Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

‘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)

Nematollahi Mahani, M.A.

Citation
Nematollahi Mahani, M. A. (2014, May 15). *‘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)*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/25764

Version:	Corrected Publisher’s Version
License:	Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden
Downloaded from:	https://hdl.handle.net/1887/25764

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page

Universiteit Leiden

The handle http://hdl.handle.net/1887/25764 holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation

Author: Nematollahi Mahani, Mahnia A.
Title: '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)
Issue Date: 2014-05-15

‘**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)

Mahnia A. Nematollahi Mahani

Cover photo: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iran–Iraq_War
Copyright, Mahnia A. Nematollahi Mahani, 2014, Leiden. All rights reserved.

‘**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)

PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van
de graad van Doctor aan de Universiteit Leiden,
op gezag van Rector Magnificus prof.mr. C.J.J.M. Stolker,
volgens besluit van het College voor Promoties
te verdedigen op 15 May, 2014
klokke 13:45 uur

door
Mahnia A. Nematollahi Mahani
geboren te Mahan (Kerman, Iran)
04-04-1967

Promotiecommissie:

Promotor:
Prof. dr. P.M. Sijpesteijn (Leiden University)

Copromotor:
Dr. A.A. Seyed-Gohrab (Leiden University)

Overige Leden:

Prof. dr. M. van Crevel (Leiden University)
Prof. dr. F.C.W. Doufikar-Aerts (VU University, Amsterdam)
Dr. A.R. Korangy Isfahani (University of Virginia)

To the loving memory of my father and mother

Table of Contents

Preface 11
Notes on transliterations, footnotes and dates 13

Introduction 15

Chapter One

Literary Tradition before the Islamic Revolution 1979 21
Classical Shiite and Mystic Paradigms in Iran-Iraq War 32
Anti-Western Poetic Rhetoric after the Revolution (1979) 35
Implementing Islamic Ideology (1982-83) 49
Conclusion 57

Chapter Two

Mystic Love in Iran-Iraq War Poetry 59
Introduction 59
Love that Destroys 61
A love not Chosen 63
The School of Love 64
Education and Purification in the School of Love 64
Love as Spiritual Teacher 74
The Book of Love 77
The Grammar of Love 81
The Religion of Love: Fighting in the Path of Love 84
War Poetry, and the Path of Love 87
The Prayer of Love 92
1. Obligatory Prayers 92
2. The Remembrance of God in Mystic Prayer 95
The Primordial Covenant and its Witnesses 99
The Primordial Cup 103
Hidden Treasure 104
The Gnosis of Love in Mysticism and on the Battlefield 105
Abandoning Reason for the Cause of Spiritual Perfection 110
The Ka‘be of the Heart 114
Ka‘be and Karbalā 117
Self-sacrifice in the Menā of Love 120
The Martyr of Love 125

Conclusion 130

Chapter Three

Mystical Motifs in the Poetry of the Iran-Iraq War 133
Introduction 133
Motifs Based on the Mystic Martyr Hallāj 134
Hosein Mansur Hallāj as a Role-model 135
The Outcry of I am the Truth 140
The Tongue is a Tale-teller 142
The Gallows of Love 145
Hallāj and the Gallows of Ascension 148
Offering one's Head (*sar dādan*) 155
Literary Motifs of Ascension 158
Conclusion 170

Chapter Four

‘Āshurā Paradigm in Iran-Iraq war 172
Introduction 172
The ‘Āshurā Paradigm 173
‘Āshurā in the War Poetry 175
Karbalā: Symbolizing the Place of Martyrdom 183
The Path to Jerusalem Goes through Karablā 188
Beyond Karbalā, the World 189
Iran as Karbalā 191
Imam Hosein: the Archetype of Martyrdom 192
The Path of Hosein 193
Seizing Hosein’s Cup 196
Self-reproach for not Assisting Imam Hosein 198
Conclusion 200

Chapter Five

Death as a Path for Perfection and Salvation 203
Introduction 203
Types of Martyrdom 204
‘Ali Shariati on Martyrdom 207
Ayatollah Mortezā Motahhari 217
The concept of Martyrdom 222
Striving for Martyrdom 228
Martyrdom in Secular Literature 230
The Litter of Martyrdom 233

The Crystalline Call of Martyrdom 234
Regret for Survival 236
Conclusion 237

General Conclusion 239

Bibliography 245

Dutch Summary 265

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