CHAPTER SEVEN

SETTING: VISUAL IMAGES, RUINED PLACES, AND FLASHBACKS

Introduction

This chapter will focus upon the analysis of setting in *The Winter of 1983*. In works of fiction, setting refers to the historical moment in time and the geographic location in which the story takes place. Generally, there are two types of settings: the actual setting in which the events happen in the real world, and the fictional setting which the author chooses to construct their story. These settings are tightly linked together as an author often chooses an actual time and place as the setting of a fictional work. Depending on the genre and type of the story, each narrative has a specific setting. For instance, in a war novel, including *The Winter of 1983*, the setting is based on historical details; thereby it follows a chronological 'temporal-spatial' structure. In this regard, as one of the major questions in narrative analysis, specificity of 'spatio-temporal' indications has to be investigated.

Regarding the relationship between the fictional setting and the characters, Michael Toolan claims that setting is an instrumental element leading a character to act in a certain way. He explains that the setting "may be either cause or effect of how characters are and behave […]."[1] In *The Winter of 1983*, the setting indeed represents the characters' behavior and ideology. For instance, from descriptions of the characters' homes, as private settings, one can understand their likes, dislikes, ideologies, approaches, and worldviews. For example, as discussed in the previous chapter, it is through an interior description of Farjām's caravan that one can observe the ideological transformation of the protagonist under the effects of war rhetoric. As a result, the writer provides descriptions of characters' private places (i.e., homes) as expedient means of representing his character's mental attributes. In other words, the setting has more to say about the characters' traits and personality than the place itself. In the novel, for instance, Fasih does not directly talk about Yārnāser's faith in Zoroaster, but it is through the description of his house and particularly a number of paintings and portraits that we can see the character's interest in Zoroastrianism as well as in the culture of pre-Islamic Iran.

[1] Toolan, *Narrative*, 104.

Fasih makes ample use of description in order to indicate the places of *The Winter of 1983*. He visualizes the state of the Iranian war cities, particularly Ahvaz, during the three months of the Iran-Iraq War. Since the representation of these places is derived from the writer's wartime experience, they are mainly genuine and accurate. In this respect, the main characteristic of the novel is boundless naturalism, in which descriptive passages have an almost photographic precision.

Fictional Space

In a novel, space is the indispensable dimension of occurrence, characters, their actions, and experiences. Narratologists itemize several functions of space in a narrative, some of which are as follows: conveying thematic information, revealing facts about characters, and reflecting characters' actions and experiences.[2] Despite this, each location acts according to its literary forms. For instance, in war narratives, frontlines, battlefields, war zones, and war cities are often used as the actual space, through which the writer can report the war. By contrast, in folktales or fairytales, jungles, castles, and other places are used as settings, to entertain the reader. Thus, spaces function diversely in various genres due to their distinct essences.

Space in *The Winter of 1983* can be examined mainly from a geographical perspective, signifying the geographic locations in which fictional characters live, act, and have their existence. Clearly, in this context, the locus is described within its physical and eternal attributes, and the novel's descriptions of spaces deliver a true and vivid picture of Iranian society during the war. The novel describes several Iranian war cities like Ahvaz, Abadan, Andimeshk, and Dezful in order to highlight the devastating impacts of the war on the cities' landscapes. The novel also depicts Tehran, as a city far from the center of action. Fasih highlights these two very different sets of places (some being near the frontline and one being outside the warzone) in the story to sympathize with the people of the war cities, whose lives were affected by the war. Fasih's description is almost sufficient as a guide to a stranger through the Iranian towns during the war.

[2] J. O'Leary Green, "Space," *The Encyclopedia of the Novel*.

Ahvaz: The Actual Fictional Space in the Novel

In *The Winter of 1983*, the city of Ahvaz is the actual place where the fictional characters interact and the main story events occur. The writer sends his narrator to Ahvaz in order to reveal the devastating impacts of the war on the city. Focusing on this aspect of the hostilities was quite uncommon during the war, as most novels were mainly used as tools to urge the Iranians to participate in the war. It is only the post-war period novels, which portray the war as the most devastating phenomenon of the century. Such works of fiction, termed 'black novels,' laid bare the devastating impact of the war on Iranian cities. In this respect, *The Winter of 1983* is considered one of the first novels to expose the way the Iranian cities ended up in ruins due to the war.

Being on the border with Iraq, Ahvaz suffered the heaviest damages of all Iranian provinces during the Iran-Iraq War. The main thrust of the Iraqi's attack was on the large cities of Khuzestan, such as Abadan, Ahvaz, Andimeshk, Dezful, and Khorramshahr. Ahvaz was an important Iraqi military objective, because it served as a "major economic communication grid," as well as a center of oil management, and its capturing was most vital for a complete Iraqi victory.[3] In the first few days after the outbreak of the war, the city was the center of actions and was directly under the enemy's assault. Iraq moved rapidly into Khuzestan, but this changed later, when Iraqi forces were halted from the cities of Ahvaz and Dezful. The enemy, however, did not give up on capturing the cities. They launched tank attacks in those territories, while Iranian helicopters attacked the Iraqi tank navies in the Dezful, Susangerd, and Ahvaz areas.[4] Ahvaz was also the site of an air base and was very close to the Iranian frontlines. It faced many casualties due to the Iraqi's air raids.

Throughout the novel, the narrator frequently addresses the state of Ahvaz in 1983, when the war had heavily affected the city after three years of bombardments. For instance, in the very first page of the novel the reader is introduced to the war by a short description of Ahvaz:

> The electricity of the city is gone, too, or they have disconnected it because of the possibility of an air attack … The city lies deserted tonight, and it damps the spirits. The corner of this side of the place, once the National Bank of Iran and the

[3] Farrokh, *Iran at War*, 352.
[4] Ibid., 353.

> International Press Store, having been hit and devastated by a gun-shot in the beginning of the war, has still remained in form of a hill of dirt and dust.[5]

The narrator goes on to designate the ultimate situation of wartime Ahvaz in the following passage:

> Now it is 1983, in the midst of the Islamic Republic in Iran, during a war of which three and half years have passed. At the center of Khuzestan, in Ahvaz, not far from the Iraqi border and the frontline, the city's airport is closed. The Iraqi aircrafts maneuver every night. […] Until now, he [Saddam] has attacked cities, which are extremely distant from Ahvaz, but located in Iran. […] When a city is under the enemy's besiege, or when the enemy attacks it, or when it is involved in a war, the civilians flee like ants and grasshoppers from every side. In this situation, there are no planes, no trains, no buses, and no cars. There are not enough vehicles for everyone. The hospitals […] have been suddenly crammed with wounded, dead, and invalid people. […][6]

The narrator also depicts the entire landscape of Ahvaz. For this purpose, he highlights several public places in the city with additional information regarding their historical and political backgrounds, pre- and post-revolutionary names, and the strategic position of each within the area. He also reveals the state of the country in general, and of Ahvaz in particular, focusing on visual graphic arts erected in public spaces. These visual images were generated in different forms such as posters, murals, graffiti, and billboards, and contained the motifs of war and martyrdom. In wartime Iran, the landscape of many cities was identical in terms of these visual pictorials. Before focusing on the description of public places in Ahvaz, as described in the novel, it is crucial to study these visual ingredients.

Visual Images in Wartime Iran

Following the Iranian Revolution and in the process of the 'Islamization' of the country in all spheres, Ayatollah Khomeini declared that "Today, the Country is an Islamic country

[5] Fasih, *Zemestān-e 62*, 3-4. The translation is taken from Haag-Higuchi, "The Theme of War," 260.
[6] Fasih, *Zemestān-e 62*, 168.

therefore its contents must be Islamic as well."[7] In response to this call, the Iranian government began purifying the country by purging and eliminating traces of Western and anti-Islamic symbols. For instance, in this attempt, symbols of martyrdom became the core element of many squares at major junctures. In addition to this, streets, alleys, parks, schools, hospitals, and other public places were mainly renamed after martyrs of the Revolution.[8] Graffiti, slogans, murals on walls and bridge columns, posters, banners, songs, and poems were created with the framework of Islam in order to bolster the populace's spirit in advocating the Revolution's values.[9]

The visual graphics were an important medium at the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War to urge the Iranians to go to the frontline. The visual displays on war and martyrdom themes "depicted actual battle experiences, […] to indicate a relation between soldiers and people on the home front as mediated by images."[10] In an effort to highlight martyrdom, the religious elements and particularly the Shi'i practices were highly applied in Iranian war rhetoric including these visual images. As it was discussed in chapter one, the war against Iraq was seen as the continuation of supporting Imam Hoseyn who fought for truth against falsehood and justice against oppression. Regarding the bond between the martyrdom of Iranian soldiers and the martyrdom of Imam Hoseyn, Christiane J. Gruber writes, "Adolescents and young men who fought and died on the war front became, in Eric Butel's words, 'little Ḥusayns' because they too were considered innocent (*ma'sūm*) and oppressed (*maẓlūm*); like Imām Ḥusayn, they also died at the hands of a stronger and better-equipped adversary."[11] Thus, the paradigm of the Karbala, Imam Hoseyn and his followers were used as the primary reference for most of the war posters and banners.

An abundant number of religious, national, and mystical symbols and signs were harnessed in these visual works of art. In *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi demonstrate that any system of signs in the space offered by a war poster, slogan, or mural speaks to a reality and "the

[7] Khomeini, *Pithy Aphorisms, Wise Sayings and Counsels* (Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works, 1994), 21.
[8] Aghaie, *The Martyrs of Karbala*, 138.
[9] For an extensive discussion on the visual arts used during the Iranian Revolution and thereafter, see Chelkowski and Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution*; Ram, "Multiple Iconographies: Political Posters in the Iranian Revolution," in *Picturing Iran: Art, Society and Revolution*, eds. S. Balaghi and L. Gumpert (London/New York: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 89-101; Chelkowski, "The Art of Revolution and War: The Role of the Graphic Arts in Iran," in *ibid*, 127-41; Fischer and Abedi, "Revolutionary Posters and Cultural Signs," in *Middle East Report* 159 (1989): 29-32.
[10] P. Karimi, "Imagining Warfare, Imagining Welfare: Tehran's Post Iran-Iraq War Murals and Their Legacy," *Persica* 22 (2008): 48.
[11] C.J. Gruber, "The Message Is on the Wall: Mural Arts in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *Persica* 22 (2008): 26.

constellation of signs and symbols is put together in order to make a statement."[12] They also assert that these figures, which usually revolved around the cues of the Islamic faith and the Iranian heritage, had the power to communicate with the illiterate masses.[13] For example, the green color and the Dome of Rock in Jerusalem as the Islamic symbols and red tulip as the Iranian cultural icon were commonplaces in war visual arts.

Furthermore, during the Iran-Iraq War, the visual arts portrayed images of Iranian clerics who played political roles during and after the Revolution, and included quotations from their speeches. For instance, the images of Ayatollah Khomeini, and two other Iranian clerics, Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti (1929-1981) and Ayatollah Mortezā Mutahhari (1919-1979) were placed above the entrances of offices, hotels, hospitals, schools, ministries, and other government buildings.[14] Therefore, visual images with the theme of war and martyrdom gave a different look to many Iranian cities, including Ahvaz. Since the city was very close to the warfront, its center and suburbs were replete with war banners, posters, billboards, and slogans.

Public Spaces: River/Hotel/Office/Cemetery

The Winter of 1983 describes the city of Ahvaz with emphasis on public places such as streets, hotels, restaurants, hospitals, cemeteries, offices, and tourist attractions. In particular, the novel depicts the following locations in Ahvaz: the Karun River, the Fajr Hotel, the Central Building of the National Iranian Oil Company, and the *Shahid-ābād* Cemetery. In addition, a number of prominent local areas and vicinities, such as Melli-rāh and the New-site in Ahvaz; Berim, Boverde, and Ahmad-ābād in Abadan are also mentioned. The narrator describes the public places in Ahvaz by focusing on the visual images seen across the city. As he goes on to describes these images, the reader becomes acquainted with the omnipresence of paintings and slogans about the war, victory, and martyrdom, which do not allow any escape to the civilians of these cities from the presence of the war. The following passage

[12] Chelkowski and Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution*, 39.
[13] Ibid., 42.
[14] Both clerics were assassinated after the Revolution. During the war, they were considered heroes who sacrifice their lives in the path of their religious and revolutionary beliefs. Ayatollah Mortezā Mutahhari (who formed the Council of the Revolution of Iran) was assassinated on May 1, 1979, by a member of the Forqān Group, an anti-clerical guerilla organization. Likewise, Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti, Chief Justice, was killed on June 28, 1981, when a bomb exploded.

from the novel is among the best examples of a description of the landscape of Ahvaz during the war:

> At the end of the alley between the end of Melli Garden and Karoun cinema parts of the fake wall were painted with murals. Simple, crude drawings depicting several teenage combatants all holding ZH3s in their hands; one of them is crawling in military fashion at the bottom of an embankment, another wades through the river and another had which been martyred amongst the date palms. The philosophy and the ideology of the city, a place with a miniature version of the Al-Aqsa Mosque dome. There are also several drawings of famous spiritual images and several slogans, which read: 'We will defy America,' or 'Islam is watered with the blood of martyrs'… Another large billboard shows a group of Basiji boys going in the direction of the frontline without armaments and with bare heads except for red bandannas tied around their foreheads which read the words, 'Karbala, we are coming.'[15]

Among all the public places in Ahvaz, the Karun River is the most famous landmark of the city. The river is the largest and only navigable river in Iran. From a geographical standpoint, it joins the Arvand River near the boundary of Iran with Iraq and ends in the Persian Gulf.[16] The sight of the Karun River has changed throughout the decades. Several bridges across the Karun have been constructed since the Pahlavi era. The steel arch bridge, which is known as the White Bridge (*pol-e sefid*) (also known as the Suspension Bridge (*pol-e mo'allaq*)) was a symbol of the nation's technological advancement.[17]

During the relentless Iran-Iraq War, the river was not a major war zone, although it played a central role in the Iranians' recapture of Abadan. In the early days of the conflict, Iraqi forces crossed Karun and settled on the eastern side of the river. They advanced into Abadan and besieged it. On September 27, 1981, Iran launched one of the major operations called '*Thāmin al-A'imma.*' The forces retook Karun's eastern shore and drove the Iraqi army back to the western side of the waterway, ending the siege of Abadan. By September 29,

[15] Fasih, *Zemestān-e 62*, 34. The translation is taken from Chandler, "No Man's Land," 88.
[16] Arvand River is located in the west of eastern Iran, on the border between Iran and Iraq. Internationally the Arvand River is called Shatt al-Arab. However, in this study, the river will be referred to by its Persian name, the 'Arvand River.'
[17] For more information on this river, see H. Borjian, "Karun River i. Geography and Hydrology, ii," *EIr*.

1981, Iraq had been forced back cross the Karun River.[18] In the course of the conflict, Iranians stopped any further Iraqi advance into the river. Despite this, during the war, many Iranian combat vessels and rafts were demolished in the river by the striking of enemy's missiles and shelling. In 2011, the Iranian press reported that due to the remains of a vast number of Iranian boats, sailing has become impossible in the river.[19]

Throughout the novel, the narrator describes the Karun River only twice in detail. In his initial portrayal, it is described as an old, dark, and silent milieu, which is nauseating:

> The old Karun creeps gloomy and motionless under the bridge. Tonight, the Karun's central islands along with the river's low-level water, which looks piebald, disturb the eyes. On the other side of the river stands what was called the Three-Girls Square, which is now void of the fountain sculpture of the girls. The new sign says: Shahid Javād Afshāri Square.[20]

Apart from describing the dimness of the river, the narrator introduces one of the main squares in Ahvaz, which was known as 'Three Girls Square' prior to the Revolution, originally because at the center of the square, the statue of three nude girls was erected. Since an unveiled and curvaceous statue was not appropriate for public viewing in post-revolutionary Iran, due to its contradiction of the Iranian-Islamic ideology, the name 'Three Girls Square' was changed to the name of an Iranian soldier, Javād Afshāri, who fell during the Revolution, and the sculptures were removed.

In the second description of the Karun River, Āriyān provides sufficient historical information regarding the River itself. For instance, he highlights that it is the best place for navigating, that it has several large and small islands, and mentions the White Bridge over the Karun as a significant symbol of Ahvaz, which was built during Reza Shah's reign by a German engineer:

> On its vast and expanded riverbed, Karun is spread out with its large and small islands as well as its small and huge waves. The traffic jam on the White Bridge, which was made by Germany during Reza Shah's reign, is moving very slowly. On the river, two

[18] See Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War*, 123-25; Gieling, "Iraq vii. Iran-Iraq War," *EIr*; M. Mehrābi, "Āshnā'i bā Sālruz-e Shekast-e Hasr-e Abadan," *Hamshahri Online*, Mehr 4, 1386/September 26, 2007, http://hamShāhrionline.ir/details/32521 (accessed October 16, 2012).
[19] "Lāye-rubi-ye Rud-e Kārun Ba'd az 33 Sāl," *Jām-e Jam*, no. 3153, Khordād 24, 1390/Jun 14, 2011, 15.
[20] Fasih, *Zemestān-e 62*, 35.

> or three pathetic wooden motor boats ferry the public around. On the narrow walkway of the bridge, people are passing leisurely. Green, black, and red banners, laden with slogans regarding the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution [i.e., Bahman 22/February 11] are erected on the columns and on all sides of the bridge. Under the bridge, at the shore of the river, parallel to the large park, very young-looking soldiers and a few invalids, women in veil, children, a photographer, and an ice-cream seller are wiggling around each other. The sound of the Quran from the loudspeaker of a nearby place announces that the evening prayer is approaching.[21]

This passage also refers to the banners at the city's tourist attractions, which played a central role in delivering the state's religious and revolutionary messages to the public. The boundless visual images had a major impact on keeping the revolutionary zeal alive as well as in encouraging the people to defend the Revolution by participating in battle.

The Fajr Hotel is another public location described in the novel, which is occasionally addressed by the narrator by its pre-revolutionary name, the Royal Astoria. This hotel is located at the center of Ahvaz by the Karun River. It is here that during his second and third trip to the city, Āriyān, as an employee of the Oil Company in Ahvaz, stays. As he indicates, in wartime the hotel was strictly under the surveillance of the government, because it was mostly used by foreigners and the official employees in Ahvaz. During the narrator's stay in Fajr Hotel, two floors of the hotel were entirely at the military's (*sepāh*) disposal and the rest were only granted either to foreigners or to Iranian bureaucrats. The narrator describes both the exterior and the interior of the hotel. Externally, the Fajr Hotel is situated in a very tall building, which has been constructed in the American style. In the novel, the Fajr is considered to be the best hotel in the area during the war.

> Outside of the hotel are parked a number of Benzes and other vehicles. Japanese station autos such as Patrols and various types of olive-colored Toyotas without license plates, which are usually at the disposal of officials, are also parked in the area.[22]

In order to describe the interior design of the hotel, the narrator merely focuses on the reception, and portraits of the Iranian revolutionary clerics that were erected there:

[21] Ibid., 163.
[22] Ibid., 10.

> This part of the hotel has not changed remarkably: a big information desk, a huge switchboard room next to it, and a small counter room located on the other side. Before the desk, a fashionable curator with a shaved head and beard is standing and [on the desk] a number of phones are here and there. There is a portrait of Ayatollah Beheshti on the front of the reception and a framed image of Ayatollah Khomeini in front of a blue background, who is standing and raising his hand at the wall behind the reception.[23]

The Central Building of the National Iranian Oil Company is another public place featured in the novel, which is located in Fadā'iān Street (formerly New-site). We are faced, in the description of the edifice, with an overwhelming image of a large number of war posters and slogans. In the following passage, Āriyān and Farjām are about to enter the central building of the National Oil Company. While depicting the outward appearance of the building, Āriyān also narrates the strict policies of the company regarding body searches:

> The main entrance is intensely guarded and the huge portraits and slogans give a new appearance to the building, in particular as relates to the philosophical and idealistic ideals of the Oil Company: 'The state belongs to 'shanty-dwellers;''[24] 'Greetings to you, O Hoseyn, the father of Abd al-Allah;' 'If this war lasts for twenty years, we are ready;' 'O my sister! Your veil is more essential than my blood, [from] a martyr.' […] Virtually all the walls and columns, from top to bottom, are covered with posters on which martyrs' images, stamped with a single red tulip, are painted as if the whole building stood on their shoulders. […] I have my employment ID card, but Farjām has to get a 'security pass.' However, we both were frisked.[25]

The narrator draws attention to the adopted strategy at the central building of the oil company. He stresses on the frisking, which was a strictly observed protocol at many governmental offices during the war. After the Revolution a series of explosions in many

[23] Ibid., 11.
[24] Identical to the term *mostaz'afin*, 'shanty-dwellers' (*kukh-neshin*), which was first used by Ayatollah Khomeini after the Iranian Revolution, refers to people from the lower stratas of society. He separated this social class from the 'palace-dwellers' (*kākh-neshin*) who were the upper class. In his speeches, Ayatollah Khomeini frequently praised the 'shanty-dwellers' for their instrumental role in the success of the Revolution. Menashri, *Post-Revolutionary Politics*, 117.
[25] Fasih, *Zemestān-e 62*, 40.

offices and ministries obliged the state to pursue a strict policy of security in the country.[26] In order to prevent any further explosions or similar accidents, a body search was carried out at many organizations before anyone could enter. The narrator also focuses on the numerous slogans and banners on the building's exterior which were meant to capture the attention of the public entering the building or those simply passing by. These pictorial images of war were meant to communicate with the masses from different walks of life and different levels of literacy.

The cemeteries of the fallen, called 'martyr cemeteries,' as among the most crowded places in wartime Iran, also functioned as an inducing locus. The *Shahid-ābād* Cemetery was one of the main martyrs' cemeteries in Ahvaz during the war. In post-revolutionary Iran, in order to glorify martyrs' deeds, special sections in the cemeteries were allocated to the martyrs of both the Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War. These particular sections are named 'the Paradise of Martyrs' (*behesht-e shohadā*) or 'the Martyrs' Flower Garden' (*golzār-e shohadā*). Most of the graves in these sections "have similar white marble tombstones bearing a simple epitaph with basic information about the deceased."[27] The graves of the martyrs often have glass cases "containing both Islamic icons and intensely intimate mementos," such as Quranic texts, prayer beads, prayer tablets (*mohr*), plastic childhood toys, and so forth. Some of the cases also include a small piece of bloody clothing, worn by the soldiers at the time of their martyrdom. There are also national flags and colored banners flying from the cases.[28]

Similar to many other places in the novel, the narrator describes the cemetery of *Shahid-ābād* from both external and internal perspectives. As Āriyān recounts, above the entrance to the cemetery there are ample posters and miniatures symbolizing the righteousness of the war martyrs. In the example that follows, the inside of the cemetery is described as a typical, containing many distinct characteristics.

> Today, the inside of the (*Shahid-ābād*) Cemetery of Ahvaz […] differs remarkably from Iran's other traditional, quiet, dim, and muggy cemeteries. Under the blue and steady sky of the cemetery, hundreds and thousands of various colored banners are

[26] A few months after the Iranian Revolution, the country witnessed several bombings in ministerial buildings. On June 28, 1981, a powerful bomb went off at the headquarters of the parliament in Tehran while a meeting of party leaders was in progress. Seventy-three leading officials of the Islamic Republic were killed, including Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti. In another bombing on August 30, 1981, President Mohammad Ali Rajā'i (b. 1933) was assassinated along with Prime Minister Mohammad Javād Bāhonar (b. 1933).
[27] P. Khosronejad, "Introduction: Unburied Memories," *Visual Anthropology* 25, nos. 1-2 (2012): 13.
[28] E. Sciolino, *Persian Mirrors: The Elusive Face of Iran* (New York/London: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 176.

> flying upon the graves. Small and big chromatic images and portraits of martyrs, vases of flowers, and the large-pedestals and electric lights are more akin to an alive and dramatic scene than a cemetery. Most of the stone graves are adorned with big frames containing young martyrs' portraits, while others contain the logos of either the Revolutionary Guards or a tulip, or a sad poem, or a slogan—with themes of love and martyrdom—or a combination of these elements. The huge banners that are ascending from some of the graves to the sky are trembling, as if they want to scream their voices from the crude soil up to the sky. There are a few Iranian national flags with its three colors. Most are either red, or black, or green, in the middle of which war slogans and phrases such as 'God is the greatest,' 'There is no God but Allah,' and 'O Mahdi' are written. Here and there, big ceramic pots of orpine flowers [the crassulaceae], which are a specialty of Khuzestan […], can be seen.[29]

Chiefly, by describing these public places, Fasih unveils the landscape of the Iranian war cities in general and Ahvaz in particular. The extraordinary use of visual arts and images led many cities to look very similar.

Abadan: The Bride of Khuzestan Province

In addition to Ahvaz, which is the main setting of the novel, other cities in the Khuzestan Province such as Abadan, Andimeshk, and Dezful are also depicted. In order to find the wounded Edris, the narrator visits these three areas. All were badly affected by the war, but Abadan was affected to the greatest extent. Many of the date palm tree groves (*nakhlestān*) were destroyed, historical sites were ruined, and the city was devastated under the boots of Saddam Hussein's forces. Much of the city, including the oil refinery, which was the world's largest refinery, was badly damaged by the siege and by bombing.

Āriyān describes Abadan as the bride of Khuzestan, due to its stunning landscape within the area and because as an island it is bound by the Arvand River to the west, Karun to the north, the Bahmanshir to the east, and the Persian Gulf to the south.[30] Though the narrator visits Abadan only once throughout the novel, in the following passage he presents a comprehensive sketch of the city's landscape, which was ruined by the war:

[29] Fasih, *Zemestān-e 62*, 152.
[30] L.P. Elwell-Sutton and X. De Planhol, "Ābādān," *EIr*.

> The bride of Khuzestan is vacant, destroyed, dead and practically gone. […] She looks like a bride naked on her wedding night, but whose hair has been shaved and whose eyes have been taken from their sockets, her face and body's skin removed all at once and then thrown into a center of smoke, muck, and fog to the Arabian dogs. Fifty percent of the workers' dwellings, including shops and buildings, are destroyed. In some places, areas the size of football grounds have been turned into hills of mud and ruins. Not an intact tree or blade of grass remains. Single bakeries or groceries are open, but there is no population except for those who are connected to the Army. Most of the oil tankers as well as the [port] installations are burnt, turned to black.[31]

In this context, Saddam Hussein's army, who are referred to as 'Arabian dogs,' have destroyed Abadan, which is described as the 'bride of Khuzestan.' On one level, the passage reveals how the city was ruined during the war by the Iraqi forces, whilst on a higher level it reveals the inhumanity of the Iraqi-Arabs, who raped Iranian women during the war. It has been said that the main reason for the Iraqi rape of women was the lack of support received by the Khuzestani-Arab population. The majority of the population was loyal to Iran and fought alongside their fellow citizens against Saddam Hussein. This was one of biggest miscalculations of the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein, as they expected that all Khuzestani-Arabs would welcome and support the invading Iraqi army.[32] When they did not receive this support, they went on a rampage and started to rape and torture Iranians as well as Iranian-Arab women in the province, and burn their villages and towns to ashes.[33] Calling the Iraqi forces 'dogs' indicates the writer's abhorrence towards Arabs, who are dominated by lust.

Apart from Ahvaz and Abadan, the narrator also refers to two other major war cities, Andimeshk and Dezful, which are located near Ahvaz. Due to the initiation of the 'war of the cities,' these two cities became deeply involved in the war. Iraq launched several air raids against Iranian cities, particularly in Dezful and Abadan, between December 1983 and February 1984. Iraqi missiles that hit Andimeshk and Dezful carried large warheads, and consequently, had a devastating effect on both the cities.[34]

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[31] Fasih, *Zemestān-e 62*, 268.
[32] Cordesman and Wagner, *The Lessons of Modern War,* 14.
[33] S. Lāhiji, "Zanān va Khoshunat-hā-ye Jang dar Irān-e Mo'āser," *Mellium Iran*, last updated Āzar 6, 1391/November 26, 2012. http://melliun.org/iran/11835 (accessed October 12, 2015).
[34] For a more extensive discussion on the 'war of the cities,' see the appendix.

Whilst searching for Edris, Āriyān visits one of the Iranian garrisons, called *Hazrat-e Sajjād* (lit., 'the holy Sajjād,' referring to the fourth Shi'ā Imam). This site, located between Andimeshk and Dezful, was known as the war-veteran's camp. The narrator does not enter the cities; however, he passes the highway which connects the two places together. He describes the ruins of the area, which were the outcome of one of the major Iranian offensives, *Va'l-Fajr I*:[35]

> These parts of Ahvaz have been directly damaged by the impact of the war. The factories and farms are deserted and abandoned. Vacant and isolated quarters and hovels are everywhere. […] The burnt corpses of cars freckle the ruined villages, which have been attacked by missiles and other bombardments that have turned the pretty plain into a wounded landscape.[36]

Tehran: Outside the War Zone

Āriyān travels to Tehran twice in the course of the novel in order to take a rest as well as to see his sister, Farangis. Although, Tehran remained outside of the war zone, there was not much of a difference between its atmosphere and the atmospheres of those cities close to the frontlines in terms of war pictorials. As the narrator claims, in Tehran, war was present in slogans, posters, billboards, and on radio and television: Tehranian lives were not directly affected by the war. He highlights the significance of the war in Tehran by counting the posters in every public sphere. In the following passage, the narrator compares Tehran to Khuzestan, one being outside the war zone, the other being thoroughly within it:

> Unlike Khuzestan, Tehran is not taking a defensive stance. It is not experiencing war […], poverty, or other emergencies. The civilians in Tehran, the Central and Northern provinces of the Islamic homeland are living as if there is no war, although every night the press publicizes the dispatching of 'the hundred groups of O Khomeini! At your service' from 'the soldiers who are ready to offer their lives' to the front. The headings of the radio and television news say: 'The artillery base of the Islamic forces has

[35] For details on the operation, see the appendix.
[36] Fasih, *Zemestān-e 62*, 198.

> breached the activities of the infidel enemy at the western frontlines of the country.'[37] […] There are posters, and the exclamation 'War, war until victory' rises from the doors and walls of every ministry, of every office, school, bank, hospital and especially of every institution, but Tehran is not physically involved in the fever and ardour of war.[38]

Apart from the geographical portrayal of these cities during the Iran-Iraq War, *The Winter of 1983* also focuses on vagrancy, fear, discontentment, and waiting as the general essence of Iranian society during this time. This reflects how the civilians in the cities mentioned are mentally affected by the war. They are living in an endless nightmare; waiting for peace to become pervasive across the country. These characteristics, as Ali Ferdowsi maintains, can only be seen in a 'discreditable society' in which social law and order, as well as humanity, have faded, whilst the new order tries to gain the civilians' trust.[39]

Temporal Indications and the Use of Flashback

Apart from place, time is also a component of the basic conceptual framework for the construction of a narrative world. In opposition to folklore, in which time is not indicated, such stories usually beginning with 'once upon a time,' a war novel, which often reports a specific historical event, embodies a particular temporal span. Therefore, in most war novels we encounter a unity of time. This means that the events are recounted in a historical order as they occurred. Regarding the time span of this genre, Bal asserts that certain types of narratives such as (auto) biographies and war novels need a long time span, as "the most important topic presented is precisely the passing of time."[40] Even though *The Winter of 1983* has a short time span, from December 21, 1983 to March 21, 1984, the author gives a comprehensive report of the war during this period.

Indications of time in the novel are highly accurate, highlighting its character as a chronological report. Phases referring to specific times such as 'it is 8:45,' 'around seven o'

[37] This is my own translation.
[38] Fasih, *Zemestān-e 62*, 156. The translation is taken from Haag-Higuchi, "The Theme of War," 261.
[39] Ferdowsi, "Āshiyāni dar Tufān," 263.
[40] Bal, *Narratology*, 215.

clock,' 'an hour later,' or exact dates like 'Saturday morning, eleventh *Bahman*,' 'the day of the twenty-second *Bahman*' run through the whole novel.

Flashback is one of the major temporal dimensions in a novel, which breaks the story-flow to recall earlier events.[41] As Bridgeman has indicated, the reason that a novel employs flashback is "to fill in the past history of protagonists while avoiding a lengthy introduction or in order to reveal new facts."[42] In *The Winter of 1983*, the narrator uses flashbacks in order to reveal the facts regarding the divergent atmosphere of Ahvaz and Abadan in two historical periods: before and after the Iran-Iraq War. He portrays them as reclaimed and welfare cities during the 1960s, which have partially collapsed during the war. Furthermore, living in Abadan prior to the war, Āriyān remembers the old days. In the ensuing flashback, Abadan is described as a reclaimed place in which the citizens are occupied by their daily routines, regardless of any displeasing war factors. By contrast, in wartime, not only does the city lose its prosperity and become a 'horrifying bride,' but also many of its inhabitants flee to other cities. As the narrator describes in the following passages, pre-war Abadan was a place of work, recreation, and tranquility while, wartime Abadan is filled with fear and horrifying moments:

Pre-war Abadan:

> It is twelve o'clock in Abadan local time. Bovārde kids are returning from the Razi School to have lunch; Berim kids are going home from the 'Pars International School' in their parent's cars, Ferdowsi school kids from Ahmad-ābād are making their way home slowly. I, in a made-in-Iran Buick, am going from the 'Refinery Vocational College' to the Annex hall of the Naft Club for lunch. […] Afternoon shift workers are going to their homes in Kofeyshe by either bicycle or bus. Companies' buses are filling up in front of the central workstation and travelling between first Lane and station number twelve. The classes at college are free from twelve to one, and the students will be departing to the dormitory's canteen for lunch.[43]

Wartime Abadan:

[41] Gérard Genette distinguishes three categories of time relations: those of order, duration, and frequency. He argues that anachronism in the narrative occurs by several means. The most prominent are flashbacks and flash-forwards. For elaborated discussions on the topic, see Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 63-78; Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 46-51.
[42] Bridgeman, "Time and Space," 57.
[43] Fasih, *Zemestān-e 62*, 276-77.

> From early in the morning, [war] in Abadan began with dreadful, frightening roars that the people of this beautiful industrial city had never heard before. When I woke up, the order of the city in areas around the university dormitory […] was disrupted, and people were confused and distracted, running away to each and any direction. Suddenly, a giant Iraqi helicopter appeared in the sky, which was attacking and disappearing.[44]

Nights as Horrendous Moments

Night is treated as a fearful time for the civilians in Ahvaz and many other war districts, due to the possibility of enemy air raids. Due to fear of enemy's attacks, many people arranged a safe place to spend the night. Some went to the basements of their houses, whilst others abandoned the city and dwelled in the nearby deserts and plains. At night, people experience the dreadful nature of the war, which is usually described with the following traits in the novel: darkness, rolling blackout, red alert, gloominess, and dejection. Moreover, nights often were the appropriate time for Iraqis to act brutally. In addition to death, blood, fire, bombs, missiles, and mines, which were considered to be inevitable factors of the war, rampage and raping, as mentioned before, were among the disgraceful actions conducted by the Iraqi forces at night. In the following passage, the narrator questions himself regarding the degree of the enemy's inhumanity, which can be seen in different ways:

> On this stunning night, thousands of people in Khuzestan are experiencing fear. How many of the inhabitants are dying or have died? How many have been torn into pieces? How many are under the ruins? How many people are bleeding right now? How many have been left crippled? How many bodies have been shredded by explosions of glass? How many people are choked by the effect of gas, smoke, and fire? How many are crushed under the tanks? How many have been killed by mines? […] How many girls have lost their virginity? How many women are being raped? How many possessions have been stolen? How many people have been suffocated by them [the enemy]? How many people have been killed by firing squads right away?

[44] Ibid., 225-26.

> The rights of how many citizens have been relinquished? How many of them are shivering in the darkness, from fear of bombs and missiles? […][45]

Ahvaz has both noisy and silent nights. Ahvaz seems dreadful and gloomy. The appalling sounds of war airliners, bombardments, and rocket attacks deprive the people of peace. The noise of anti-aerial strikes was ear-splitting, and led the walls and windows of the houses to shake. Mostly, during the night, Iraqi aircrafts maneuvered and surveyed the Iranian cities, including Ahvaz, to evaluate the situation for an assault. In order to hinder the Iraqi's plans, the Iranian government strategically disconnected the electricity of the city. If there was a major air attack happening, the Iranian media or the installed loudspeakers in public centers would immediately broadcast the danger alert to inform civilians to take shelter in safe places, like basements. Coinciding with the alarm, the following text would be broadcast via social media: "attention! attention! The message that you are hearing now is a danger announcement or red alert. It signifies that the enemy's air assault is approaching. Leave your workspace and go to the shelters." Subsequent to this, the red alarm used to go on incessantly for three minutes. After the elimination of the danger, a white alarm would be propagated.

By contrast, some nights, which are rarely mentioned in the novel, were silent. On these nights there was neither electricity nor Iraqi air raids. This silence, as Āriyān indicates, "is louder than the [sound of] lamentation. I can hear this silence which is horrific and like a cancer growth under the skin."[46] Despite this, he emphasizes the many noises that can be heard during the warring nights, and notes that sometimes it is hard to distinguish the noises.

> Outside, in the middle of the night, an ambulance sounds a siren and passes. May be it was a police's Benz, or a fire breaker, or an escort auto, or a 120mm mortar. The sound comes inside the room through the windows and curtains and fades later. It is comparable to the horrifying howl of a mislaid jackal which laments in the turbulent plain and afterwards dies.[47]

The novel provides a vivid and comprehensive presentation of Ahvaz at night in chapter four, when Āriyān roams around the city, observing its dark atmosphere, the vacant streets, the closed shops, the deserted places, the soldier's security vehicles, the jagged

[45] Ibid., 308.
[46] Ibid., 260.
[47] Ibid., 219.

walkways, and the sounds of *nowhe*s broadcast from public loudspeakers. Disconnection of the city's electricity during the nights (either because of the possibility of the Iraqi's air raids or because of damage to Ahvaz's electricity generation and distribution building), the dreadful sound of Iraqi air attacks, obliteration of several local areas due to bombardments, and civilians' migration to other safe places, all serve as the major components of 'the war of the cities' which Fasih describes in his novel.

Except for night, sunset is also employed as a prominent temporal element in *The Winter of 1983*. The novel begins and ends during the sunset, emphasizing the gloomy and depressing nature of Ahvaz's atmosphere during wartime. In addition to this, the narrator's journeys from Tehran to Ahvaz and vice versa occurred at twilight. Contrary to sunset and nights, days are depicted with a different exposé in the whole novel, though we hardly observe the city during this time. The days look alive and people are engaged in their daily activities, as the narrator describes: "people, mostly, Arabs, Arab-Iranians, and Iranians are walking on the pedestrians and in front of the shops. The traffic is making noise."[48]

Conclusion

Analysis of the setting in *The Winter of 1983* shows that this element has three main functions within the novel: being a background, relaying information about the characters, and its effects on the characters' thinking and ideology. The novel uses the city of Ahvaz as the background to unveil the devastating impacts of the Iran-Iraq War on the landscape of the Iranian cities as well as on civilians. The narrator provides the readers with descriptions of plenty of public places in Ahvaz, not only to show the ruins of the city, but also to depict its atmosphere, which is colored by religious and nationalistic rhetoric. He constructs a spatial relationship between the insides and outsides of buildings, cities, and tourist attractions and tries to make a perceptual space, filled with discrete descriptions. The descriptions of different types of public places lead the reader to realize the identical landscapes of many public milieus in wartime Iran in terms of visual imagery.

Furthermore, analyzing the setting of *The Winter of 1983* makes Teresa Bridgeman's statement that setting helps to broaden the scope of a narrative comprehensible. The broader scope of the novel is formed when the writer uses setting to represent his characters'

[48] Ibid., 40.

emotional and psychological conditions. In order to reveal the effects of the setting on the characters, *The Winter of 1983* describes two kinds of space: private and public. The private places (i.e., homes) in the novel are often used to represent the ideology of the characters, while the public places are used to show the effects of visual war rhetoric on the protagonist. The city of Ahvaz, with its enormous use of war rhetoric, is the best place for the protagonist to make up his mind regarding going to the frontline. All the narrative elements are so closely tied up together that if only one of them was replaced it would be harmful to the element of realism as well as to the main theme of the novel, which is martyrdom. The setting of the novel is in one of the war cities, where the war is closely integrated with the lives of the people. It is apparent that Ahvaz plays a major role in the protagonist's acquaintance with the notion of martyrdom, and indeed to his martyrdom.