaders of the Islamic Republic, such as the spread of the Islamic Revolution to the world, the Iranians are responsible for supporting and freeing the Muslims of the world from tyrannies imposed upon them. They believed that because Iraq consisted of a Shi‘a majority with Sunni rulers, it was the best place to begin. In this regards, Iranian soldiers altruistically laid down their lives to free the Shiite Muslims of Iraq. The propaganda machine lead the former to believe that they should assist Palestinians defeat the ‘Zionist’ regime governing the al-Aqsā mosque in Jerusalem. Another ideal was introducing Ayatollah Khomeini, or his successor, as the leader of the Muslims of the world (*vali-ye faqih-e moslemin-e jahān*). To achieve this goal it was necessary to inspire the Iranians to actively participate in the fight. Ayatollah Khomeini stated that Iran had a twenty million army (*artesh-e bist milyuni*), indicating that all Iranians are ready to fight for Islam. Leadership of the Muslim world would be possible once they had occupied Iraq, and then Jerusalem.

Thirdly, this study discusses how Iranian government formulated ideals that were applicable to both Shiite and Sunni Muslims. The government emphasized its wish to

establish a Muslim state in Jerusalem and to liberate al-Aqsā mosque, indicating that it is the right of Muslims to rule over the Islamic holy sites. In political conflicts, the Islamic states made references to al-Aqsā mosque to motivate the Muslims (Shi'a and Sunni) to fight against the prospective enemy that is never named.

Fourthly, the universal concept of martyrdom and the martyrs' divine reward were a powerful concept that influenced Iranians to fight effectively on the battlefield. Comparable to the mystical concept of self-annihilation, the soldier assumed martyrdom as a mystical stage that unites him with the Beloved. The major difference between the aforementioned concepts is the way that individuals offer their most precious belonging: life. The similarity between martyrdom and spiritual self-annihilation are as follows: both the soldier and the mystic leave their families and their belongings in order to initiate into the path. The soldier breaks his ties with worldly interests, begins his journey to the battlefield where he endures hardship and fights against the enemy. If he dies as a martyr, he will receive divine rewards. The mystic, in his turn, leaves his interests behind and traverses through the path of spiritual perfection. He mortifies his body to purify his soul and strives to fight against the temptations of the Satan, namely the enemy. After his death, he becomes one with the Beloved. The correspondence between the concepts of martyrdom and self-annihilation, leads the soldier to believe that his death is a stage of spiritual elevation, and a short cut to the eternal union with the Beloved.

Iran's historical upheavals show that Iran's literary past has been used for various purposes. To praise a beloved or a patron, to illustrate mystical states and to show one's longing for spiritual perfection and self-annihilation into the Beloved. These literary themes are employed to compare the fight against an actual enemy to the fight against the enemy of the soul, and to equate martyrdom to annihilation into the Beloved. The discussion remains open whether Iran's literary past will be used in future to inspire public support of prospective revolutionaries.

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DUTCH SUMMARY

INTRODUCTIE

Eén van de meest dramatische gebeurtenissen in de moderne geschiedenis van het Midden-Oosten was het uitbreken van de Iran-Irak oorlog in de jaren 80 van de vorige eeuw. In dit onderzoek wordt nagegaan welke mystiek-religieuze motieven en belangrijke gebeurtenissen uit de sji'itische geschiedschrijving Iraanse dichters benutten om de bevolking te inspireren naar het front te gaan.

INDELING EN INHOUD VAN HET WERK

Het aanwenden van motieven uit de klassiek Perzische literaire traditie voor politieke doeleinden ontstond in Iran tijdens de zogenaamde "Constitutionele Revolutie" (1905-1911), die beoogde de absolute macht van de (Qadjaarse) sjah door middel van het instellen van een grondwet in te perken. Juist in deze periode begonnen dichters en schrijvers de mystieke beeldspraak in te zetten om de massale corruptie en de buitenlandse bemoeienissen in het land aan de kaak te stellen. Zo werd de symboliek van een bekend mystiek motief van de liefde voor een *onbereikbare Beminde*, zijnde de verpersoonlijking van Gods aanwezigheid, gereïnterpreteerd als liefde voor het *vaderland*.

Tijdens het latere Pahlavi bewind in de jaren 60 en 70 waren de religieuze, mystieke motieven en beeldspraak uit de Perzische literatuur, die onder brede lagen van de bevolking overbekend waren, ook herkenbaar aanwezig in de massale protesten tegen de regering. Ze werden ook ingezet om de Iraniërs te mobiliseren tijdens de Islamitische Revolutie van 1979. Zo werd Ayatollah Khomeini vergeleken met een klassieke held die het land weer van de onderdrukking door een tirannieke heerser zou verlossen. In de Iran-Irak oorlog werden ze aangewend om de opoffering van jonge mensen (om op deze wijze bepaalde militaire doelstellingen te behalen) te rechtvaardigen. De soldaten werden door de oorlogsdichters betiteld als *Minnaars van het mystieke pad*, dat, in hun gevechten tegen het Iraakse leger, naar de *Geestelijke Vervolmaking* en de *Algehele opname in God* zou leiden.

Er kon ook een meer sji'itisch-religieuze wending aan deze strijd gegeven worden door de soldaten te beschouwen als de trouwe aanhangers van de derde sji'itische Imam Hossein, die in 680 in de historische Slag bij Karbalā (gelegen in het huidige Irak), de martelaarsdood vond. Saddam Hoessein, de toenmalige dictator van Irak, werd op één lijn gesteld met Imam Hosseins aartsvijand, de soennitische kalief Yazid.

Het eerder genoemde begrip *Liefde* heeft in de klassieke poëzie, m.n. in de mystieke kant ervan, een aantal cruciale functies met hun bijbehorende motieven, die ook in de Iran-Irak oorlog relevant waren. Zo was de *Liefde* in staat om de *Minnaar* en de *Beminde* te verenigen. Zij kon dan verlichting brengen aan de harten van de soldaten, die immers op het slagveld als de *Minnaars* van de *Beminde* (d.i. God, Imam Hossein e.a.) de Iraakse troepen (d.i. de vijanden van de *Beminde*) bevochten.

De andere rol van de Liefde is dat zij ook als leermeester in de zogenaamde *School van de Liefde*, optreedt, waar in het *Boek van de Liefde* onderwezen wordt. De lessen in deze *School van de Liefde* bestaan uit de *Versterving* en *Zuivering* van de lage *Zelf* (d.i. met al zijn instincten en dierlijke lusten) op het pad naar de *Beminde*. In de Iran-Irak oorlog maakten dichters aldus een vergelijking tussen deze *School van de Liefde* en het slagveld. Immers, de ontberingen van de soldaat op het slagveld zijn analoog aan de zelfkastijding van een mysticus (d.i. de *Minnaar van het mystieke pad*). Het slagveld is dan de *School van de Liefde*, waar de soldaat zijn geestelijke *Verheffing* bereikt.

Traditioneel werd God als de leermeester van deze *Liefde* beschouwd. Door sommige oorlogsdichters werd een nieuw motief geïntroduceerd door Imam Hossein ook als een leermeester van de Liefde voor zijn volgelingen te beschouwen, aangezien Hossein in de Slag bij Karbalā zijn leven voor de goede zaak gegeven had. Deze ultieme daad van zelfopoffering diende door de Iraanse soldaten aan het front nagevolgd te worden.

Naast de *School van de Liefde* kunnen we ook nog het *Pad van de Liefde* als een belangrijk motief in de oorlogspoëzie noemen. Oorspronkelijk verwees het *Pad van de Liefde* naar een alternatief naast de formele godsdienstbeoefening. De moderne dichterlijke reïnterpretatie is dat door naar de frontlinies af te reizen de soldaten symbolisch dit *Pad van de Liefde* betreden, waarbij gehoorzaamheid en opoffering tot op zekere hoogte gelijkwaardig zijn aan de formele rituelen in de moskee. Aldus kunnen de soldaten al snel

het spirituele niveau van een klassieke mysticus, die zijn hele leven met ascetische praktijken vult, halen.

Tot slot, de eindbestemming van deze Liefde, de *Ka'ba van de Liefde*, is ook een veelvuldig aangehaald motief. Deze *Ka'ba van de Liefde* bevindt zich in (of is gelijk aan) het *Hart* van de Schepping en dat van de mysticus. Deze *Ka'ba van de Liefde* is superieur aan de echte Ka'ba in de fysieke wereld van Mekka, aangezien de schoonheid van de *Beminde* zich als een weerspiegeling in dit *Hart* openbaart. In de oorlogspoëzie wordt de bestemming van een soldaat, het slagveld, met deze *Ka'be van het Hart* vergeleken. Pregnant hierbij is dat juist door de dood op het slagveld het *Hart*, deze *Ka'be van de Liefde*, van de aanwezigheid van afgoderij gezuiverd wordt (waardoor de schoonheid van *Beminde* beter tot zijn recht komt).

Het tweede belangrijke thema dat uit de mystieke traditie geleend is de beeldspraak rond het leven van de mystieke martelaar Mansoer Hallādj, die in 922 AD mede vanwege zijn godslasterlijke uiting ‘Ik ben de Waarheid’ door het soennitische kaliefenhof in Baghdad ter dood veroordeeld werd. Zijn levenshouding en zijn dood dienden voor latere mystici als een voorbeeld van zelfopoffering op het pad van de geestelijke *Vervolmaking*. De dood van Hallādj werd als het ultieme offer voor de liefde van God, en de uiting ‘Ik ben de Waarheid’ werd beschouwd als het bewijs van zijn hereniging met God waarin zijn eigen identiteit volledig opgegaan was. De omstandigheden rond zijn geweldadige dood, d.i. ophanging, verbranding en tenslotte, verspreiding van zijn as in de rivier Tigris, hebben verscheidene bekende motieven in Perzische dichtkunst opgeleverd, o.m. de *Galg van de Liefde*, de *Wassing in het bloed*, *Getuige van de Hemelreis*. Hiervan maakten de oorlogsdichters tijdens de Iran-Irak oorlog dankbaar gebruik. Het leven van de historische Hallādj kreeg een moderne politieke contekst door de Iraanse soldaten met Hallāj te vereenzelvigen en het Iraakse bewind met het toenmalige kaliefenhof.

De traumatische dood van Imam Hossein in 680 AD in de Slag bij Karbalā wordt jaarlijks in Iran en andere sji’itische gebieden in de wereld uitgebreid herdacht tijdens de Āshurā -herdenking. In de Iran-Irak oorlog werd het legitieme recht van Iran om de strijd met Irak met de massale opoffering van de Iraanse soldaten te voeren benadrukt door te stellen dat Iraniërs van oudsher sji’ieten en trouwe aanhangers van Imam Hossein waren.

Het bewind in Irak werd beschouwd als de moderne voortzetting van het onrechtmatige, soennitische kalifaat van Yazid. Het feit dat de meerderheid van de Iraakse bevolking sji'itisch is, werd door de Iraanse leiders maar gemakshalve genegeerd. De Āshurā herdenking is voor sji'ieten het modelvoorbeeld van lijden en liefde, het symbool van zelfopoffering voor de sji'itische zaak, de strijd van gelovigen tegen ongelovigen (de soennitische moslims meegerekend).

Iraanse oorlogsdichters maakte niet alleen vele toespelingen op de Āshurā plechtigheden en Karbalā, maar schiepen ook motieven als het *Boek van* Āshurā, het *Pad van Hossein*, de *Lediging van Hosseins Beker* rond de gebeurtenissen hiervan. De soldaten op het slagveld bewandelden in zelfopoffering als het ware het spirituele *Pad van Hossein*, dat de verlossing brengt. Het concept van zelfopoffering ten behoeve van de *Beminde* werd in de oorlogspropaganda steeds benadrukt. Hiervoor diende ook Karbalā, de laatste rustplaats van Imam Hossein in het Irak, van de soennitische bezetting gevrijwaard te worden. Karbalā werd als een sji'itische Iraanse stad gepresenteerd, die evenwel eeuwenlang bezet was door soennitische heersers. De tijd was daarom gekomen om deze heilige stad van de ongelovige Irakezen te bevrijden.

Binnen het hedendaagse sji'isme van Iran speelt het concept van martelaarschap een centrale rol. Dit werd in belangrijke mate ingegeven door de baanbrekende opvattingen van de religieuze Iraanse denkers Ali Shariati en Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari in de afgelopen 50 jaar. Zo benadrukte Shariati dat door zichzelf op te offeren voor een heilige zaak zo'n "martelaar" ook heiligheid zal verwerven. Een martelaar roept aldus de gemeenschap op om voor recht en rechtvaardigheid op te komen. Imam Hossein staat model hiervoor. De werken van Shariati hebben in belangrijke mate de Iraanse bevolking overtuigd om tegen het Pahlavi bewind in opstand te komen. Een vergelijkbare gedachtegang is ook te vinden in de werken van Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, die mede de basis legde voor de Islamitische Revolutie. Hij vergeleek de "martelaar" met een kaars die zichzelf opbrandt zodat hij voor de rest van de gemeenschap de weg kan verlichten.

Kortom, de vertrouwdheid met deze religieuze en mystieke concepten en beeldspraak onder brede lagen van de Iraanse bevolking gaf voor de leiders van de Islamitische Republiek en oorlogsdichters een uitstekend middel om Iraniers naar de

frontlinies te krijgen en hun leven op te offeren. Bovendien konden zo de vele offers en opofferingen van de Iraanse bevolking in de oorlog tegen de Iraakse vijand geestelijk verwerkt en zelfs gerechtvaardigd worden.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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