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CHAPTER TWO

THE PERSIAN NOVELS OF THE IRAN-IRAQ WAR

Novel as a Medium for Socio-Political Expressions in Twentieth Century Iran

From the rise of the Persian novel in the late nineteenth century to the present day, the novel form in Iran has undergone profound changes in terms of form and content.¹ This development has been closely associated with the social and political fluctuations of the country.

The twentieth century is characterized as being the most significant cultural period in the history of Iran, and saw the novel become one of the dominant mediums in communicating the social, political, historical, and even cultural situation of the country at different stages. The importance of prose literature in twentieth century Iran, particularly the novel, as Ghanoonparvar indicates, stems from novel writers' emphasis on social and political issues and their depictions of the ordinary lives of the common people, themes which cannot be seen in the classical literature of Iran.² The novelty of this subject matter in literature of this period is due to the novel form's capacity to document political and social movements in the country from the exclusive viewpoint of the author.

As one of the very first political events of the twentieth century, the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) brought remarkable changes to the novel in Iran.³ It was during this movement that authors were for the first time seriously concerned about their country's social, cultural, and political condition. Ever since, the novel has been used as a literary vehicle by

¹ There is no consensus about the first Persian novel among literary critics. For instance, Hāfez Farmān-Farmāyi'ān states that Nāser al-Din Shah's *Hekāyat-e Pir o Javān* ('The Story of the Old and the Young,' 1867) is the first instance of a Persian novel based on Western models; while, other scholars such as Hasan Ābedini, Hassan Kamshad, and Yahyā Āriyanpur consider Zeyn al-Ābedin Marāghe'i's (1840-1910) *Siyāhat-nāme-ye Ebrāhim Beg* ('The Travel Dairy of Ebrāhim Beg,' 1895) the first Persian novel. By contrast, Julie Scott Meisami, Āzar Nafisi, and Houra Yavari consider Mohammad Bāqer Khosravi's (1850-1919) three volume novel *Shams and Toghrā* (1907) as the first true Persian novel.

² Ghanoonparvar, *In a Persian Mirror: Images of the West and Westerners in Iranian Fiction* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 2.

³ Many books and articles have been written and published on the political and social background of the Constitutional Revolution in both Persian and English. For instance, see E.G. Browne, *The Persian Revolution 1905-1909* (Washington: Mage Publishers, 2006); N.R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 58-72; F. Ādamiyyat, *Ideology-e Nehzat-e Mashrute-ye Irān* (Tehran: Payām, 1355/1976).

which to express the political and social conditions of Iran. In the process of modernizing Iran, the Constitutional Revolution introduced the concept of Iranian nationalism, which was imported from the West, to reinforce Iran's independence as a new, modern nation, as well as enabling the people of Iran to conceive of a national culture and national particularism. Apart from this, nationalism was used to unify the inhabitants of Iran, who had different cultures, spoke different languages, and practiced different religions, under a single national identity. In this respect, the return to pre-Islamic Iran, which had three powerful empires (Achaemenid, Parthian, and Sasanid) and three religions (Zoroastrian, Manichaeism, and Mithraism) was emphasized as the hallmark of Iranian identity. In other words, reviving the past was regarded as the best way to introduce Iranian nationalism in Iran.⁴ In order to highlight pre-Islamic Iran as the period of the Persian civilization, which, according to Iranian secular nationalist, Mirzā Āqā Khan Kermāni (1853-1896), was destroyed by the Arabs in the seventh century, writers attempted to glorify Persia's past by emphasizing the greatness of its empires, religions, cultures, and social life, in order to bring the concept of Iranian nationalism to the attention of their audiences. In this regard, historical novels appeared in Iranian society which played a significant role in awakening the masses to Iran's glorious past and in urging them to adhere to their real identity.⁵ For Persian writers, the historical novel was felt to be the most powerful literary vessel for painting a vivid picture of Iran in the pre-Islamic era, and in encouraging readers to compare its political, social, and cultural circumstances to Iran in the Constitutional period. For instance, Sheikh Musa Nasri's (1882-1953) *Eshq o Saltanat yā Fotuhāt-e Kurosh-e Kabir* ('Love and Lordship or the Conquest of Cyrus the Great,' 1919), which recounts the tale of Cyrus, is one of the best examples of such historical novels. By recounting the history of pre-Islamic Iran, the author sets out to bring out Iranians' nationalistic sentiments.⁶ This and other historical novels produced during the last two decades of the Qājār dynasty (1785-1925) "provided a means of escape from a sense of national impotence in the face of foreign intervention, and were aimed at restoring Persian self-confidence through the renewal of ancient splendor."⁷

⁴ S. Meskub, *Dāstān-e Adabiyāt va Sargozasht-e Ejtemā' (Sāl-hā-ye 1300-1315)* (Tehran: Farzān, 1371/1992), 8-9.

⁵ A. Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the 20th Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 5.

⁶ For an extensive study regarding this novel, see C. Balaý, *Peydāyesh-e Romān-e Fārsi*, trans. M. Qavimi and N. Khattāt (Tehran: Mo'in, 1377/1998), 362-71.

⁷ S. Soroudi, "Constitutional Revolution vii. the Constitutional Movement in Literature," *EIr*.

The 1921 coup which led to the creation of the Pahlavi dynasty also brought profound changes in many spheres of society, including literature.⁸ By the time Reza Shah Pahlavi had come to power in 1925, full-scale modernization and Westernization of Iran had become major and urgent issues. Reza Shah exclusively focused on reforming and modernizing the administration, the army, the dress code, economic development, judiciary system, education, and communication by drawing from Western examples. He glorified Iran's pre-Islamic history, praised the Aryan race as the origin of Iranians, gave great recognition to the Zoroastrian religion, and took steps to purge the Persian language of foreign languages, particularly Arabic words.⁹ These changes helped to reinforce 'national pride,' to transform Iran into a modern nation, and to widen the gap between Iran and the Arab world.¹⁰ Despite rapid progress in certain spheres of public life (e.g., education, transport, and health), Reza Shah failed to drastically increase the contentment enjoyed by ordinary Iranians. Under his social policies, Iranians remained, in general, discontent, as the country was dominated by injustice and arbitrary rule. For this reason, poverty, illiteracy, and prostitution increased under Reza Shah's reign.¹¹

This discontent within Iranian society, which began in the early Twenties due to the coup and continued throughout the Thirties, witnessed a new literary genre known as 'the social novel.' During this time, the writers were not allowed to write about political issues of the country. Therefore, Iranian writers in the Twenties and Thirties mainly used the novel as a medium for social criticism. They committed themselves to demonstrating social problems such as abstinence from civic life (especially in big cities like Tehran), social discrimination, poverty, illiteracy, public ignorance, the plight of Iranian women in society, the issue of unveiling, and the question of prostitution.¹² The first social novel in Iran was *Tehran-e Makhuf* ('The Horrific Tehran,' 1922) by Morteżā Moshfeq Kāzemi (1902-1977), which dealt with the unfair social situation imposed on Persian women during the early Twenties. In this

⁸ For a detailed study of the coup, see N. Shambayati, "Coup D'état of 1299/1921," *EIr*; H. Katouzian, *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis* (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 242-67.

⁹ Vaziri, *Iran as Imagined Nation*, 193.

¹⁰ A. Goldschmidt Jr. and L. Davidson, *A Concise History of the Middle East* (Oxford: Westview Press, 2006), 239.

¹¹ For a detailed account of Reza Shah's policies, see Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), chapter nine.

¹² M.A. Sepānlu, *Nevisandegān-e Pishrow-e Irān: Az Mashrutīyyat tā 1350* (Tehran: Negāh, 1369/1990), 139. In 1936, Reza Shah ruled that Iranian women were not allowed to wear veils in public. For Reza Shah, this was a sign of modernity in Iran. Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals*, 48.

work, the author pays significant attention to several important issues including the rights of women, 'outmoded marriage customs,' prostitution, and social depravity.¹³

When Reza Shah's son, Mohammad Reza Shah, was crowned the new king of Iran in 1941, authors were given the opportunity to write freely about political issues.¹⁴ As a direct result of the freedom of speech enjoyed in Iran during the 1940s, Persian novels focused on wide range of social, political, and ideological themes such as nationalism; the battle between good and evil; the criticism of certain aspects of traditional culture (i.e., religion, social equality, justice, and freedom); anti-western ideas, and even criticism of Reza Shah's dictatorship and method of ruling.¹⁵ For Example, Sādeq Hedāyat's (1903-1951) *Hāji Āqā* (1945) is a satirical novel presenting the writer's concerns regarding the social and political issues of the Thirties and early Forties in Iranian society. The work deals with the upper strata of society through the character Hāji Āqā, in order to show the greed and religious hypocrisy of such characters.¹⁶

Following the coup d'état of 1953, which overthrew the nationalistic government of Mohammad Mosaddeq (1882-1967), Mohammad Reza Shah concentrated his efforts on consolidating his rule.¹⁷ In 1957, he established the SAVAK (*sāzmān-e ettelā'āt va amniyyat-e keshvar*, or State Organization for Intelligence and Security) with the help of the CIA. SAVAK was the secret police, responsible for domestic security and the intelligence service. Within the literary domain, the SAVAK became one of the most powerful institutions, responsible for censorship of the press, media, books, and films.¹⁸ The establishment of the SAVAK dramatically increased control over the lives of writers, limiting their freedom of speech and imposing strict censorship. These factors led a handful of highly committed writers (*nevisandegān-e mote'ahhed*) to find a way to describe the political atmosphere of the

¹³ Kamshad, *Modern Persian*, 59; H. Mir'ābedini, "Moshfeq-e Kazemi, Sayyed Mortaza," *EIr*, online edition, last updated January 21, 2011, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/moshfeq-kazemi> (accessed December 15, 2014). Other prominent social novels written during Reza Shah are as follows: *Ruzegār-e Siyāh* ('Black Days,' 1924) by Abbas Khalili (1891-1971); *Shahrnāz* (1926) by Yahyā Dowlatābādi (1863-1939), and *Man ham Gerye Karde-am* ('I Have Cried Too,' 1933) by Jahāngir Jalili (1909-1939).

¹⁴ Ghanoonparvar, *Prophets of Doom: Literature as a Socio-Political Phenomenon in Modern Iran* (Lanham: Universality Press of America, 1984), 10.

¹⁵ K. Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 5; Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals*, 5; Ābedini, *Sad Sāl Dāstān-nevisi dar Irān*, Vol. 1 (Tehran: Tondar, 1368/1989), 108.

¹⁶ For a more extensive analysis of this novel and Hedāyat's other satirical works, see Katouzian, "Satire in Persian Literature, 1900-1940," in *A History of Persian Literature: Literature of the Early Twentieth Century from the Constitutional Period to Reza Shah*, ed. A.A. Seyed-Gohrab, Vol. 11 (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 222-39. Also for the English translation of the novel *Hāji Āqā*, see G.M. Wickens, trans. *Hāji Āghā: Portrait of an Iranian Confidence Man* (Austin: Center of Middle Eastern Studies, 1979).

¹⁷ For the coup d'état of 1953, see M.J. Gasiorowski, "Coup D'état of 1332 Š./1953." *EIr*.

¹⁸ G.R. Afkhami, *The Life and Times of the Shah* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 381-403.

country in a publishable form.¹⁹ For this reason, they chose to write allegorical novels in order to facilitate the expression of their political ideas whilst still evading the censorship imposed by SAVAK. These writers typically attempted to criticize Mohammad Reza Shah's policies towards modernizing Iran through allegories, metaphors, and symbols.²⁰

Apart from those writers who committed themselves to describing the political atmosphere of Iran in the form of allegorical novels, others used mythological novels as an appropriate vehicle for expressing the social and political affairs of the country whilst escaping SAVAK's censorship. The primary objective of these novelists in using myths was to create an imaginary world in which they could re-imagine the social situation.²¹ They also employed motifs pertaining to the tragic human condition in the contemporary era. In this regard, the domain of the mythological novels expanded to encompass philosophical and metaphorical elements of human life such as death, love, solitude, and eternity.²²

From 1953 to the end of the Pahlavi regime in 1979, various new kinds of novel came into being, implying a significant development in Persian prose literature.²³ The immense literary productivity during these years occurred for two reasons. Firstly, as Michael Hillmann explains, the "political constraints were a stimulus to *engage* writing and social criticism in literature, rather than a deterrent." In the second place, "such social criticism in the highly controlled political environment was used [...] as a means to reduce the intensity of discontent."²⁴ Furthermore, during the Pahlavi regime, the role of Iranian writers was generally identical to that of the 'social prophets,' due to their ability to distinguish social problems and their effort to "influence events in order to establish a better society."²⁵ Although censorship was pervasive throughout the Pahlavi reign, and had a direct impact on

¹⁹ For more information on Iranian 'committed writers' and 'committed literature' in this period, see Talattof, *The Politics of Writing*, 66-107.

²⁰ Q.A. Täheri, "Barresi va Tahlil-e Jariyān-hā-ye Dāstān-nevisi-ye Mo'āser (1332-42)," *Fasl-nāme-ye Pazhuḥesh-e Zabān va Adabiyāt-e Fārsi* 1 (1381/2002): 85. Jalāl Āl-e Ahmad (1923-1969) published three allegorical novels, *Modir-e Madrese* ('The School Principal,' 1958), *Nun Va'l Qalam* ('By the Pen,' 1961), and *Nefrin-e Zamin* ('The Curse of the Land,' 1966), in which he was a social critic.

²¹ S. Bozorg-Bigdeli et al., "Tahlil-e Seyr-e Bāztāb-e Mazāmin va Revāyat-hā-ye Osture'i-ye Irāni dar Romān-hā-ye Fārsi (az 28 Mordād 1332 tā 1387)," *Pazhuḥesh-e Zabān va Adabiyāt-e Fārsi* 19 (1389/2010): 240-41.

²² Ābedini, *Sad Sāl Dāstān-nevisi*, Vol. 1, 245. *Yakolyā va Tanhā 'i-e U* ('Yakolyā and Her Loneliness,' 1956) by Taqī Modarresi (1932-1997) and *Malakut* ('Heavenly Kingdom,' 1961) by Bahrām Sādeqi (1936-1983) are among the most well-known mythological novels of this kind from this period.

²³ It is beyond the scope of this research to mention all the novels produced between 1953 and 1979; naming some is sufficient: *Sang-e Sabur* ('The Patient Stone,' 1966) by Sādeq Chubak (1916-1995); *Tup* ('The Canon,' 1967) by Gholām-Hoseyn Sā'edi (1936-1985); *Shāhzāde Ehtejāb* ('Prince Ehtejāb,' 1968) and *Barre-ye Gomshode-ye Rā'i* ('Shepherd's Lost Lamb,' 1977) by Hushang Golshiri (1938-2000); *Sharāb-e Khām* ('Raw Wine,' 1968) by Esmā'il Fasih; and *Hamsāye-hā* ('Neighbors,' 1974) by Ahmad Mahmud.

²⁴ M. Hillmann, "Revolution, Islam, and Contemporary Persian Literature," in *Iran: Essays on a Revolution in the Making*, eds. A. Jabbari and R. Olson (Lexington: Mazda Publishers, 1981), 133.

²⁵ Ghanoonparvar, *Prophets of Doom*, 12.

the novelistic discourse in Iran, writers broke this barrier by using different methods and language to portray Iran's political and social status.

The Iranian-Islamic Revolution, which put an end to the Pahlavi regime as well as the monarchy, brought fundamental changes to Iranian society. In literary arena, a new wave of Persian novels, known as the 'revolutionary novels' (*romān-hā-ye enqelābi*) emerged.²⁶ These novels address the development of the revolutionary movement as well as Shiite concepts and the politics of contemporary Iran. The primary objective of these novelists was to stoke Iranians' revolutionary zeal. Normally these authors used the novel as a medium for disseminating the revolutionary ideals and dogmas such as martyrdom, antagonism against autocracy in Islamic countries, and anti-imperialist sentiments. Furthermore, not only did these revolutionary novels highlight the major role of Islam, the Iranian Shiite clergy, and the people in the course of the Islamic Revolution, but they also played a central role in denouncing the dictatorship and secular policies of the previous regime, in unveiling the deeds of the SAVAK and their treatment of political prisoners, and in underlining the legitimacy of the new Islamic state. In this regard, most of these novels attempted to juxtapose the Islamic state with the secular Pahlavi regime, in order to reveal the huge differences between them, including their policies, ideologies, and social developments.²⁷ These and other relevant subjects caused Ābedini to classify these revolutionary novels as 'political-historical novels,' since many of them address both the political and historical events that occurred in Iran during and after the Revolution of 1979. Ābedini explains that the intention of the writers of these novels was either to display the events in a chronological order, or to focus on a political and social analysis of the society.²⁸ A unique tool that entered into this literary episode was the inclusion of slogans and chants uttered during demonstrations against the Pahlavi regime, which played a central role in the success of the Islamic Revolution.²⁹

²⁶ M. Rahmāndust, *Se Padide dar Āyene-ye Romān: Qorān-e Karim, Enqelāb-e Eslāmi va Defā'-e Moqaddas* (Tehran: Sure-ye Mehr, 1388/2009), 104.

²⁷ See *ibid.*, 94-103; M.R. Sarshār, "Romān-e Enqelāb: Mokhtassāt, Bāyad-hā, va Nabāyad-hā," *Sure* 42 (1388/2009): 130-33; Idem, "Cheshmandāz-e Adabiyāt-e Dāstāni pas az Enqelāb," *Adabiyāt-e Dāstāni* 110 (1386/2007): 42-45. Two of the revolutionary novels with the mentioned themes are Barāheni's *Rāz-hā-ye Sarzamin-e Man* ('The Secrets of my Homeland,' 1989) and Jamāl Mirsādeqi's (b. 1933) *Bād-hā Khabar az Taghyir-e Fasl Midādand* ('The Winds Announced a Change of Season,' 1984).

²⁸ Ābedini, *Sad Sāl Dāstān-nevisi*, Vol. 3, 986.

²⁹ M. Taqavi, "Jahat-giri-ye Adabiyāt-e Mo'āser va Tahavvol-e ān pas az Piruzi-ye Enqelāb-e Eslāmi," in *Majmu'e Maqāle-hā-ye Seminār-e Barresi-ye Adabiyāt-e Enqelāb-e Eslāmi* (Tehran: Samt, 1373/1994), 112. The revolutionary slogans, which were abundant, can be divided into several categories: those which were against the Pahlavi regime and its commanders (i.e., Shāpur Bakhtiār) and those supporting Ayatollah Khomeini and his effort to develop an Islamic state. Several major steps were taken in order to introduce the revolutionary slogans to the young Iranian generation. For instance, in 2000, the Islamic Revolution's Documents Center (*markaz-e asnānd-e enqelāb-e eslāmi*) compiled and published almost the entire collection of Iranian revolutionary slogans in a book called *Farhang-e Sho'ār-hā-ye Enqelāb-e Eslāmi* ('The Lexicon of the Islamic

One of the best examples of a revolutionary novel is Barāheni's *Āvāz-e Koshtegān* ('Songs of the Murdered,' 1983), which recounts the life of a teacher who, due to his political writing and his denouncement of the deeds of the SAVAK, was imprisoned. Another novel, which concerns itself with the Islamic nature of the Revolution and the actions of ordinary people in establishing the Islamic state in Iran, is Fasih's *Lāle bar Afrukht* ('Tulip Glowing').³⁰ Although this novel was one of the earliest revolutionary novels, it was not published until 1998.³¹

Although immediately following the Iranian Revolution many writers focused on writing about the event, the number of revolutionary novels was limited. This was mainly due to the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War, which occurred very shortly after the Revolution. As soon as the war began, Iranian writers employed the novel as a medium for addressing the war and its related issues. This instant shift from writing about the Revolution to writing about the war clearly shows the alliance between the Persian novel and the political and social changes in Iran.

Persian War Novels and their Designations in Post-Revolutionary Literature

The Iran-Iraq War, as one of the most significant historical events in the late twentieth century, introduced profound changes in almost all domains of life in Iran. It also had direct and substantial impacts on the development of Persian literature, both in poetry and prose.³² In the realm of Persian prose literature, the 'war novel,' a new genre, began to appear following the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War.

When the first Persian authors began writing what would come to be known as war novels, several names were given to this literary genre, including 'novels of holy defense,' 'novels of perseverance,' and 'novels of resistance.' All of these designations refer to modern Persian war novels, but Persian critics' views regarding the definition and scope of each of

Revolutionary Slogans'). For further discussion regarding the role of the slogans in the Iranian Revolution, see E. Hasanzāde, "Hoviyyat-e Melli dar Sho'ār-hā-ye Enqelāb-e Eslāmi," *Motāle'āt-e Melli* 31 (1386/2007): 3-30; M.H. Panāhi, "Barresi-ye Zamine-hā va Ahdāf-e Enqelāb-e Eslāmi-ye Irān bar Asās-e Sho'ār-hā-ye Enqelāb," *Fasl-nāme-ye Olum-e Ejtemā'i* 11-12 (1379/2000): 63-84.

³⁰ This novel will be examined in chapter three.

³¹ Badi', *Asl-e Āsār*, 4.

³² For a comprehensive discussion on the Iranian poetry of the Iran-Iraq War, see Seyed-Gohrab, "Martyrdom as Piety," 248-72; Farzad, "Qeysar Aminpur," 351-74; M.A. Nematollahi Mahani, "'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)" (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2014).

these terms are contradictory. There are two groups of critics: those who agreed to categorize the war novels and name them distinctly, and those who disagreed with the practice. Both groups of critics have their own justifications. For instance, a new generation of writers and critics such as Mas‘ud Kowsari, Ahmad Shākeri, Samirā Aslānpur, and Mohammad Hanif, who emerged after the Iranian Revolution, insisted on using the term ‘novel of holy defense’ instead of ‘war novel.’ As a sociologist, Kowsari claims that using the term ‘novel of holy defense’ or ‘novel of resistance’ better defines the Persian novels written about the Iran-Iraq War. He identifies two key points: first, he argues that when the Iran-Iraq War broke out, Ayatollah Khomeini referred to the war as a ‘defense,’ stating: “Iran has stood for the sake of God, and it will continue for the same reason. Excepting defense, Iran is not willing to fight against other nations. [...] Now they [the Iraqis] have assaulted Islam, and we have to defend.”³³ Therefore, Iran and Iraq were labeled as the defender and the aggressor respectively. Kowsari therefore concludes that defense and resistance are the two major Islamic values emphasized in wartime Iran. In this regard, novels which emphasize these values should have an appropriate name and should be separated from other categories of war novels that do not focus on these values, and so he argues that the designation ‘novel of holy defense’ better characterizes the war novels written by Persian writers at this time. Secondly, Kowsari suggests the term ‘resistance literature,’ which initially appeared in reference to Arabic literature to describe the resistance of Arab-Muslims against Israel.³⁴ When the Iran-Iraq War began, many similarities were drawn between Iranians and Palestinians as well as between Iraq and Israel. The Iranians’ situation was identical to that of the Palestinians—both had to resist against the brutality of their enemies for a long time. Iraq and Israel were both described as brutal regimes which had unlawfully invaded Iran and Palestine, respectively. This resemblance was not only confined to politics, but also extended to literature. Palestinian writers generated novels to portray the situation of their country and the bravery and perseverance of their nation. Thus, Kowsari and many likeminded writers preferred using the term ‘novel of resistance’ in referring to war novels, in order to highlight the resistance of Iranian warriors against the Iraqi assault.³⁵

Ahmad Shākeri prefers using ‘novel of holy defense’ to refer to the novels written on various aspects of the Iran-Iraq War. In his view, the difference between a war novel and a ‘novel of holy defense’ concerns a difference in writers’ attitudes towards the war. According

³³ Quoted from Sa‘idi, “Adabiyyāt-e Jang,” 78.

³⁴ In Arabic literature, ‘resistance literature’ (*adab al-muqāwima*) includes any form of literary genre, including both poetry and novels.

³⁵ Cited by Sa‘idi, “Adabiyyāt-e Jang,” 78.

to Shākeri, a ‘novel of holy defense’ describes the war as a defensive rather than an offensive conflict, while a war novel generally portrays the war as an aggressive action and focuses on the brutal actions of the enemy.³⁶ Aslānpur also argues for using the term ‘novel of holy defense,’ which delineates the Persian war novel from other war novels in world literature. She claims that when we refer to war novels or even ‘novels of perseverance,’ these could be written about any offensive or defensive conflicts around the world, whereas a ‘novel of holy defense’ specifically refers to novels written about Iran’s defense against Iraq’s assault, and their perseverance in refusing to surrender to Iraq during eight years of fighting.³⁷ Similarly, Hanif emphasizes using the term ‘novel of holy defense,’ which he regards as one of the most significant hallmarks of Iranian identity during the war. According to Hanif, this term is closely tied with Islamic concepts and revolves around various subjects, such as sacrifice, martyrdom, veterans, the wounded, war captives, volunteers, soldiers, commanders-in-chief, and the mothers and wives of martyrs.³⁸ Most writers and critics prefer using ‘novel of holy defense’ or ‘novel of resistance’ to refer to the Persian war novels. They claim that these terms thoroughly characterize the war novel in Iran as distinct from other war novels from around the world, because they highlight the Islamic nature of the war in Iranian society.

In addition to those who prefer to draw lines between various names given to the war novel as a distinct genre, there is another group of critics who refuse to employ any specific terms for this genre in Iran. For instance, Hoseyn Fattāhi and Qāsem-Ali Ferāsāt both disagree with the practice of giving these novels a distinct name like ‘novel of holy defense’ or ‘resistance novel.’ They assert that as long as a novel deals with war and its various dimensions it can be termed generically as a war novel, and there is no need to subcategorize it.³⁹ Equally, Reza Amirkhāni criticizes any division regarding the novels written on the Iran-Iraq War. He notes that names such as ‘novel of holy defense,’ ‘novel of resistance,’ and ‘novel of perseverance’ are derived from the Islamic ideology which underpins the cultural institutions of Iran. In his view, they are different names given to works revolving around the same theme: war. He further notes that during the war, there was already a genre of novels called ‘war novel,’ which was frequently used. However, after the war ended in 1988, due to a change in policy in Iranian cultural institutions, the term ‘war novel’ became ‘novel of holy defense.’ It was later changed to ‘novel of resistance,’ and later still to ‘novel of perseverance.’ Amirkhāni believes that although in the future these names may also alter into

³⁶ Hanif, *Kand o Kāvi*, 45-47.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 99.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 48-49.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 100-1.

new terms, they all designate novels which have the Iran-Iraq War as a subject, and not others.⁴⁰ Mehdi Sa'idi, another literary critic, also avoids making distinctions between each of the mentioned names for the Persian war novels. He asserts that these divisions are irrational and unnecessarily complicate research. 'Novels of holy defense,' in his view, only indicates those novels written about the religious and Islamic aspects of the war, while the term 'war novel' has a broader scope, describing both novels which focus on these Islamic concepts (e.g., martyrdom) and the impact of war on society more generally.⁴¹

Reza Najafi suggests that each country chooses a special designation for the literary work surrounding event, particularly wars, which are particularly significant in a nation's history. Najafi offers France, Germany, and Russia as examples, explaining that when France was occupied during the Second World War, the new term 'literature of the resistance movement' came into being. Similarly, when Germany was defeated in the Second World War, a new episode in German literature appeared, known as 'anti-war literature,' which concerned itself with portraying the devastating and unpleasant nature of the war. When civil war erupted in Russia, the 'literature of the great national war' became popular and Russian writers generated literary works describing the bravery and heroism of Bolshevik warriors against the royalist enemy. Najafi contests that, mirroring these designations in other countries, Iran sought to establish a particular term for novels written on the Iran-Iraq War. They thus decided to call these novels 'novels of holy defense,' a designation specific to Iranian literature, designed in order to evoke the concepts surrounding the Iran-Iraq War and the ways in which it was viewed in Iranian society.⁴²

Thus, there is no consensus among Persian writers and critics regarding the terms used to categorize Persian war novels. It is true that nations have their own particular languages, cultures, traditions, and literature, which are distinguishable from those of other nations. In this regard, 'novel of holy defense' specifically describes Persian novels written on the Iran-Iraq War. The term 'novel of holy defense,' which highlights the Islamic and religious dimensions of the war in Iran, can be seen as reflecting Iranian identity. Many critics view the term 'novel of holy defense' as covering those novels which describe the 'war values' (*arzesh-hā-ye jang*) such as bravery, self-sacrifice, and fidelity, while the term 'war novel' can be broadly applied to all novels written about the war, whether focusing on positive or

⁴⁰ Ibid., 105.

⁴¹ Sa'idi, "Adabiyyāt-e Jang," 79.

⁴² Hanif, *Kand o Kāvi*, 118.

negative aspects of it. To avoid confusion, in the following discussion, the term ‘war novel’ will be used to refer to Persian novels written about the Iran-Iraq War.

Connotations of a War Novel

As a result of the large number of wars which occurred during the nineteenth century, many literary works produced throughout the world during this period (including novels) were about war.⁴³ One of the earliest and best examples of novels dealing with the theme of war is Leo Tolstoy’s (1828-1910) *War and Peace* (1865-1869), which is set during the Napoleonic Wars in Russia. In the novel, Tolstoy reveals the effect of Napoleon’s wars from 1805 to 1820 on Russian families.⁴⁴

The First World War (1914-1918) brought the first wave of novels to be called ‘war novels.’ Since many of the novelists of this period had seen active service, their novels often mirror their first-hand experiences of war. The earliest seminal war novel about the First World War was by the French author Henri Barbusse (1873-1935) who wrote *Under Fire* (1916), which depicted the true character of the war for its participants.⁴⁵

The Second World War gave rise to a new boom in war novels. Unlike the war novels of the previous war, writers from every country produced novels portraying the Second World War.⁴⁶ In this respect, Malcolm Cowley writes:

There is no longer any doubt that many more novels have been written about World War II than about World War I, that more of them reach a certain level of competence

⁴³ Reportedly, there have been around 490 major wars from the beginning of the nineteenth century. H. Askari, *Conflicts and Wars: Their Fallout and Prevention* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 23.

⁴⁴ See M.J. Diamond, (ed.), “Tolstoy, Leo,” *Encyclopedia of World Writers: 1800 to the Present* (New York: Facts On File, 2011).

⁴⁵ T. Tate, “The First World War: British Writing,” in *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing*, ed. K. McLoughlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 166. Some of the most significant novels regarding the First World War are *Three Soldiers* (1920) by Ernst John Dos Passos (1896-1970); *Soldiers’ Pay* (1925) by William Faulkner (1897-1962); and *Death of Hero* (1929) by Richard Aldington (1892-1962).

⁴⁶ *Return via Dunkirk* (1940) by Gun Buster; *Between the Acts* (1941) by Virginia Woolf (1882-1941); and *No Directions* (1943) by James Hanley (1897-1985) are examples of the novels written during the war which have the Second World War as a subject. For a comprehensive overview of war novels from both World Wars, see P.G. Jones, *War and the Novelist: Appraising the American War Novel* (Columbia & London: University of Missouri Press, 1976); M. Rawlinson, “The Second World War: British Writing,” in *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing*, 197-211.

or merit, and that, as a group, they compose a sounder body of work. Writers of the second wartime generation have been quick to master the tools of their craft.⁴⁷

The numerous novels that dealt with the two World Wars were, in general, based on the wartime experiences of their authors.⁴⁸ Therefore, the dominant themes that were addressed in these novels included the effects of technological warfare, the impact of war on the civilian, scenes of wartime horrors, arguments for peace, the nature of heroism, and the morality of war.⁴⁹ War literature, as Kate McLoughlin points out “is more often expressed as the need to keep the record for others—those who were there and can no longer speak for themselves, and those who were not there and need to be told.”⁵⁰

As a new literary genre, the war novel needs to be defined. However, there is no clear-cut definition for a war novel, as different literary theorists and critics have changed its definition over time. The term ‘war novel’ often refers to novels that discuss a war and its related aspects. The term ‘war novel’ is not only reserved for those novels which directly describe the warfront and soldiers’ actions on the battlefield, but can also refer to those novels which reflect the physiological and social impacts of war on civilians. Regarding war novels, Holger Klein focuses on the tradition of realism as the major element of the genre, which allows the novels to contain a greater degree of authenticity.⁵¹

Since the term ‘war novel’ is very broad, Peter G. Jones has divided this genre roughly into the following thematic categories: ‘*Bildungsroman*’ and the ‘command novel.’ According to Jones, *Bildungsroman* are concerned with the theme of education and the development of individual philosophies. War novels of this type depict war as amplifying and accelerating the challenges that life offers. In other words, the war novels as *Bildungsroman*, such as *From Here to Eternity* (1951) by James Jones (1921-1977), do not portray combat, but instead “demonstrate the growing parallel between modern technological warfare and the quality of contemporary life.”⁵² Similarly, Karsten H. Piep has described the war novel as *Bildungsroman* in terms of young heroes’ quests for wisdom. “Almost invariably,” Piep quotes, “the hero is said to enter the story in a state of romantic innocence until the experience

⁴⁷ M. Cowley, *The Literary Situation* (New York: The Viking Press, 1955), 34.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁹ I.F. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 162-63.

⁵⁰ K. McLoughlin, “War and Words,” in *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing*, 19.

⁵¹ H. Klein, “Introduction,” in *The First World War in Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. H. Klein (London & Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1976), 4.

⁵² Jones, *War and the Novelist*, 19.

of warfare initiates him into the realities of modern life.”⁵³ The outcome of this process, Piep writes, “is the individual’s realization that he is pitted against a cruel, debased, and, at bottom, absurd society.”⁵⁴ In the second place, novels of command, such as *The Naked and the Dead* (1948) by Norman Mailer (1923-2007), focus on the military aspects of war:

The novels of command are most explicitly devoted to the political and sociological repercussions of military affairs. [...] The novels of command tend to be dramatic in structure and in presentation as well. Dialogue is used to convey most key ideas, and there is consistent use of a ‘chorus’ figure who presents the author’s position or the conversation of society. Evidence of the split-psyche is persistent, manifested either in the contrasts between protagonist and antagonist, or by situations that force a choice between radically opposing courses of action.⁵⁵

Despite these divisions, as Jones points out in the introduction of his book, war novels may also refer to the following topics: the connection between the war and the quality of contemporary life, the situations in which humans are involved in fighting, and “impressions and explorations of the psychology of combat.”⁵⁶

Apart from the themes that make a literary work a war novel, it is also important to know to what extent the theme of war should occupy a place in a literary work in order for it to be classified as a war novel. Alternatively, we may ask whether the degree to which a novel deals with war is a touchstone in deciding whether a particular novel is a war novel. To answer, it is necessary to have a look at two of the world’s most famous war novels, in order to identify whether the level of war representation is crucial in classifying a novel as a war novel. For instance, Elizabeth Bowen’s (1899-1973) detective novel *The Heat of the Day* (1949) is one of the few novels concerning which critics have reached consensus regarding its classification as a war novel. *The Heat of the Day* is set during the Second World War, but the violence of the war is mostly absent from the narration. There are, however, isolated passages in this novel which deal with the bombings of London. These factors may lead one to conclude that it does not matter to what extent a writer refers to war in a novel in order for to be classified as a war novel. So long as the story is set in the context of war, it can be labeled

⁵³ K.H. Piep, *Embattled Home Fronts: Domestic Politics and the American Novel of World War I* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2009), 113.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Jones, *War and the Novelist*, 13.

⁵⁶ See *ibid.*, 1-15.

as a war novel. In contrast, Dos Passos' *The Grand Design* (1949), which describes the city of Washington during the Second World War and criticizes the growth of bureaucracy in wartime Washington, is said to be hard to call a war novel. In this work, as Edwin Berry Burgum argues, the war is only the trigger for a story. He goes further to say "the thread [...] that holds the book together is not the war but New Deal, under cover of which labor racketeers and communists and hairbrained theorists have been smuggled into the government, to cause a demoralization that even the exigencies of war cannot control."⁵⁷ As the war is not a pervasive theme throughout the novel, and since its focus is rather on the social classes and their development during the war, the novel is therefore not generally considered a war novel. The two mentioned examples show that there are no precise criteria for classifying war novels. The classification of the war novel in recent times has been based on two main elements: existing theories regarding the war novel and the critics' personal taste. The combination of these factors makes it hard to distinguish a war novel from other literary genres and have led to disagreement among critics in most individual cases.

The Rise of Persian War Novels during the Iran-Iraq War

From the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War to the present day, a large number of Persian war novels have addressed the conflict. In the first volume of her book *Ketāb-shenāsi-e Defā'-e Moqaddas* ('The Bibliography of the Sacred Defense'); Firuze Borumand listed all of the Persian war novels produced between 1981 and 2001. Her findings show 135 war novels written for teenagers and 125 for adults.⁵⁸ This continual growth in the number of Persian war novels published not only during this period, but also after 2001, testifies to writers' commitment to the war, and their sense of it as one of the most prominent political events in post-revolutionary Iran.

The Persian war novels written between 1981 and 2012 display a range of differences and similarities. Each novel contains particular, unique features, whilst simultaneously resembling others by deploying comparable narrative elements (e.g., theme and characters). In order to investigate the differences and similarities between the Persian war novels, as well as to thoroughly investigate the messages behind each novel, many Persian critics, such as

⁵⁷ E.B. Burgum, "War and Novelists," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 25, no. 2 (1949): 302.

⁵⁸ F. Borumand, *Ketāb-shenāsi-ye Defā'-e Moqaddas*, Vol. 1 (Tehran: Sarir, 1384/2005), 415-58.

Kāmrān Pārsinezhād, Mohammad Hanif, and Mohammad Reza Sarshār (also known as Reza Rahgozar) have attempted to construct a classification of the Persian war novels. These critics usually classify the novels according to the periods in which they were written, their themes, or according to the author's outlook on the war.⁵⁹ This and the following section will classify the Persian war novels according to whether they were written before or after the Iran-Iraq War. This will enable the reader to see the development of the novels in terms of theme, structure, setting, and other narrative elements over time. Primary focus will be given to novels written during the war.

Belqeys Soleymāni, the contemporary Persian writer and critic, refers to the vital role of writers during the war. In her view, when the Iran-Iraq War began, many Persian writers, who had started their careers before the Revolution, could not adjust themselves to the new situation in Iran. For this reason, some of those writers living in Iran decided to stop writing, whereas others left the country and lived in exile. At the same time, the young generation of writers who established themselves after the Revolution, noted the immanent need for new writings about the war. They produced many novels, mostly focusing on the Iranian soldiers and their bravery at the frontline, which served to urge others join the army and fight, for the sake of God, Islam, Iran, and the Iranian Revolution. Therefore, their emphasis was on theme rather than structure.⁶⁰

During the Iran-Iraq War, Persian writers used the novel as one of the main mediums by which to express Islamic concepts and to accustom the public to them. Highlighting these concepts and ideas in their novels not only urged the Iranian people to go to the front, but also served to strengthen the morale of the Iranian soldiers fighting on the battlefields. For instance, these writers often glorify the deeds of those Iranian soldiers who left their homes and families to go to the war and defend their homeland. The soldiers who fell during battle were described as the genuine followers of Imam Hoseyn, who also sacrificed his life and family for the sake of Islam. Meanwhile, these writers also addressed those individuals who had not yet had the chance to go to the front and show their support and loyalty to Imam Hoseyn.⁶¹ In this regard, many of the wartime novels had the same plot and message.

The novels written during the war had specific characteristics that can be distinguished from those written after the conflict. Primarily, the writers of the early war novels paid much

⁵⁹ For the various categorizations of the Persian war novels, see M.B. Najafzāde, "Ta'ammoli dar Dāstān-nevisi-ye Emruz-e Irān va Dāstān-hā-ye Jang," in *Majmu'e Maqāle-hā*, 619-39; Sarshār, *Nim Negāhi be Hasht Sāl Qesse-ye Jang* (Tehran: Howze-ye Honari, 1370/1991), 25-31.

⁶⁰ B. Soleymāni, *Tofang va Tarāzu: Naqd va Tahlil-e Romān-hā-ye Jang* (Tehran: Ruzegār, 1380/2001), 40.

⁶¹ F. Akbari-Sheldarē'i, *Darāmadi bar Adabiyyāt-e Dāstāni pas az Piruzi-ye Enqelāb-e Eslāmi-ye Irān*, (Tehran: Markaz-e Asnād-e Enqelāb-e Eslāmi, 1382/2003), 180-82.

attention to the theme of their novels rather than the structure.⁶² As Persian writer and critic Zahra Zavvāriyān indicates, due to the deep patriotic sentiments among the writers in the early days of the war, as well as their hastiness in rendering the warriors' activities at the front, writers focused merely on a theme, particularly martyrdom. Therefore, as Zavvāriyān argues, these novels were extremely shallow and void of complexity in terms of form.⁶³ The second characteristic of the wartime novels was their simplicity, which, according to Soleymāni was derived from the following factors: the new generation of writers' lack of experience in novel writing; attention to the addressees of the novels, who mainly had little academic education; and their insistence on expressing the reality of the war.⁶⁴ The third characteristic of the novels written during the war was the propagandistic nature of them. For the most part, these writers emphasized the positive aspects of the war, praising the deeds of martyrs and commending the resistance of martyrs' mothers. Almost all of these novels presented martyrdom as a positive phenomenon which brought the martyr eternal life and numerous rewards from God. In this regard, the good characters in these novels were always based upon Iranian soldiers who decided to sacrifice their lives for the sake of Islam, the Quran, and the homeland. Firuz Zonuzi-Jalāli suggests that novels in this era, which focused mainly on these themes, should be called 'propaganda novels' (*romān-hā-ye sho'āri*). He explains: during the war, the writers had to exhort people to take part in it; therefore, a kind of story appeared in which the characters were 'black or white.'⁶⁵ Finally, because the novels of this era were written to address the subject of the war, they contained an element of realism. For this purpose, these writers used social media (e.g., television and radio) to gather information about the war. Apart from this, they often talked to those who had come from the front and researched around those areas affected directly by the war in order to gain first-hand news.⁶⁶ Because of these characteristics, most of the early war novels had identical forms, themes, plots, characters, and settings. This similarity stemmed from the fact that these novels had the same, specific aim: to persuade Iranians to take part at the frontline. For instance, some of the common themes which occurred in these novels were military operations; the occupation of cities; the resistance of Iranian civilians in the war cities such as Ahvaz, Abadan, and Khorramshahr, and the sacrifice and martyrdom of Iranian soldiers.⁶⁷

⁶² K. Pārsinezhād, *Jangi Dāshtim, Dāstāni Dāshtim* (Tehran: Sarir, 1384/2005), 25.

⁶³ Hanif, *Kand o Kāvi*, 204.

⁶⁴ Soleymāni, *Tofang va Tarāzu*, 41.

⁶⁵ Hanif, *Kand o Kāvi*, 203.

⁶⁶ Rahmāndust, *Se Padide*, 165.

⁶⁷ Soleymāni, *Tofang va Tarāzu*, 42.

Despite Soleymāni's emphasis on the role of the young generation of writers in wartime Iran, it should be taken into account that those writers who had started their careers before the Revolution produced the very first novels about the war. Ahmad Mahmud, Esmā'il Fasih, and Mohsen Makhmalbāf (b. 1957) fall within this category. Since they were already accustomed to the styles and techniques involved in novel writing, the Iran-Iraq War merely gave them a new theme on which to write. Along with these authors came a new generation of writers such as Ferāsāt, who established himself as a writer after the Revolution. *The Scorched Earth* by Ahmad Mahmud, *The Headless Palm Trees* by Ferāsāt, *The Winter of 1983* by Fasih, and *Bāgh-e Bolur* ('The Crystal Garden,' 1986) by Makhmalbāf are perhaps the most significant novels written during the war.

The Scorched Earth is considered to be the first Persian war novel, written in November 1981 and published in March 1982.⁶⁸ The novel describes the situation in Ahvaz, an oil-rich city in southwest Iran, which in the early days of the war suffered heavily from bombardment by Iraqi missiles. The story revolves around the narrator's family, who chose to go from Ahvaz to Tehran in order to distance themselves from the action. Despite this, the narrator and his two brothers (Khāled and Shāhed) stay in order to defend the town from Iraq's further advancement. In a bombardment, Khāled is killed. By observing the crushed body of his brother, Shāhed goes into a mental shock and joins his family in Tehran. The narrator, who stays in Ahvaz, bemoans the fact that many of his friends and acquaintances have been killed by the Iraqi offensive.⁶⁹

The Headless Palm Trees has a similar plot to that of *The Scorched Earth*. It recounts the story of a family living in Khorramshahr. In the early days of the war, when the Iraqis capture the city, working class family decides to leave the city and go to Tehran. Despite this, the family's daughter (Shahnāz) and two sons (Hoseyn and Nāser) stay in Khorramshahr. Shahnāz and Hoseyn are killed shortly after the onset of the war. This incident deeply affects Nāser and causes him to go to Tehran. Nāser finds Tehran to be very depressing, because the civilians do not seem to care about the war and its victims. After returning to Khorramshahr, Nāser joins the army, and is killed during the operation *Beyt al-Moqaddas* (lit., 'Jerusalem'), which resulted in the liberation of Khorramshahr after 578 days of Iraqi occupation.⁷⁰

The Crystal Garden, also written during the war, has a divergent plot compared to the above two war novels. It revolves around the lives of a number of women who have lost

⁶⁸ P. Shishegarān, *Mo'arrefi-ye Towsifi-ye Chehel Dāstān-e Defā'-e Moqaddas* (Tehran: Golgasht, 1386/2007), 135.

⁶⁹ A. Mahmud, *Zamin-e Sukhte*, 3rd ed. (Tehran: Mo'in, 1378/1999).

⁷⁰ Q.A. Ferāsāt, *Nakhl-hā-ye bi Sar*, 3rd ed. (Tehran: Sarir, 1385/2006).

someone close to them as a consequence of the war. These women live together in a house in Tehran, which was given to them by the government because they were related to war martyrs or veterans. Lāye and Suri both lost their husbands during the war, and Malihe lives with her husband, Hamid, who is a *jānbāz* (literally meaning ‘one who has lost his/her life,’ and refers to disabled war veterans). Lāye marries a dishonest man, and their marriage ends in a bitter divorce. Suri marries Ahmad, her brother-in-law, only to lose him to the war sometime later. Hamid’s physical condition leads people to regard him with pity, which leads Hamid to stay at home all day and night. He then adopts a child from an orphanage, which revives his love for life.⁷¹

It was common in the early war novels to support and praise the Islamic concepts and teachings (which had been spelled out by the Iranian leaders). Martyrdom was one of the main concepts to enter into these novels. The characters of these novels who were concerned with the invasion of their homeland enthusiastically went to the warfront to fight against the aggressor. They were not afraid of death. Instead, they welcomed martyrdom, because they regarded it as a reward given by God. Therefore, in an important sense, the Iranian volunteer soldiers in these novels welcomed death, wanting to outdo their fellow fighters in attaining death. For the most part, writers concentrated their praise on those who stayed back in their hometowns and eagerly took part in the war. This common theme implies these writers’ approval with respect to the concept of martyrdom, and suggests that they viewed martyrdom in the service of their country as precious. *The Crystal Garden*, as Kamran Talattof notes, “portrays martyrs in their Islamic sense, defined in terms of their relation to God. The dialogues in the book abound with religious terms and connotations that reflect the dominant rhetoric about the ‘true path’: martyrdom is the key to paradise.”⁷² In this regard, the title ‘*The Crystal Garden*’ refers to Paradise, the true resting place of the martyrs, who were killed for the sake of God and Islam.

Apart from martyrdom, faith is another significant theme highlighted in the Persian war novels. Deficiency of weapons and ammunitions, especially in the early stage of the conflict, led the Iranian forces to think that Saddam Hussein’s army, which was supported by Western countries throughout the conflict, would defeat them. To promote their morale, faith was regarded as one of the most powerful weapons at their disposal, with which they could easily defeat the enemy. Emphasis on faith was commonplace in the novels produced during the war. For instance, *The Scorched Earth* expresses the important role of faith among the

⁷¹ M. Makhmalbāf, *Bāgh-e Bolur* (Tehran: Barg, 1365/1986).

⁷² Talattof, *The Politics of Writing*, 123.

Iranian combatants and addresses Iraq: “O ill-natured enemy! Man’s faith governs the destiny of the war, not his weapon.”⁷³ Likewise, in *The Headless Palm Trees*, not only faith in God but also faith in Ayatollah Khomeini, who is described as a wise leader, is empathized. In the story, Nāser is troubled by the lack of weapons in the hands of the Iranian forces. In order to boost his morale, his fellow fighter, Reza, says: “Nāser! We do not have any armament. Everyone knows this fact. Nevertheless, we have something [faith in God] that they [the Iraqi forces] do not have. In addition, our leader is not this man [Saddam Hussein], but the Imam [i.e., Ayatollah Khomeini]. You know this very well. The Imam has ordered us to fight, and it is our duty to obey. And that’s it.”⁷⁴ Describing faith in this way, as the most powerful weapon at the disposal of the Iranian soldiers, led a large number of Iranians, including teenagers and youths, to take part in the war without fear of death.

Given their objectives, the early novels attempted to focus chiefly on positive aspects of the war. They referred to the alliance and union of the Iranians during the war as one of the essential elements for defeating the enemy. For instance, at the beginning of *The Scorched Earth*, the narrator refers to this positive aspect of the war by saying: “it is as if the invasion of Iraqi airplanes has connected the people together. Though previously acquainted, people are welcoming each other [at the warfront]. Willingly, they talk about the war, the defense, and abolishing the enemy.”⁷⁵ The alliance between civilians allowed them to pursue a unified objective, defending and fighting for their country until the enemy’s complete retreat had been achieved. Moreover, taking part in the war was regarded as a compulsory duty for every Iranian, and those who relinquished this duty were viewed as having betrayed themselves, their generation and the Iranian Revolution.⁷⁶

Although the wartime Persian novels were mainly concerned with describing the active role of the members of the working class in the war, and in emphasizing the importance of Islamic concepts in order to put a positive spin on the war, Fasih’s *The Winter of 1983*, as one of the earliest novels on the war, goes one step further. Rather than focusing on the exploits of the working classes, *The Winter of 1983* instead shows the reactions of the middle strata of society to the war, and the ways in which they attempt to distance themselves from the center of the action. This does not mean that Fasih’s war novel is void of references to Islamic ideas and particularly to martyrdom. The work is unique because it shows how the protagonist, who is portrayed as a middle-class character, goes to the battlefield, where he

⁷³ Mahmud, *Zamin-e Sukhte*, 103.

⁷⁴ Ferāsāt, *Nakhl-hā*, 65.

⁷⁵ Mahmud, *Zamin-e Sukhte*, 21.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

meets his martyrdom. *The Winter of 1983* was also fairly unique in its portrayal of the cities which were ruined. This aspect of the war was mainly described in post-war novels, since after the war the aim of writers shifted from urging the people to go to the war, to revealing the unpleasant sides of the conflict. This novel will be extensively discussed in the following chapters.

The Flourishing of Persian War Novels after the Ceasefire

Following the ceasefire on August 20, 1988, a new wave of Persian war novels appeared. Writers in the post-war era reacted differently to the subject of the war. Some of these writers continued to portray the war in a positive light, focusing on subjects such as heroism, bravery, the resistance of the Iranian forces, their desire for martyrdom in the service of their homeland, their religious and spiritual drifts, and their withdrawal from mundane life. Other writers, alternatively, decided to begin to consider the abhorrence of the war by describing the chaotic condition of the country during wartime. These authors honed in on the subjects of poverty, despair, food shortage, mental diseases, fear, the destruction of Iranian cities, and the loss of human life.⁷⁷

In the post-war period, two types of novels about the Iran-Iraq War emerged. The first kind of novel, which were identical to those written during the conflict, highlight subjects such as martyrdom, self-sacrifice, and resistance.⁷⁸ These novels mainly focus on ‘the culture of the warfront’ (*farhang-e jebhe*), including features, such as the terms and idioms used by Iranian soldiers at the frontline, the slogans on billboards, and other propagandist tools.⁷⁹ In addition, the religious and spiritual dimensions of the war are highly stressed in this type of war novel.⁸⁰ For instance, *Ātash dar Kherman* (‘Fire in the Crop,’ 1988) by Fattāhi, *Safar be Gerā-ye 270 Daraje* (‘Journey to Heading 270 Degrees,’ 1996) by Ahmad Dehqān (b. 1966), and *Shatranj bā Māshīn-e Qiyāmat* (‘Chess with the Doomsday Machine,’ 2005) by Habib

⁷⁷ Pārsinezhād, *Jangi Dāshtim*, 16.

⁷⁸ Akbari-Sheldarre‘i, *Darāmedi bar Adabiyyāt*, 215.

⁷⁹ For a comprehensive study regarding ‘the culture of the warfront,’ see Seyyed Mehdi Fahimi’s four volume work *Farhang-e Jebhe* which was published by the Art Department of the Islamic Development Organization (Tehran, 1369/1990). Each volume focuses on one aspect of the warfront’s culture. For instance, the first volume deals with the ethics and manners (*ādāb va rosūm*) at the front, while the remaining three volumes concern the leisure activities of the soldiers (*owqāt-e ferāghat*), humorous remarks made by them (*shukh-tab‘i*) and a compendium of commonly used wartime terms and phrases (*estelāhāt va ta‘birāt*) respectively.

⁸⁰ G.R. Kāfi, *Shenākht-e Adabiyyāt-e Enqelāb-e Eslāmi* (Tehran: Bonyad-e Hefz-e Āsār va Nashr-e Arzesh-hā-ye Defā‘-e Moqaddas, 1389/2010), 194.

Ahmadzāde (b. 1964) are some of the most prominent novels of the post-war era which describe the war positively. These novels, which chiefly describe the warfronts, aim to remember the sacrifice of Iranian martyrs during the war as well as to illustrate the innocence and solitude of the Iranian nation (due to lack of international support), and to further denounce the brutality of the Iraqis as the initiators of the war.

The second type of Persian war novel that appeared following the ceasefire is known as ‘anti-war novel’ (*romān-e zedd-e jang*).⁸¹ The writers of anti-war novels are keen to describe the war negatively, characterizing it as a terrible, devastating, and tragic phenomenon. These novels portray the impact of war on Iranian cities, and the inhabitants as innocent victims. Fattāhi maintains that though after the war Iranian writers focused on the negative aspects of the war, this did not necessarily mean that they were opposed to the war. Although they highlighted the difficulties and calamities which occurred during the war, they agreed on the righteousness of Iran in its defense. Given this, according to Fattāhi, it is thus more correct to call this type of novel a ‘black war novel’ (*romān-e siyāh-e jang*), as opposed to an ‘anti-war novel.’⁸² *Shab-e Malakh* (‘The Night of Grasshopper,’ 1990) by Javād Mojābi (b. 1939) and *Mohāq* (‘Interlunar,’ 1990) by Mansur Kushān (1948-2014) are considered two novels which focus predominantly on the negative outcomes of the war, such as migration, food shortage, lack of security and so on.⁸³ As an example, the story of *Interlunar* revolves around a number of intellectuals who leave Tehran, which is heavily affected by the enemy’s bombardment, and migrate to a village in Khorasan, northeast Iran, which remains unaffected by the war. The novel reveals the physical and psychological impacts of the bombardments on the civilians, especially on children, to whom it caused bedwetting and stutters.⁸⁴ Sarshār notes that the further away the war is temporally, the more writers tend to pay attention to the negative aspects of the war rather than the positive ones.⁸⁵ In addition, Aslānpur notes that in the case of the Second World War literature, writing about the bitterness of war generally emerged after the close Second World War. Similarly, when the Iran-Iraq War ended, Persian writers came to emphasize negative aspects of the war. Therefore, over time, writing about the

⁸¹ Pārsinezhād, “Dāstān-e Jang be Revāyat-e Digar,” in *Maqūle-hā va Maqāle-hā: Barresi-ye Adabiyyāt-e Defā’-e Moqaddas*, ed. M.Q. Foroughi-Jahromi, Vol. 2 (Tehran: Bonyād-e Hefz-e Āsār va Nashr-e Arzesh-hā-ye Defā’-e Moqaddas, 1389/2010), 122.

⁸² A. Shākeri, *Gām Nahādan dar Shib-e Tond: Goftār-hā-yi Darbāre-ye Adabiyyāt-e Dāstāni-ye Defā’-e Moqaddas* (Tehran: Khāne-ye Ketāb, 1391/2012), 68.

⁸³ *Nāgahān Seylāb* (‘Suddenly, Flood,’ 1989) by Mehdi Sahābi (1944-2009) and *Safar-e Kasrā* (‘Kasrā’s Journey,’ 1989) by Ja‘fār Modarres-Sādeqi (b. 1954) are also war novels with a negative outlook on the Iran-Iraq War.

⁸⁴ M. Kushān, *Mohāq* (Tehran: Shivā, 1369/1990), 47.

⁸⁵ E. Zāhedi-Motlaq, *Nasl-e Bārut: Goft o Gu bā Nevisandegān-e Defā’-e Moqaddas* (Tehran: Sarir, 1384/2005), 207.

heroism of the Iranian soldiers was replaced by accentuated attention to the negative aspects of the war.⁸⁶

It should be taken into account that during the war, the short story was the dominant and most convenient prose literary form used to address it. However, in the post-war era, writers were determined to create novels for two major reasons. Firstly, after the ceasefire, there were enormous sources and materials to draw from, such as the Iranian soldiers' published and unpublished memoirs and testaments, history books, cassettes of war narrators, war museums, war documentaries and films, and so on, which helped writers to be flexible and innovative in terms of their chosen themes. Perceiving the huge availability of these war materials, many authors attempted to generate a war novel rather than a short story in order to detail many diverse issues surrounding the war.⁸⁷ In the second place, many of those Iranian soldiers who fought at the front and had seen the war with their own eyes attempted to intimately describe their experience in the form of a novel. This literary genre allowed them to describe their experiences extensively. Therefore, these soldiers, who were abundant in number, such as Ebrāhim Hasanbeygi and Hanif, became writers in the post-war era merely to write about their experiences.⁸⁸ For this reason, greater attention was paid to the creation of war novels rather than short stories during the period immediately following the war.

The Persian post-war novels have specific characteristics. Unlike the novels written during the war which paid little attention to structure, these novels are well structured. The writers in this period focused on both the content and structure of their novels. Not only this, but also they used elements such as metaphor and symbol in order to increase the aesthetic impact of their works. Therefore, as Hanif has maintained, the war novels that were produced after the war are distinguishable from the previous ones in terms of form and the use of more complex aesthetic tools.⁸⁹ Furthermore, in the post-war period, the attention of novelists switched from portraying the warfronts to portraying the devastating aftermath of the war on Iranian cities and on the psychologies of Iranian citizens.

Although there are fundamental differences between those novels written during the war and those written in its aftermath, to some extent, they have some shared characteristics. Flashback is one of the common elements that can be seen in most of the Persian war novels. The writers use flashbacks to sketch a comprehensive picture of Iranian cities in two periods:

⁸⁶ S. Aslānpur, "Adabiyyāt-e Dāstāni-ye Enqelāb-e Eslāmi: Padide'ī Ta'rif Nashode," *Sharq*, Bahman 16, 1386/February 5, 2006, 13.

⁸⁷ Rahmāndust, *Se Padide*, 132-34.

⁸⁸ Pārsinezhād, *Jangi Dāshtim*, 20-21.

⁸⁹ Hanif, *Kand o Kāvi*, 65.

before and after the war.⁹⁰ By doing so, readers come to better appreciate the devastating and destructive impacts of the war. The novelists often aim to portray pre-war Iran as a tranquil, secure, and intact nation, while post-war Iran is usually described as a fearful, insecure, and decimated nation. For instance, Fasih's *The Winter of 1983* and Ahmadzāde's *Chess with the Doomsday Machine* are examples of war novels in which flashback plays a prominent role.

Is 'Writing by Commission' a Threat to Persian War Novels in the Post-war Era?

Regarding the large number of war novels which appeared in Iran following the ceasefire, 'writing by commission' (*sefāreshi-nevisi*) is considered to be one of the most significant issues affecting the production of war novels during this time. During this period, in order to perpetuate the values and ideals espoused in the Iranian society during the war, including the strong morale and nationalism which had developed during the Iranians' perseverance against the Iraqis, and to continue to emphasize the impact of religion and spirituality on the Iranian resistance, some of the state's cultural custodians encouraged writers to create war novels. Among the cultural organizations in Iran which played a key role in overlooking these literary productions, two are significant: the Foundation for the Preservation of the Heritage and Distribution of Sacred Defense Values (*bonyād-e hefz-e āsār va nashr-e arzesh-hā-ye defā'-e moqaddas*) and the Department of Resistance Literature and Art of the Artistic Center (*daftar-e adabiyāt va honar-e moqāvēmat-e howze-ye honari*). The former foundation was established just after the war in 1989, for the purpose of memorializing the defense and the unforgettable heroic acts of Iranian volunteer soldiers (*razmandegān*) during battle. As indicated in the first article of the foundation's regulations (*asās-nāme*), preservation of the values of the sacred defense and further distribution of the wartime culture of resistance, sacrifice, and martyrdom, were treated as the main missions of the foundation. Any research relevant to these goals was thus financially supported by the foundation.⁹¹ Moreover, apart from supporting the production of war novels, the foundation organized and sponsored several festivals (e.g., the 'film festival of holy defense'), book fairs, and scholarly seminars devoted

⁹⁰ Pārsinezhād, "Dāstān-hā-ye Jang: Form, Zabān, va Mohtavā," *Adabiyāt-e Dāstāni* 55 (1380/2001): 22.

⁹¹ "Asās-nāme-ye Bonyād-e Hefz-e Āsār va Nashr-e Arzesh-hā-ye Defā'-e Moqaddas," *Jamejam Online*, Ābān 22, 1387/November 12, 2008, <http://www1.jamejamonline.ir/newstext.aspx?newsnum=100954179979> (accessed December 11, 2014).

to the war across the country, in order to disseminate the values of the sacred defense among the younger generation.

The Department of Resistance Literature and Art of the Artistic Center is another major cultural institution in Iran. It was founded in 1990 by Mojtabā Rahmāndust, the celebrated Iranian post-revolutionary poet and author, to support the production of war novels and to keep alive the memory of the conflict within the Iranian nation.⁹² The foundation aims to propagate both revolutionary and war rhetoric and thus supports those war novels, which are usually written by men and contain nationalistic discourses that engage in the discourse of martyrdom.⁹³ Not only does this foundation support those writers who want to create such novels, but it also publishes these novels in large numbers and distributes them across the country.

In addition, in order to highlight the significance of Iranian war novels, the Department of Resistance Literature held the first ‘Seminar for Exploring the War Novel in Iran and in the World’ (*seminār-e barresi-ye romān-e jang dar Irān va jahān*) between the 7th and 9th of September 1993 in Kermanshah, western Iran. During this literary event, thirty-two lectures were given by both Iranian and non-Iranian critics on the war novels. This seminar led Iranian novelists to identify a standard framework for the war novel both in terms of content and perspective.⁹⁴

Following the end of the war, in order to achieve their objectives in preserving the values of sacred defense and introduce the new generation to the subject of the war, both of the foundations here mentioned encouraged Iranian writers to write about the war in any literary form, whether in novels, short stories, poetry, or memoirs. As part of this process, these foundations required their authors to sign contracts which outlined the due dates of their works and the conditions concerning the receipt of their writing fee.⁹⁵ In addition to this, in order to facilitate the authors’ task and to incite them to write about the war, the foundations provided the writers with opportunities to travel to war zones and visit war veterans.⁹⁶ This is to say that, in most cases, the writers produced their literary works in accordance with directives issued by the relevant organization.

⁹² Zāhedi-Motlaq, *Nasl-e Bārut*, 128.

⁹³ L. Nanquette, “An Iranian Woman’s Memoir on the Iran-Iraq War: The Production and Reception of *Da*,” *Iranian Studies* 46, no. 6 (2013): 945.

⁹⁴ Interview with Mojtabā Rahmāndust, “Seminār-e Barresi-ye Romān-e Jang dar Irān va Jahān,” *Adabiyāt-e Dāstāni* 11 (1372/1993): 68-69.

⁹⁵ M. Parviz, “Sefāreshi-nevisi,” in *Chāhārdah Maqāle Darbāre-ye Dāstān-e Kutāh*, eds. Pārsinezhād and A. Ja‘fari-Moqaddam (Tehran: Sarir, 1390/2011), 97-100.

⁹⁶ Zāhedi-Motlaq, *Nasl-e Bārut*, 129.

As to the question of whether ‘writing by commission’ had a good or bad effect on Persian war literature, Persian critics have divergent opinions. Many of them, such as Mohammad Ayyubi and Sarshār, consider it to be one of the major issues leading to the rise of particularly weak Persian war novels. These critics argue that, after taking their orders from an organization, some writers were so concerned with delivering their novels on time that they forgot about the accuracy of their content, and subsequently were unable to portray the war in a deep or interesting way. This group of critics claims that the *sefāreshi-nevisi* novels show little creativity in terms of their narrative elements such as plot, character, and setting.⁹⁷ By contrast, those critics who advocate ‘writing by commission,’ such as Aslānpur, perceive it as an invaluable means of supporting writers and literary production. In Aslānpur’s view, the existence of *sefāreshi-nevisi* is unproblematic because many good novels written about the war were generated on the basis of such orders.⁹⁸

Although many critics express their views on ‘writing by commission’ straightaway, others attempt to define the phenomenon first, and then disclose their ideas about it. For instance, Reza Amirkhāni attempts to define the term ‘*sefāreshi-nevisi*.’ He states that if it only signifies that a foundation merely suggests a theme to a writer, it is not a problem, because most writers over the world write because of an order coming from some organization or other. He goes further to declare that if the term *sefāreshi-nevisi* implies that a foundation has paid the writer in advance before they start writing their novel, this is an unacceptable method for encouraging writers to write about the war. He claims that if a foundation does so, authors will not properly dedicate themselves to their work, and the results will be uninteresting and uncreative. In this regard, Amirkhāni views *sefāreshi-nevisi* as a major threat to the quality of the corpus of Persian war novels.⁹⁹ Similarly, Mahmud Akhbarzāde asserts that if ‘writing by commission’ entails merely an opportunity for the writer to write about the war, rather than a stifling of the writer’s true creative desires, then it need not be perceived as an obstacle in the path of the writer. In his view, there is no harm if an organization orders a writer to write about the war. But if the organization tells a writer what to write and what not to write, this is not acceptable. He observes that most good authors write from their heart. Consequently, restricting writers will only lead to the emergence of clichéd and superficial war novels.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Ibid., 221; Hanif, *Kand o Kāvi*, 248.

⁹⁸ Hanif, *Kand o Kāvi*, 246.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 247-48.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 247.

Differing Views on the Iran-Iraq War

Previously, I separated the Persian war novels into two groups: those written during the eight years of the Iran-Iraq War and those written after the ceasefire up to 2012. The present section will focus on the ways in which Persian war novelists have represented the war in their novels (based on Mohammad Hanif's classification). Authors' differing outlooks on the conflict provide another means by which to classify the Persian war novels. Most of the Persian writers who experienced the war wrote about the event in order to reveal their perspective on the war. Some had a positive outlook, while others had a negative attitude toward the conflict. Given this, the Persian war novels can be classified into three groups: those novels with predominantly positive attitudes towards the war, those novels with generally negative outlooks on the war, and novels with moderate or neutral outlooks on the war. To comprehend the writers' attitude in each of the Persian war novels, it is necessary to analyze their narrative elements, including their themes, characters, settings, and messages. For, it is through studying these elements that readers come to comprehend whether a particular writer's outlook on the war is positive, negative, or moderate.

Novels with a Positive Outlook on the War

Although the war was often viewed as a negative phenomenon, some Persian writers, such as Ferāsat, Nāser Irāni (b. 1937), and Mohammad Reza Bāyrāmi (b. 1961) highlighted the positive aspects and outcomes of the war. They treated the war as 'God's blessing.'¹⁰¹ In detailing the positive aspects of the conflict, these writers intended to emphasize Islamic principles and teaching in their novels. Thus, novels with a positive outlook on the war tend to closely associate the war with religious and spiritual convictions.

One of the main positive consequences of the war that was highly stressed during wartime Iran was the possibility of martyrdom that it brought with it. As martyrdom was a noble ideal within Iranian society, it became one of the main themes in most of the novels with a positive outlook on war. The writers of these novels emphasized the sublime and sacred status of martyrs, as friends of God who will rest by His side after death. In this kind of novel, characters often welcome martyrdom. In many cases, martyrdom becomes the

¹⁰¹ Hanif, "Dah Sāl Romān va Dāstān-e Boland-e Jang," *Adabiyāt-e Dāstāni* 51 (1378/1999): 89.

characters' main wish, and the central factor that compels them to go to war. For instance, Manizhe Ārmin (b. 1945), in her novel *Sorud-e Arvand Rud* ('The Song of the Arvand River,' 1989), describes the passion of the protagonist, Akbar, in joining the army and going to the frontline in order to fulfill his desire to be martyred. He eventually goes to the front, where he meets his martyrdom and his wish is fulfilled. The protagonist sees his martyrdom as a valuable choice in life, which takes him to an eternal life in Paradise.¹⁰² Similarly, in *The Headless Palm Trees*, the author describes Nāser's desire to partake in the war. When Nāser learns about his sister and brother's martyrdom, he becomes determined to follow their path. He thus goes to war, and is subsequently killed in a confrontation. In this novel, the writer also reveals the impact of this martyrdom on Nāser's friends and family. It concludes that not only does the martyrdom of loved ones not prevent others from participating at the front, but also it actually plays a key role in urging them to do so. Martyrdom in most of the novels with a positive outlook on the war is thus not viewed as a tragic event, but rather a sweet and pleasant one, which is selected deliberately.¹⁰³

Another prominent notion in those novels with a positive outlook on the war is *emdād-e gheybi* (lit., 'invisible aid').¹⁰⁴ This concept implies God's divine assistance to man through mysterious ways. God's aid can appear either to an individual or to a group of people.¹⁰⁵ During the Iran-Iraq War, God's hidden aid and support were interpreted as occurring in different ways. This subject therefore entered many war novels in order to emphasize the righteousness of Iran in the war. For instance, Bāyrāmi's *Oqāb-hā-ye Tappe-ye Shast* ('Eagles of Hill Sixty,' 1990) is one of many novels that address this concept. The story revolves around Ahmad Amiri, who leaves school and joins the army with his friend, Sa'idi. One day they go to a hill, known as 'Hill Sixty,' which is situated near the Iranian warfront. On top of the hill, they find an eagle's nest, which is bombarded a few days later by an Iraqi plane. This event leads to the development of a friendship between the boys and the eagle. Later in the story, the eagle plays a central role in rescuing Iranian soldiers from being killed.¹⁰⁶ The eagle in this novel is represented as God's invisible assistant, bent on saving Iranian lives. The

¹⁰² M. Ārmin, *Sorud-e Arvand Rud* (Tehran: Markaz-e Nashr-e Farhangi-ye Rajā', 1368/1989).

¹⁰³ Sa'idi, "Ruykard-hā-ye Omde-ye Adabiyyāt-e Dāstāni," *Pazhuhesh-e Zabān va Adabiyyāt-e Fārsi* 7 (1385/2006): 24.

¹⁰⁴ Pārsinezhād, *Jangi Dāshim*, 17.

¹⁰⁵ For an extensive study regarding the concept of '*emdād-e gheybi*' in Islamic context, see M. Mutahhari, *Emdād-hā-ye Gheybi dar Zendegi-ye Bashār* (Qom: Sadrā, 1354/1975), 49-94.

¹⁰⁶ M.R. Bāyrāmi. *Oqāb-hā-ye Tappe-ye Shast*, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Sure-ye Mehr, 1387/2008).

concept of *emdād-e gheybi* also occurs in Jamshid Khāniyān's (b. 1961) *Kudaki-hā-ye Zamin* ('Earth's Childhoods,' 1997).¹⁰⁷

The main characters in novels with a positive outlook on the war are always supporters of the Islamic Revolution. In order to protect and save the Revolution from being destroyed by the enemy, they oblige themselves to participate in the war. They have a strong faith in God and perceive the war as an ordeal in which they must be victorious, raising their heads proudly. For these characters, the war signifies 'God's ordeal,' testing the firmness of their belief and moral behavior. If they are killed during this test, this is viewed as a great success and triumph, which implies the firmness of their beliefs. Furthermore, the war martyrs in these novels are often described as having an innocent demeanor, glorious and bright faces, and pure and clean hearts filled with the love of God. For instance, the main characters in *The Headless Palm Trees* and Nāser Irāni's *Oruj* ('Ascension,' 1984) fall into this category. The main characters in these novels are often described as brave soldiers who fight sincerely in order to preserve the state of the Islamic Revolution.¹⁰⁸

Most of the novels with a positive outlook on the war describe the frontline, where the Iranian warriors are fighting against the enemy, directly. The authors of these novels often aim to acquaint readers with the culture of the warfront by exploring the values held by Iranian soldiers on the battlefield and attempting to paint a realistic picture of Iranian soldiers at the front. Moreover, they also depict the lives of civilians behind the frontlines. In some of these novels, such as *Fire in the Crop* and *Esmā'il-Esmā'il* (1981) by Mahmud Golābdarre'ī (1939-2012), which were written for teenagers, citizens behind the front are often described predominantly as supporters of the Iranian soldiers, who pray for their success and victory.

Novels with a Negative Outlook

Some authors of Iranian war novels, instead of perceiving the war as a 'blessing,' focus merely on the devastating and unpleasant impacts of the event, exploring subjects such as the bombardment of cities by Iraqi forces, poverty, insecurity, and forced migration. Furthermore, some of the concepts that are frequently praised in those novels that portray the war positively are satirized in these novels. Taqi Modarresi's *Ādāb-e Ziyārat* ('The Pilgrim's Rules of

¹⁰⁷ E. Hasanbeygi, *Jang va Romānhāyash: Mo'arrefi, Kholāse, va Tahlil-e Kutāh-e 54 Romān-e Defā'-e Moqaddas* (Tehran: Soroush, 1392/2013), 147-52.

¹⁰⁸ Hanif, *Jang az Se Didgāh*, 23-25; A. Amiri-Khorāsāni, "Mo'allege-hā-ye Pāydāri dar Simā-ye Shakhsīyat-hā-ye Romān-e Defā'-e Moqaddas," *Adabīyāt-e Pāydāri* 2 (1389/2000): 31-44.

Etiquette,' 1989) and Kushān's *Interlunar* may be categorized as novels with negative outlooks on the war. For instance, in *The Pilgrim's Rules of Etiquette*, the writer does not consider death to be a positive occurrence in any shape or form. Consequently, he does not view martyrdom as noble. Generally, in such novels, the writers are often worried for the lives of the young Iranians who go to the front without any real knowledge the facts of war and its dire consequences. The negative aspects of the war are also made evident where the writers choose to portray, in depth, the devastating effects of the war on Iranian cities, which turned them to ruins. This facet of the war is explored in *Interlunar*.

The main characters in novels with a negative outlook on the war are often described as intellectuals who perceive the Iran-Iraq War to be result of the government's insanity and irresponsibility. They are also often keen to criticize the state's military strategies.¹⁰⁹ For instance, the character of Hādi Beshārat in *The Pilgrim's Rules of Etiquette* is tenaciously against the government, its Islamic teachings, and Iranian tradition, which were all stressed in wartime Iran. One of the Iranian customs which, according to Beshārat, was irrational was the keeping of bridal chambers (*hejle*). During the war, in order to praise the bravery of Iranian martyrs on the battlefield and to keep their memories alive, the construction of martyrs' chambers became customary. These were small-scale, hexagonal, or octagonal structures that were called *hejle*. Their symbolic purpose was to lament the fact that these young martyrs were never able to see their bridal chambers. *Hejle* could be seen standing outside those houses where mourning ceremonies for martyrs were held. The chambers were decorated with flowers and colorful lights, and each of them contained the image of the martyr.¹¹⁰ In *The Pilgrim's Rules of Etiquette*, in order to show his dislike of this custom, Beshārat sarcastically says: "in some of the lanes they have kept chambers for the martyrs [...]. What is the connection between those small cabins with massacre on the battlefield? Only God knows."¹¹¹

Although some of the intellectuals in these novels are killed at the frontline, their intention in going to the front is neither religious nor national, but personal. Therefore, according to many Persian critics such as Barāheni and Hanif, these characters cannot be regarded as war martyrs. For instance, in *The Pilgrim's Rules of Etiquette*, a history student named Mehrdād Rāzi goes to the front in order to visit the ruins of Mesopotamia where, because of the war, he is killed. In this regard, the intellectual characters who die at the front

¹⁰⁹ H. Bārūniyān, *Shakhsīyyat-pardāzi dar Dāstān-hā-ye Kutāh-e Defā'-e Moqaddas* (Tehran: Bonyād-e Hefz-e Āsār va Nashr-e Arzesh-hā-ye Defā'-e Moqaddas, 1387/2008), 151-52.

¹¹⁰ Today, chambers are placed when a person passes away at a young age. See Y. Dehghanpur "Hejleh as Public Art," *Rose Issa Projects*, <http://www.roseissa.com/past%20exhib/Monir-Hejleh/Monir-Hejleh-exh-press.html> (accessed June 11, 2014).

¹¹¹ T. Modarresi, *Ādāb-e Ziyārat* (Tehran: Nilufar, 1368/1989), 15.

are mainly portrayed as the victims of war, rather than as national heroes. These protagonists are often characterized as well-educated, kind, devoted, and harmless individuals. In addition, these novels often present those characters who eagerly want to join the army as ignorant, illiterate, and inhumane.¹¹²

Such novels, which highlight the negative aspects of the war, also often describe scenes behind the front which reveal the devastating impact of the war on Iranian society at large. Atmospherically, these novels are often teeming with stress, sorrow, pessimism, and suspicion. The people in the cities are exhausted and desperate for the war to end. Most of them make attempts to leave their homes and settle somewhere far from the war zone. Moreover, in these novels, those who go to the front to sacrifice their lives are considered to have made a pointless sacrifice, and more often than not their deeds go unappreciated. Mojābi in *The Night of Grasshopper*, for example, claims that those who choose to go to the front are seeking something (i.e., martyrdom) which has no value. He compares them to a horse's portrait, which is absolutely still, only appearing to be dynamic and progressive.¹¹³

Although the novels with a positive outlook on the war aim to highlight the sacrifice of Iranian soldiers in the defense of the country, the novels which portray the war negatively, emphasize peace and prosperity and want these elements to encompass the country.

Novels with a Moderate Outlook

Other Persian war writers have a moderate outlook on the war. This is to say that they consider both positive and negative aspects of the conflict. Unlike the two previous kinds of war novel we have been considering, which are abundant in number, there are not many novels with a neutral outlook on the war. Ahmad Mahmud's *The Scorched Earth* and Makhmalbāf's *The Crystal Garden* are categorized as novels with a moderate view of the war.

In those novels with a moderate outlook on the war, the main characters often oblige themselves to go to the front and defend their country against the enemy's brutality. These novels praise the deeds of those characters who join the army and are proud to be at the battlefield. However, in addition to this, the novels also highlight the negative impact of the war on civilian life. They often attempt to characterize the mental and social effects brought about by the war on their protagonists. The main characters are often frustrated and distressed,

¹¹² Hanif, *Jang az Se Didgāh*, 147-48.

¹¹³ J. Mojābi, *Shab-e Malakh* (Tehran: Esperk, 1369/1990), 150.

hoping for some miracle to happen that will bring them peace.¹¹⁴ For instance, in *The Scorched Earth*, Ahmad Mahmud describes and praises the people in Ahvaz who were successful in not allowing the Iraqis to make a rapid advance in the city. On the other hand, he also describes negative aspects of the war including rape, robbery, and lack of food. Likewise, in *The Crystal Garden*, not only does the writer elevate the position of disabled war veterans as the genuine heroes of the warfronts, but he also criticizes the government for not paying enough attention to the families of war veterans and martyrs who are unable to solve their financial problems without the state's support. Makhmalbāf therefore concludes that those who are killed in the war are lucky as they have reached Paradise. Their families, on the other hand, are not so fortunate because they have to continue to live with persisting problems within the society. *The Crystal Garden* also describes the impact of the war on Iranian orphanages, which filled with children who lost their parents, whilst only a very limited number of families were willing to adopt a child.

Mehdi Sa'idi claims that novels with a neutral view of the war mainly revolve around social issues; therefore, they could be described as 'novels with social axis' (*romān-e jāme'e-mehvar*). In his view, although the writers of these novels have a strong belief in the value of defending the country and focus on Islamic concepts, they nonetheless reveal the abhorrence of the war and describe the ways in which Iranians dealt with its tragic elements. Sa'idi thus concludes that these novels, which expose the impact of the war on people's lives, are a kind of social realism.¹¹⁵ He goes further to discuss the differences between those novels with a negative outlook and those with a moderate outlook. He explains that describing and criticizing the negative aspects of the war are predominant in the former type of novel and not the latter type. In addition to this, those concepts and beliefs that are presented as commendable in the positive and moderate novels are satirized in the negative novels.¹¹⁶

Many literary critics in Iran, such as Hanif and Sarshār, have classified Fasih's *The Winter of 1983* as a novel with a negative outlook on the war. This is because it does not describe the concept of martyrdom in line with Islamic ideology, as a positive phenomenon. There are however two main factors which rather indicate that this novel should be categorized as a novel with a moderate outlook on the war. First and foremost, as with those novels having a positive outlook on the war, *The Winter of 1983* praises the deeds of the main protagonist in going to the war, and focuses on themes of martyrdom and sacrifice. The point

¹¹⁴ Kāfi, *Shenākht-e Adabiyāt*, 192.

¹¹⁵ Sa'idi, "Ruykard-hā-ye Omde," 26.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

that the critics have missed is the conspicuous presence of war rhetoric which the novel uses to propagate the notion of martyrdom. This is to say that Fasih's novel was indeed used as a mobilizing tool. Another factor which indicates that *The Winter of 1983* should be classified as a novel with a moderate outlook on the war is its description of the devastating effects of the war on the cities of Iran, as well as the negative physiological impact which the war wrought on its citizens. In this regard, this novel can easily be compared to *The Scorched Earth*, which according to Ghanoonparvar both "expressed the sense of frustration, helplessness, and desperation felt by Iranians suffering the death and destruction caused by the far-reaching effects of modern warfare on their cities and villages" whilst also describing martyrdom in a positive light.¹¹⁷ As a result, *The Winter of 1983*, which similarly addresses both the positive and negative aspects of the conflict, should also be considered a novel with moderate outlook.

Although both *The Scorched Earth* and *The Winter of 1983* are categorized in this dissertation as having a moderate outlook on the war, each of them portrays the war and its various aspects in different manners. A number of both similarities and differences can be drawn between these two works. Firstly, *The Scorched Earth* emphasizes the theme of martyrdom by featuring a protagonist from the lower strata of society, and showing how he welcomes martyrdom and desires to be martyred in the path of his religion. *The Winter of 1983*, in contrast, highlights ideological trends in wartime Iran in general, and martyrdom in particular, by introducing various forms of war rhetoric. This war rhetoric is described to show how martyrdom was presented in wartime Iran and to illustrate its ideological influence on people. That is, the reader of *The Scorched Earth* is expected to already know the meaning and interpretation of martyrdom in the context of Iranian war culture, while *The Winter of 1983* helps its reader to first understand the significance of martyrdom, and then through the actions of the protagonist, it illustrates how war rhetoric motivated Iranians to the battlefield.

Secondly, the main characters in *The Scorched Earth* belong to the working class, to highlight this socio-economic group's contribution to and sacrifice in the war, while *The Winter of 1983* chiefly portrays the middle class's role, and especially their views about the war. This does not imply that Fasih's novel ignores working-class characters; however, he pays greater attention to the manner in which the higher social strata dealt with the war. Thirdly, although dealing with different socio-economic groups, both novels exemplify the impact of the war on civilian life in Ahvaz, which is a real city fictionalized as the setting for

¹¹⁷ Ghanoonparvar, introduction to *Fortune Told in Blood*, trans. Ghanoonparvar (The Center of Middle Eastern Studies: The University of Texas at Austin, 2008), xi, xii.

both these works. This shared choice of location derives from the writers' wartime experiences, as both Ahmad Mahmud and Fasih were residents of Ahvaz for some time.

Moreover, as far as the characters are concerned, those in *The Scorched Earth* believe that participation in the war effort is their civic duty, and that they must defend their homeland, while those in *The Winter of 1983* often try to find ways to escape the country, because they see the war as a result of Iran's political upheaval. For instance, the female character Nane Bārān in Ahmad Mahmud's novel is the opposite of the character of Nane Bushehri in Fasih's novel. Nane Bārān's son is martyred in the early days of the war, and she is grateful to God for his martyrdom, which she interprets as a reward. In contrast, Nane Bushehri not only criticizes her son's martyrdom, but also tries to convince the protagonist and other characters to leave the country.

Finally, Ahmad Mahmud's *The Scorched Earth* and Fasih's *The Winter of 1983* not only differ in their representations of the Iran-Iraq War, but are even more divergent in their style and language. It is obvious that Ahmad Mahmud wrote his work quickly in order to convey the state's message during wartime and encourage readers to defend their country as soon as possible, whereas Fasih's choice of theme, characters, and even his style were chosen carefully to indicate a broader and deeper sketch of the war, which was often neglected in many contemporary novels.

Recurrent Themes in the Persian War Novels

The Persian war novels contain a vast range of themes pertaining to the war and its impacts on all aspects of Iranian society. Apart from martyrdom, which has already been extensively discussed, many of these novels have the subject of disabled war veterans as one of their focal points. In this respect, these writers highlight several aspects concerning war veterans, ranging from describing how they became disabled during the Iran-Iraq War to their personal lives and the issues they face after becoming disabled, as well as their physical and mental conditions. These writers often praise and acclaim the deeds of veterans who sacrificed their bodies in the path of defending the country and bringing peace and tranquility to their fellow compatriots. Comparing the conditions of war martyrs and war veterans, the war novels often admire the second group, who, due to their physical or mental handicaps, struggle with the burdens of daily life. The martyrs, on the other hand, are viewed as living tranquilly in

Heaven, free from such mundane issues. In the Persian war novels, disabled veterans are often antisocial individuals who seldom appear in public due to their fear of the opinions of others regarding their physical handicaps.¹¹⁸ For instance, Ferāsāt's *Golāb Khānom* ('Miss Golāb,' 1995) recounts a story of Musa, who goes to the frontline, hoping to return home for his wedding. During battle he is wounded by a bullet, his face is damaged, and he is admitted to hospital. As a result, he cannot reach his wedding ceremony on time. After a while, Musa is transferred to a mental hospital in his hometown. He does not tell his family or fiancée about this, since he fears that they will be disgusted by his disfigured face. Eventually, when Musa sees his fiancée Golāb, he asks her to leave him to find a better-looking man. Despite this, Golāb decides to marry Musa after all.¹¹⁹

Another theme explored by these novels, which is relevant to the subject of disabled war veterans, is the issue of shell-shock (*mouj-gereftegi*). Several of the Persian war novels describe war veterans suffering from shell-shock and other neuroses caused by the war, which have a profound effect on their overall world-views. For instance, Hasanbeygi's *Rishe dar A'māq* ('Root in the Depths,' 1994) revolves around the life of Shafi Mohammad who eagerly goes to the frontline, where, due to being hit by a bullet, becomes shell-shocked. Shafi Mohammad's superstitious father believes that an evil spirit (*jenn*) has possessed Shafi's soul. To remove the evil spirit, the father tries everything he can think of, but his efforts are all in vain. Thus, Shafi Mohammad is forced to live out the rest of his life with shell-shock.¹²⁰

Another recurrent theme in the Persian war novels is captivity (*esārat*), especially the captivity of prisoners of war. Novels containing this theme often describe the lives of Iranian captives in Iraqi war camps, as well as the living conditions found within them. During the Iran-Iraq War, many Iranian soldiers became captives of the Iraqis and were transferred to prisoner-of-war camps in Iraq. Novels which explore the theme of captivity not only aim to show how Iraqis were treating and torturing Iranian prisoners, but also serve to highlight the Iranians' brave and enduring resistance against the enemy's torments. Some of these Iranian prisoners even died as a result of the Iraqi's methods of torture. *Faqat be Zamin Negāh Kon* ('Just Look at the Ground,' 1993) by Mohammad Reza Kāteb (b. 1966) is a significant example of a novel which describes the inhuman conduct of an Iraqi officer to Iranian war prisoners. In one of the Iraqi war camps, the Iraqi officer interrogates four Iranian prisoners. He asks them a series of questions and commands them to answer without looking at his face,

¹¹⁸ Soleymāni, *Tofang va Tarāzu*, 55-56.

¹¹⁹ Ferāsāt, *Golāb Khānom* (Tehran: Qadyāni, 1374/1995).

¹²⁰ Hasanbeygi, *Rishe dar A'māq* (Tehran: Barg, 1373/1994).

whilst looking at the ground. While answering the questions, the Iraqi officer breaks the fingers of the first captive and has a savage attitude to another. The third prisoner is a brave teenager, who makes fun of the officer and is not afraid of him. The officer then reaches an aged captive who is the same age as him. They start a conversation through which the Iraqi officer confesses that due to a defeat in one of the operations during the Iran-Iraq War he received a military demotion. Eventually, the officer orders the old man to be executed.¹²¹ Jahāngir Khosrowshāhi (b. 1961) in *Zakhm-dār* ('The Injured,' 1995) also discusses the theme of captivity. The story revolves around the narrator, Esmā'il, who has been a war prisoner for several years. During his captivity, he undergoes surgery to remove a bullet from his head, but after the surgery, he succumbs to Alzheimer's and is unable to talk. In the course of the exchanging of war prisoners between Iran and Iraq, Esmā'il returns to Iran. Every day he visits the grave of his best friend, Habib, who was killed during the war, and writes letters to him. In these letters, he describes the tortures and hardships he experienced in the Iraqi war camp. One day, while writing a letter to Habib, Esmā'il realizes that he can talk once more. The same night, he dreams of Habib, which alleviates his anxiety and loneliness.¹²²

Bombardment and civil war are other frequent themes in the Persian war novels. The writers of such novels tend to focus mainly on the enemy's cruelty towards defenseless civilians. The civil war was the most devastating phase of the Iran-Iraq War, under which most of the Iranian cities were under the direct bombardment of the Iraqis' missiles and aerial attacks. During this stage of the war, the Iraqis used chemical weapons which affected the lives of many Iranians in most of the cities. Not only do these writers emphasize this devastating stage of the war; they also detail the people's mental upheaval during these bombardments.¹²³ One of the most frequently discussed outcomes of the bombardment in these novels is the subject of civilian migration to cities and villages further from the war zones. They often picture the lives of Iranian immigrants and their reactions to the war. *Interlunar* by Kushān and *Naqsh-e Penhān* ('The Concealed Image,' 1991) by Mohammad Mohammad-Ali (b. 1948) are novels in which bombardment, civil war, and migration are the main themes.

¹²¹ M.R. Kāteb, *Faqat be Zamin Negāh Kon* (Tehran: Mo'avenat-e Tablighāt va Enteshārāt-e Niru-ye Zamini, 1372/1993).

¹²² J. Khosrowshāhi, *Zakhm-dār*, 2nd ed. (Tehran: Takā, 1386/2007).

¹²³ Soleymāni, *Tofang va Tarāzu*, 52-53.

Women's Roles in the Persian War Novels

When Iraq invaded southern Iran, Iranian men rushed to the warfront in order to defend their country from the enemy's further advancement. Women, on the other hand, generally stayed at home in order to support their families. This said, many Iranian women also volunteered in the army to fight against the enemy, especially in the southern and western parts of the country, alongside the men. In these areas, women undertook activities such as taking care of weapons, arming soldiers, safeguarding bodies of the martyrs, and raising awareness of the enemy's movements.¹²⁴ Direct participation in military affairs was considered one of the most important contributions of women to the war. Reportedly, 6,420 Iranian women were killed on the frontline during the war.¹²⁵

Seyyede Zahra Hoseyni is one of the many Iranian women who directly participated in the war in southern Iran. She compiled her memoirs on the Iran-Iraq War in a book, entitled *Dā* (the Kurdish word for 'mother'). In this book, she recounts her personal experiences of the war. She describes herself as being strong, ready to help at any time, and extremely courageous. Not only did Zahra nurse the wounded; she also worked in the cemetery, washing the corpses of the dead. She even washed her father and brother's corpses, burying them herself. In fact, her memoir provides valuable information regarding the direct roles of Iranian women in the war.¹²⁶

Despite the direct participation of Iranian women in the war, it was more common for women to assume roles out of the way of the fighting. For example, many women behind the front, in mosques, homes, schools, and other public places were active in collecting donations, wrapping, and shipping them to the front. In addition, Iranian women provided medical services to the families of martyrs and soldiers.¹²⁷ Women behind the front also played a supportive role for the Iranian soldiers, reinforcing their morale. This role of women was so important during the war, that Ayatollah Khomeini has praised them, saying "the emotions that women expressed during the war had many instrumental effects at the frontlines."¹²⁸

The Persian war novels emphasize both the roles of Iranian men fighting in the war and the roles of Iranian women during the eight years of fighting. This said, women are less

¹²⁴ M. Shirudi, "Moshārekāt-e Zanān dar Defā'-e Moqaddas," *Hosun* 8 (1385/2006): 143.

¹²⁵ E. Koolaee, "The Impact of Iraq-Iran War on Social Roles of Iranian Women," *Middle East Critique* 23, no. 3 (2014): 281.

¹²⁶ For a comprehensive study of this memoir, see Nanquette, "An Iranian Woman's Memoir," 943-57. Paul Sprachman's English translation of this memoir was published under the title "One Woman's War: *Da* (Mother)" in 2014.

¹²⁷ Koolaee, "The Impact of Iraq-Iran War," 281.

¹²⁸ Shirudi, "Moshārekāt-e Zanān," 144.

frequently main characters in the war novels.¹²⁹ The novels often describe the characteristics and traits of Iranian women during the war, among which persistence, assistance, patience, endurance, supporting the family, and improving the morale of the fighters are prominent. In addition, women's emotional and psychological issues, their pain and torment, their experiences of immigration, the happiness of the martyrs' mothers, love, the loyalty of martyrs' wives, and the assistance of women behind the front are the common themes explored when dealing the experiences of Iranian women in the war novels. Furthermore, women featuring in Persian war fiction often fall in one of the following groups: the families of martyrs (e.g., mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters), immigrants, intellectuals, nurses, and women behind the front.¹³⁰ Each of these groups of women has a different outlook on the war, which is explored in the different war novels.

The families of martyrs are frequently considered in the Persian war novels. They are often described as the bravest of all women by virtue of sending their loved ones (fathers, sons, husbands, and brothers) to the war for the sake of their religious cause. Most of these women know that the martyrdom of their loved ones will be rewarded later in Paradise, and that as the daughters, wife, sister, and/or mother of a martyr, they will be treated as martyrs in their own right, in virtue of being left to look after their families.¹³¹ Among the family members, the mothers and wives of the martyrs appear most often in the Persian war novels.

The martyr's wife is portrayed as the most vulnerable class of society, who, after losing her husband, has to carry the burden of life alone. Not only does a war widow have to cope with emotional loss, but they must also deal with providing for the daily needs of the rest of their families. In other words, the war widow is forced to suffer from both a lack of financial and emotional support.¹³² For instance, in *The Garden Crystal*, which is dedicated "to a woman, the oppressed woman of this land," Makhmalbāf describes the lives of Iranian women during the war, mainly focusing on the difficulties faced by widows in the society. For instance, Āliye, after the loss of her husband and two sons, suffers from mental illness. Lāye, another war widow, who has two children and is pregnant with a third, marries Karim for emotional support. However, in the end, Karim deceives and leaves Lāye forever. Through the character of Lāye, the author shows how difficult the life of an Iranian war widow can be.

¹²⁹ Pārsinezhād, "Dāstān-hā-ye Jang," 22.

¹³⁰ Soleymāni, "Zan dar Dāstān-hā-ye Jang," *Adabiyāt-e Dāstāni* 55 (1380/2001): 16-20.

¹³¹ F. Shirazi, "Death, the Great Equalizer: Memorializing Martyred (*Shahid*) Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Visual Anthropology* 25, nos. 1-2 (2012): 104.

¹³² M. Ghaffāri-Jāhed, "Naqsh-e Zanān dar Adabiyāt-e Dāstāni-ye Defā'-e Moqaddas," *Adabiyāt-e Dāstāni* 113 (1386/2007): 43. For a comprehensive discussion regarding the role and status of Iranian war widows, see A. Zahedi, "State, Ideology, and the Status of Iranian War Widows," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 8, no. 2 (2006): 267-86.

By contrast, many Persian war novels describe the tolerance and patience of the mother and wife of a martyr. They are often characterized as the followers of Zeynab, the sister of Imam Hoseyn. In the battle of Karbala, Zeynab's brother, as well as her two sons, Own and Mohammad, were killed. After the battle, Zeynab along with other women and children were taken as prisoners to Yazid's court in Damascus, where Zeynab openly denounced the brutality of Yazid. In Zeynab's view, the martyrdom of her loved ones was an occasion for celebration, not mourning. Zeynab is consequently a symbol of an ideal woman, "supporting [her] male relative, suffering the indignation of captivity with dignity, educating and preparing [her] sons to follow the path of [Imam] Hoseyn, willingly sacrificing [her] male loved ones to martyrdom, and serving as spokesperson for the cause after the men were martyred."¹³³ During the Iran-Iraq War, the Iranian women took Zeynab as their role model and reacted as she did when they heard about martyrdom of their loved ones. For instance, in *The Headless Palm Trees*, Nāser's mother, who has lost three of her young children to the war, is happy like Zeynab. Salime in *The Song of the Arvand River* and Nane Bārān in *The Scorched Earth* have the same reaction towards the death of their sons in the war, and both compare their situation to that of Zeynab. By contrast, in those novels with negative outlook on the war, the mothers of martyrs do not appreciate the deeds of their sons. For instance, Mehrdād's mother in *The Pilgrim's Rules of Etiquette* and Nane Bushehri in *The Winter of 1983* are angry about the martyrdom of their sons, and endeavor to forget their sons' memories.

The wives of disabled war veterans are another type of woman presented in the war novels. They usually have the huge responsibility of looking after their husbands. Often, they perceive their husbands' disability as an advantage rather than a disadvantage. Fattāhi's *Eshq-e Sāl-hā-ye Jang* ('Love of the War Period,' 1994) describes the reaction of a woman who has discharged her disabled husband from hospital. Not only is she not upset about her husband's disability, but she talks about it proudly and says: "Everyone is proud of him, who has lost his legs in the war. In fact, I want everyone to know how well my husband has fought. I want everyone to know that he was a brave man and did not leave the front. I want everyone to know that we have a *jānbāz*."¹³⁴ Likewise, in *The Crystal Garden*, Malihe gets married to a disabled war veteran for the sake of God and for its spiritual rewards (*savāb*). However, these women are often required to devote their lives to nursing their husbands. For Malihe, this is

¹³³ K.S. Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala: Shi'i Symbols and Rituals in Modern Iran* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 2004), 9.

¹³⁴ H. Fattāhi, *Eshq-e Sāl-hā-ye Jang* (Tehran: Qadyāni, 1373/1994), 351.

the smallest thing that she can do in return for her husband's sacrifice in the service of their homeland.¹³⁵

Iranian immigrant women and their issues during the war are also often present in the Persian war novels. These women are those who are forced to leave their hometowns and settle far from the war. They are mainly concerned about the lives of their family members, and thus decide to migrate. It should be noted that throughout the Iran-Iraq War there were severe threats to immigrant women and their children, which lead to 'physical abuse,' family breakdown, loss of job, 'deprivation of health and educational services,' and a worsened economic situation.¹³⁶ For instance, in *The Headless Palm Trees*, Nāser's mother goes with her family to Tehran, where she is discontent. She eagerly awaits returning home. Immigrant women in these novels are often frustrated and encounter financial and moral problems. In *The Concealed Image*, for example, Safiyye Khānom, who lives in southern Iran, migrates to a safe area which is not affected by the war. Since her husband is killed in battle, she is forced to work and manage her financial affairs alone. Using illegal methods, she earns money and gradually starts to mistreat others. She is eventually killed during one of the Iraqi bombardments, but her bad behavior remains in the minds of her friends.¹³⁷ Although many war writers chose to write about such immigrant women and their problems during the war, many of these characters are marginal and do not play an important role in the course of their respective stories.

Intellectual women are another kind of female character often mentioned in the Persian war novels. For the most part, those novels which have a positive outlook on the war do not include intellectual women characters, since it is believed that they did not play an active role in fighting against Iraq. By contrast, those novels which view the war negatively often do include intellectual women as characters. In these novels, intellectual women are often well-educated and have active intellectual lives. As the writers of these novels show, during the war, many of the intellectual women characters are determined to either go abroad or migrate to another city, so long as they are far from the war zone. They are often worried about their future personal lives, instead of worrying about the future of the nation, the state, and those who are being killed at the frontline. For instance, in *Interlunar*, a group of intellectual men and women migrates to Khorasan, where they have good time together, talking, smoking and drinking all day and night. They remain in their own little world to the

¹³⁵ Ghaffāri-Jāhed, "Naqsh-e Zanān," 45.

¹³⁶ Koolae, "The Impact of Iraq-Iran War," 282.

¹³⁷ M. Mohammad-Ali, *Naqsh-e Penhān*, 3rd ed. (Tehran: Cāravān, 1380/2001).

extent that they sometimes forget that the war is even going on. Likewise, the intellectual women characters in *The Pilgrim's Rules of Etiquette* despise the war and do not applaud the martyrs who are giving their lives for the country. Khānom Rāzi, for example, whose son is killed at the frontline, tries to sell all of her son's clothes in order to erase the memory of him, and hopes to relocate to Europe to have a more peaceful life.¹³⁸ Generally, in most of the war novels, these intellectual women are subsequently described as cowards who intend to leave the country instead of staying and facing the situation.

Another group of women in the Persian war novels are those who play active roles behind the front. These women render special services like cooking, distributing drinks, nursing the wounded, and giving moral support to the Iranian soldiers. Most of the writers focus on women who voluntarily nurse and aid wounded combatants. Due to the close connection between the nurses and soldiers, the nurses are among the first people to receive news and information regarding the frontline. Writers often use these women to depict the conditions at the frontline. For instance, in *Khāk-e Sorkh* ('Red Soil,' 1993) by Shohre Vakili (b. 1946), due to a mental shock during the war, the female character Golizhe becomes infertile, which leads her husband to divorce her and marry another woman. In order to forget the bitterness of this separation, Golizhe goes to a hospital in Tabriz, where she devotes her life to nursing the wounded Iranian soldiers of the war. Meanwhile, she goes to several war zones as a first responder (*emdādgār*).¹³⁹ Likewise, in Fattāhi's *Love of the War Period*, Ma'ume, whose husband is killed in the early days of the war, devotes her life to nursing wounded soldiers in hospital. By doing so, she views herself as playing an important part in the war. In describing women behind the front, writers often seek to emphasize the central role of women in war. Their services remain vital during war and, as such, writers cannot avoid mentioning them.

Iraqi Novels and the Iran-Iraq War

During the Iran-Iraq War, both nations witnessed an extensive number of novels being written, most of which were produced to support the state's ideology and war efforts. Although the focus of this dissertation is emphatically on Iran, the following discussion aims

¹³⁸ Hanif, "Dah Sāl Romān," 110.

¹³⁹ S. Vakili, *Khāk-e Sorkh* (Tehran: Mo'allef, 1372/1993).

to provide an informative, though by no means comprehensive, account of the Iraqi novels written about the Iran-Iraq War for the sake of completeness.

When the war broke out between Iran and Iraq, governments of both nations glorified martyrdom and classified those who were killed in the war as martyrs. Unlike Iran however, the Iraqi government did not use martyrdom in the context of religion, but rather in the context of national unity. Since war in Iraq was presented as another phase of Arab-Persian rivalry the Iraqi government focused on Arab-Persian discourse and the superiority of the former over the latter. Not only did Arab hegemonic discourse become one of the state's dominant wartime ideologies, but it also entered novels of the time to influence the masses and to invoke them to fight for their country. In this respect, the war brought significant changes to both military and cultural arenas, and authors played a key role in accentuating the abovementioned aspects of the war.¹⁴⁰

Using novels for propaganda purposes, Saddam Hussein aimed to both secure his position as a legitimate ruling authority in Iraq, and to circulate his war strategies. To achieve this, he encouraged writers to acclaim the heroism of the Iraqi people in the battle against Iran, and to write about his life and the history of the Ba'ath Party.¹⁴¹ His emphasis was on the concept of 'Iraqiness' to "displace ethnic, sectarian, and religious diversity" in the country.¹⁴² Almost half of the Iraqi population was Shiite and the rest were Sunni. It was essential for the Iraqi president to prevent any religious and ethnic divisions from affecting his war strategies while also bringing alliance amongst Iraqi people to fight for the same goal: defending their country and safeguarding other Arab countries. In this respect, Saddam Hussein invested all his efforts into propagating Arab nationalism in general and 'Iraqiness' in particular. Therefore, right after the outbreak of the war, to disseminate nationalism and Arab hegemony, the state reprinted a pamphlet with the title *Three Whom God Should Not Have Created: Persians, Jews, and Flies*, in which Persians were defined as "animals God created in the shape of humans."¹⁴³ This work, and similar rhetoric, was used as propaganda over the course of the war.

In addition to being a propaganda tool, in wartime Iraq the novel was also used to promote two key concepts highlighted by the state: martyrdom and national identity. In the eyes of Iraqi politicians, going to war and possible martyrdom was "a means of rejuvenating

¹⁴⁰ M. Cooke, *Women and the War Story* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 235.

¹⁴¹ F. Caiani and C. Cobham, *The Iraqi Novel: Key Writers, Key Texts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 164-65.

¹⁴² M.J. Al-Musawi, *Reading Iraq: Culture and Power in Conflict* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), 77.

¹⁴³ This pamphlet was written by Saddam Hussein's uncle, Khairallah Talfah, and it was first published in 1940. Karsh, *Saddam Hussein*, 15.

society and creating national unity and solidarity.”¹⁴⁴ In this regard, martyrdom was eulogized in the name of national solidarity in Iraq. War novels were designed to influence the Iraqi people by highlighting heroism, humanitarianism, and patriotism. When the war began, a new genre known as ‘war literature’ or ‘nationalist war literature’ was introduced in Iraq, which “was replete with references to Iraq’s ancient Mesopotamian and Islamic past, albeit in a trivialized fashion that was a far cry from the subtlety and distinguished artistic quality that characterized Iraqi arts in previous decades.”¹⁴⁵ In order to propagate this discourse of heroism, sacrifice, and national solidarity in an effective and impressive way, novels were produced under the strict surveillance of the state over their theme, content, and style. In short, Iraqi writers were under government pressure and were not allowed to write freely and openly about the state’s ideological visions. As Muhsin al-Musawi argues, any kind of literary production, including novels, had to fulfill Saddam Hussein’s ambition of supremacy among Arab leaders, and could have brought disapproval if there was not an effective and direct statement regarding his instrumental and active role in directing Iraq during the war.¹⁴⁶

Iraqi novels and short stories published during the eight years of the war were mostly written by authors who personally experienced the battlefield. Their works were important propagandist tools: only two years after the war, the Iraqi Ministry of Culture and Information published two volumes of short stories on the Iran-Iraq War, and prizes were awarded for war literature by the government.¹⁴⁷ In a large number of Iraqi wartime novels, the focus is on themes of heroism, sacrifice, and patriotism. In such novels, the protagonists are male fighters who leave their families behind to go to war. Women do not usually play roles in these novels, and they are often depicted passively as mothers, wives, or beloveds. Ādil Abd al-Jubar’s serialized novel, *Mountains for Fire, Mountains for Ice* (1982) is one of the early works about Iraq at war, which was published in parts in *al-Thawra*, a government-sponsored daily newspaper. As far as the content and characters of this work are concerned, Achim Rohde writes: “it focuses almost exclusively on daily life at the front and reflects upon the courage and heroism of Iraqi men. Women feature only rarely in this novel, and if they do

¹⁴⁴ A. Rohde, *State-Society Relations in Ba’thist Iraq: Facing Dictatorship* (London & New York: Routledge, 2010), 125.

¹⁴⁵ A. Baram, A. Rohde, and R. Zeidel, “Between the Unknown Soldier Monument and the Cemetery: Commemorating Fallen Soldiers in Iraq, 1958-2010,” in *Conflicting Narratives: War, Trauma and Memory in Iraqi Culture*, eds. S. Milich, F. Pannewick, and L. Tramontini (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2012), 115.

¹⁴⁶ Al-Musawi, *Reading Iraq*, 87.

¹⁴⁷ A.W. Lu’lu’a (trans.), *Battlefront Stories from Iraq* (Baghdad: Dar al-Ma’mum, 1982), 5-6.

they are depicted as passive characters, as ‘symbols of beauty and femininity’ in the eyes of a soldier.”¹⁴⁸

The Iraqi government also used sexualized images of women as a means of propaganda in cultural production. At the heart of Iraqi war literature, as Naddj Sadiq al-Ali argues, “was the image of a female symbolizing the nation and men depicted as lovers ready to sacrifice their needs and desires for the good of the nation.”¹⁴⁹ Novels also described women as beloveds to propagate the state’s policies regarding gender. Eroticized and sexualized images of women were also evident in Iraqi wartime visual arts, such as drawings, paintings, and posters. The portrayal of both Iraqi soldiers and women in a single piece of art symbolized the solidarity between the different Iraqi cultural and ethnic groups in the defense of their homeland.¹⁵⁰ Iraqi wartime novels, such as *al-Qamar al Şahrāwī* (‘The Desert Moon,’ 1983) by Āi’d Khasbak, and *A ‘dād Madfā’ 106* (‘Battery 106,’ 1983) by Hishām Towfiq al-Rikābi, relate stories of romantic love between the Iraqi soldier at the front and the beloved waiting at home. Both novels are regarded as excellent examples of Iraqi propaganda, and the latter was also awarded a prize by the state.¹⁵¹ During the war, pieces of Iraqi gendered propaganda, as Rohde claims, “have reinforced images of male heroism and superiority, notions of gender difference, ideals of virility and practices of male bonding among the individuals affected by them and in Iraqi society in general, with obvious negative impacts on women.”¹⁵²

Although both Iran and Iraq witnessed a considerable number of novels published during the eight years of the conflict, in Iran the creation of war novels continues to the present day, while this production decreased and then finally stopped in Iraq when the country faced another major conflict with the United States in 2003.¹⁵³ There were still a number of writers who focused on the Iran-Iraq War after it ended, but most refrained from publishing their work in Iraq during Saddam Hussein’s reign. For instance, Mahdī Īsā al-Şaqr (b. 1927), one of the best-known Iraqi writers, wrote his war novel *Bayt Ālā Nahr Dijla* (‘A House on

¹⁴⁸ Rohde, *State-Society Relations*, 130.

¹⁴⁹ N.S. Al-Ali, *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present* (London/New York: Zed Books, 2007), 154.

¹⁵⁰ Baram, *Culture, History and Ideology in the Formation of Ba’thist Iraq, 1968-89* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 78.

¹⁵¹ Baram, Rohde, and Zeidel, “Between the Unknown Soldier Monument,” 116.

¹⁵² Rohde, “Opportunities for Masculinity and Love: Cultural Production in Ba’thist Iraq during the 1980s,” in *Islamic Masculinities*, ed. L. Ouzgane (London/New York: Zed Books, 2006), 198. For the representation of women in Iraqi war novels, see Cooke, “Death and Desire in Iraqi War Literature,” in *Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*, eds. R. Allen, H. Kilpatrick, and E. de Moor (London: Saqi Books, 1995), 184-199.

¹⁵³ Chandler, “No Man’s Land,” 12.

the Tigris River'), in 1991, but it was not published until 2006.¹⁵⁴ In the post-war era, many Iraqi writers published their war novels in exile where they could openly criticize Saddam Hussein's regime and war policies. For example, *I'jām* by Sinān Anṭūn (b. 1967) was published in 2004 outside Iraq; in it, the author uncovers war propaganda and criticizes Saddam Hussein's regime.¹⁵⁵

Estimates suggest that the number of Iraqi novels published during the eight years of the Iran-Iraq War is remarkably higher than those published throughout the entire history of Iraqi novels.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, according to many scholars, this war significantly enlarged the corpora of modern Arabic literature in terms of social, emotional, and political themes.¹⁵⁷ In one of the early monographs published on Iraqi novels, Abdullāh Ibrahim lists fifty-four war novels that were produced in Iraq between 1980 and 1985.¹⁵⁸ This prolific number of Iraqi war novels can be regarded as a turning point in history of Iraqi literature in terms of quantity. Furthermore, many critics believe that Iraqi literature also witnessed its 'maturity' as a result of the war. In a statement published in 1988, a literary historian describes the situation in the following way:

War literature in Iraq became a phenomenon that attracted the attention of Arab readers and critics. They referred to it as a rich substance that produced a literary movement. [...] The more the battles raged and the victories multiplied, the surer and maturer became the fiction to the extent that there emerged short stories and novels that could stand alongside international war fiction. [...] Iraqi fiction today is mature and its maturity is due to its having lived with the fighting, politically and militarily.¹⁵⁹

Although Iranian and Iraqi war novels were both used as a mobilizing tool to persuade men to the frontline, their content and the way they presented war diverged to a remarkable extent. Martyrdom was depicted as an admirable action in both nations' literary works, but in Iranian novels it was propagated in the name of Islam as the noblest way to die, while in Iraqi novels it was promoted for nationalist purposes as a means of solidarity and national victory. Moreover, in Iraqi wartime novels female characters were often presented erotically for

¹⁵⁴ For a comprehensive analysis of this novel and other works of al-Ṣaqr, see Caiani and Cobham, *The Iraqi Novel*, chapter six.

¹⁵⁵ For analysis of this novel, see F. Pannewick, "Dancing Letters: The Art of Subversion in Sinān Anṭūn's Novel *I'jām*," in *Conflicting Narratives*, 65-74.

¹⁵⁶ Chandler, "No Man's Land," 165.

¹⁵⁷ Cooke, *Women and the War Story*, 236.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 235

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 237.

propaganda purposes to highlight the heroism and virility of the Iraqi soldier, while in Iranian novels of the time, references to women were confined to their motherhood or wifehood, rather than to their position or acts as a beloved. In other words, elements of romantic love were not prevalent in wartime Iranian novels, and women did not usually play any major role in the stories. Fasih's *The Winter of 1983* however is one – or perhaps the only – Iranian wartime novel that describes romantic love in times of war, further lending to its uniqueness.

Additionally, although Iraqi novels predominantly depicted the front and soldiers involved in the war, Iranian novels go one step further to describe the atmosphere behind the front, and the impact of the war on the lives of people in cities. In order to see Arabic and Persian war narratives in a detailed comparative context, two doctoral dissertations on this topic could be invaluable. Defended in 2012 at the University of Manchester, Jennifer Chandler's dissertation "No Man's Land: Representations of Masculinities in Iran-Iraq War Fiction" analyzes the concept of masculinities in the works of Iraqi and Iranian writers to display how concepts of gender were defined and used in novels of these two warring nations. Amir Moosavi's dissertation titled "Reimagining a War: Negotiating Ideology and Disenchantment in Literary Narratives of the Iran-Iraq War," is another comparative study of Iranian and Iraqi novels. Moosavi, who is currently carrying out this project at New York University, aims to analyze alternative narratives produced both during and after the war in both Iranian and Iraqi war novels. His focus will be on ideological issues, the concept of martyrdom, and the lingering effect of war on women, children, and veterans, especially in the post-war period.

Conclusion

As has been shown in this chapter, from its rise in the end of the nineteenth century to the present day, the Persian novel has undergone several major developments, particularly in terms of content. These developments, which were directly derived from political, social, cultural, and economic changes in Iran, played a key role in the diversity of genres and topics found in Persian novels. The early, historical Persian novels tended to be set in pre-Islamic Iran, and were used as a tool for awakening people. By contrast, the emergence of social novels during the reign of Reza Shah, which depicted social ills, directed the reader's attention to the social ailments of the contemporary world. After 1953 Iranian coup d'état, due to the Pahlavi regime's imposed censorship, writers produced allegorical and mythical novels,

in order to describe the political condition of the country. However, soon after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Islamic political ideas became the dominant themes in the novels. The novels written after the Iranian Revolution mainly covered Islamic ideas and concepts. Apart from this, the revolutionary novels introduced new themes such as negligence of materialism, questions of morality and theology, the fight against colonialism, social injustice, and blasphemy.¹⁶⁰

The Iran-Iraq War brought new topics to the Persian novels. Although poetry was the dominant genre used to reflect on the war, the novel soon found its place among as one of the main forms used in Iranian literature. The war against Iraq introduced the ‘war novel’ as a new literary genre in the country. In this regard, the ‘war novel’ does not have a very long history within Persian literature—little more than three decades. During the war, many Persians used the novel as tool by which to mobilize the masses to go to the frontline, as well as to boost their military sentiment. Therefore, the writers in this era mainly focused on communicating their message rather than the structure of their novels. By contrast, when the war ended, a new wave of war novels came into being, much of which represented negative aspects of the war such as migration and Iranians’ sense of frustration and despair. Among the wartime and post-war Persian novels, Fasih’s *The Winter of 1983* is considered to be an outstanding literary achievement, being a wartime novel whilst at the same time encompassing the characteristics of the post-war novel. For instance, on one level, the novel focuses on martyrdom, the predominant theme of most of the wartime novels, whilst on another, it addressed the ‘war of the cities,’ the most devastating phase of the Iran-Iraq War.¹⁶¹ In brief, *The Winter of 1983* familiarizes the reader with various facets concerning the war, ranging from the theme of martyrdom, to revealing the negative aspects of the conflict and to the reactions of the middle class during wartime Iran.

¹⁶⁰ Sarshār, “Cheshmandāz-e Adabiyāt,” 44.

¹⁶¹ For a more extensive discussion of the ‘war of the cities’ during the Iran-Iraq War, see chapter four.