

**Official Voices of a Revolution:
A Social History of Islamic Republican Poetry**

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To My Parents

For their unconditional love and support throughout this long journey

Abstract

This thesis is primarily concerned with the literary aspects of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Its immediate focus rests on the evolution of the Islamic republican poetic trend, encompassing both the disillusioned and conformist voices that rose to prominence in the course of the 1979 Revolution and their on-going engagement with the ruling political power. In this vein, this thesis investigates the various cultural policies of the state, as well as select political transformations of the past three decades, all of which played a pivotal role in this literary evolution.

The thesis shows how the official poets that emerged during the 1979 Revolution, and which proved significantly active throughout the immediate history subsequent to that event (war with Iraq, the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and the rise and fall of the reform movement), evolved over time and thereby either received political support for their commitment to the state ideology or became gradually excluded from official cultural institutions.

Finally, this thesis reviews the manner in which state strategies have shaped an institutionalised form of poetry that is monitored and reinforced by the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic and official cultural authorities. It demonstrates how an innate linking of the project of Islamic republican literature to underlying ideologically defined notions such as ‘religious verse’, ‘legitimate poetry’ and ‘commitment’ was and continues to be an intrinsic part of the literary foundations of the ideological apparatus of the Islamic Republic.

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Transliteration

Modified Iranian Studies Transliteration System

Consonants

ب	b	ض	z
پ	p	ط	t
ت	t	ظ	z
ث	s	ع	‘
ج	j	غ	gh
چ	ch	ف	f
ح	h	ق	q
خ	kh	ک	k
د	d	گ	g
ذ	z	ل	l
ر	r	م	m
ز	z	ن	n
ژ	zh	و	v
س	s	ه	h
ش	sh	ی	y
ص	s	ء	‘

Short and long vowels		Diphthongs
a (as in arg)	ā (as in āb)	ey (beyn)
e (cheshm)	i (sib)	ow (Nowruz)
o (pol)	u(nur)	

NB: Proper names and nouns with standardised spellings in the English language, such as Khomeini, Khatami, Iran, Ahmadinejad, Khamenei and Namjoo, have not been transliterated in accordance with the above scheme.

Abbreviations

Howzeh	Centre for Islamic Art and Thought (<i>Howzeh-ye honar va andisheh-ye eslāmi</i>)
MCIG	Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (<i>Vezārat-e farhang va ershād-e eslāmi</i>)
OIP	Organisation of Islamic Propaganda (<i>Sāzmān-e tablighāt-e eslāmi</i>)
IRIB	Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (<i>Sedā va simā-ye jomhuri-ye eslāmi-ye Iran</i>)
SCCR	Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution (<i>Showrā-ye ‘āli-ye enqelāb-e farhangi</i>)
CRH	Cultural Revolutionary Headquarters (<i>Setād-e enqelāb-e farhangi</i>)
IAO	Islamic Agricultural Organisation (<i>Jahād-e kashāvarzi-ye enqelāb-e eslāmi</i>)
AE	Assembly of Experts (<i>Majles-e khobregān</i>)
GC	Guardian Council (<i>Showrā-ye negahbān</i>)
FPW	Foundation for the Preservation and Publication of War Values (<i>Bonyād-e hefz-e ‘āsār-va nashr-e arzeslhā-ye defā ‘-e moqaddas</i>)
HWP	Headquarters of War Propaganda (<i>Setād-e tablighāt-e jang</i>)
KSI	The Poets’ Association of Iran (<i>Khāneh-ye shā‘erān-e Iran</i>)
IRP	Islamic Republican Party (<i>Hezb-e jomhuri-ye eslāmi</i>)
AIDC	Association for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (<i>Kānun-e parvaresh-e fekri-ye kudakān va nowjavānān</i>)

Introduction

1. Creating the Context

As a vehicle for the reflection, reproduction and creation of society, literature requires that any assessment of its role within human civilisations address its relation to the exercise of “power” and related discourses. Given the fundamental role that poetry as a literary form has played throughout history within the literature of Iran, the relationship between poetic discourse and power, however it may be conceived, is indeed palpable and unique. It is thus surprising that there exists a dearth of systematic scholarly investigation into the state of poetry and its relationship with the ruling power in the context of post-revolutionary Iran. A book has yet to be devoted to the manner in which the ruling post-revolutionary state has co-opted poetry as a fundamental ideological component of its regime. Similarly, scant informed investigation has been made of the emergence of Islamic republican poets during and after the revolution, and their relation to the state’s ideological apparatus from 1979 onwards.

Given how poetry has been utilised by the post-revolutionary regime as a tool for the mobilisation of society during critical historical events, such as the cultural revolution of 1980-83, the war with Iraq and the post-war reconstruction era, there exists the need for a detailed critical study of this specific school of poetry, namely Islamic republican poetry (*Jaryān-e she‘r-e jumhuri-ye eslāmi*), as it is termed in this thesis for the first time in Persian and English scholarship. The term Islamic republican poetry is used herein in reference to a poetic trend that rose to prominence in the wake of the Islamic Revolution and dates as far back as 1979, with the consolidation of post-revolutionary state-sponsored

poetry. This term is used to describe the works and general literary trend discussed herein since alternative terms and titles, such as Islamist poetry (*She‘r-e eslāmgarā*), revolutionary poetry (*She‘r-e enqelābi*) and state poetry (*She‘r-e hokumati*), are expressive of determinative ideological readings that elide the ambiguities, inconsistencies and temporal evolution of the works and poets that fall under the rubric of such titles. Alternatively, Islamic republican poetry indicates a literary phenomenon that bears a specific relation to the hierarchy of power and exhibits distinctive literary characteristics. The aim herein is to analyse the aforesaid relation and characteristics in the following chapters.

Within this thesis, I often use the terms “official literature” and “official poetry”, both of which imply that the work discussed has some kind of formal relationship with contemporaneous structures of state power. Other scholars have used the term to describe certain sets of literature within modern authoritarian societies and, although it has not been formally or precisely defined, I broadly follow their usage. To take Dominic Thomas’s definition, official literature is a genre “which is inseparable from the course of the state and the imperatives of ideological utility.”¹ For example, in studies of literature and ideology in China, terms such as “thought management” and “linguistic engineering” are used in reference to “the activities geared toward making people’s thinking conform to the dominant ideology to describe government efforts.”² Manipulating language and literary utterance to shape the mind of the reader is a common feature of various official literary

¹ Dominic Thomas, *Nation-building, Propaganda and Literature in Francophone Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 5.

² Laurie A. Brand, *Official Stories: Politics and National Narratives in Egypt and Algeria* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2014), 6.

trends across the globe. In his ground-breaking study of the official Soviet literary construction of the camp experience, Dariusz Tolczyk (1999) shows how “Soviet camp literature as a series of efforts inspired by Soviet ideology” could “challenge, redesign and control moral perceptions of the camps by the Soviet public.”³ While deeply indebted to these studies in defining and approaching the official literature in post-revolutionary Iran, the present thesis places the official poetry of the Islamic Republic in the context of the changing socio-political realities of that specific polity in order to shed light on the complex transformations that it has gone through since its emergence.

The thesis shows how the state mobilised literature, art and poetry in particular to affect social change, as well as identifying the ways in which the politicisation of literature intensified following the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988). Following the founding of the Islamic Republican Party (IRP) on 18 March 1979, the Islamic republican view of culture, literature and art as explicitly subordinate to the state ideological apparatus of necessity shaped the face of literary discourse during its first decade in power, a period during which the official literary field was gradually occupied by a newly emergent intelligentsia. Young, pro-revolutionary poets created literary circles and characterised their work by an amalgamation of pre-revolutionary leftist poetic discourse and religious (Shi‘ite) emblems, which eventually came to be recognised as a new literary discourse that appealed to the official authorities.⁴

Although in various contexts “official literature” has been used as a general term in

³ Dariusz Tolczyk, *See No Evil: Literary Cover-ups and Discoveries of the Soviet Camp Experience* (New Heaven, London: Yale University Press, 1999), xiii.

⁴ See chapter 1 for a detailed account of the formation of the Islamic republican poetic trend.

reference to a set of largely predictable literary works in terms of viewpoint and content, it would be reductive to dismiss such works as consequently one-dimensional by making reference to their ideological premises and nothing more in the context of post-revolutionary Iran. Instead, as Dominic Thomas notes in his case study of official literature in Francophone Africa, official texts should be viewed “as products of a complex network of social relations.”⁵ As such, the risk is that by pigeonholing these works in such a manner we miss much that is interesting or of literary merit, even when they are considered outside of the context of the power relations that circumscribed and directed their production. As noted by Katherine Hodgson in her study of Soviet official literature, “the continued application of narrowly defined categories to the complex predicament facing Soviet writers had led to the neglect of figures of considerable stature.”⁶

In light of these views, the second half of this thesis focuses on the post-war, post-Khomeini era and tackles the notion of disillusionment in the works of official poets to show the complex relation between poets such as Qaysar Aminpur and the Islamic republican literary-political establishment. Implicit in this discussion is the notion that Islamic republican poetry as a movement and a body of work was by no means an unchanging monolith during the period studied, and that it was subject to evolution and fracture in the face of the socio-political transformations and disjunctions that shook the Islamic Republic at this time. These changes stirred both disillusionment and disintegration in the camp of official poets, indicating a story of literary ambiguity and complex political ambivalence that reflects the revolutionary experience of Iran and yet

⁵ Thomas, *Nation-building, Propaganda and Literature in Francophone Africa*, 25.

⁶ Katherine Hodgson, *Voicing the Soviet Experience: The Poetry of Olga Berggolts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2-3.

has remains neglected in attempts to describe and explain that experience.

In addition to the initial appeal of its promise of social justice and the promotion of an Islamic lifestyle, the post-Khomeini government seemed to propose a new outlook on official poetry. Further politicisation of the realm of literature for the sake of the state's ideological apparatus was a way of restoring the disputed revolutionary ideology and legacy of the late Ayatollah Khomeini. One of the costs of this politicisation was further disillusionment among pioneering official poets who were already disenchanted by the death of their charismatic leader as well as the end of the war. This transformation of the Islamic republican poetic trend – unprecedented in the social history of Persian literature – necessitated the dismissal of ideological hegemony and its replacement with a more questioning and doubtful approach to politics and controlled literary discourse. As such, this sheds light on fundamental questions concerning the nature of literary autonomy and individual resistance to or negotiation with ideological policing and other attempts at thought control. It is pertinent to note, however, that the disillusioned Islamic republican poets never totally dismissed the ideological underpinnings of the Islamic Republic and the 1979 Revolution. As shown later in this thesis, they remained within certain circumscribed boundaries that distinguished them from non-official poets with secular and leftist tendencies.

Following the rise of disagreements and doubts among official poets, a need for the further institutionalisation of poetry became apparent and thus a new trend of official poetry was promoted in the form of official ceremonial poetry, supervised by the Leader of the Islamic Republic. The structure of ceremonial poetry reflects the notion of a purely legitimate discourse and is entirely different from critical, non-official literary

reservations. Criticisms of the socio-political status quo and satire are allowed in this trend of poetry insofar as they do not comprise the state's ideological apparatus. It is within this context that the peculiarly religious and authoritarian rhetoric of Islamic Republican ideology has emerged in the poetry of the various state-endorsed figures that take part in this annual ceremony of poetry. As this thesis hopes to show, both the aforesaid official literature, with its disillusioned approach, and the newly emerged genre of ceremonial poetry fall into the category of the official literary school of the Islamic Republic, which can be understood as a complex literary phenomenon.

2. Earlier Scholarship on Islamic Republican Poetry

An overwhelming amount of existing scholarship on Islamic republican poetry has been written and published in Iran by scholars sympathetic to the Islamic republican system and its poetry. Often viewed by official cultural bodies as a legitimate style of writing, the alliance of religious concerns and ideological correctness within these works has been described as fundamental to the literary production of poetry. To name but a few examples, voluminous works such as Mohammadreza Sangari's four-volume set on Islamic revolutionary literature,⁷ Sa'id 'Alai's anthology of Islamic revolutionary poetry,⁸ and Gholamreza Kafi's introduction to the literature of the Islamic Revolution,⁹ create narratives in their literary analyses of Islamic revolutionary literature that tend towards the exclusion of non-religious and ideologically neutral works and the appreciation of an

⁷ Mohammadreza Sangari, *Naqd va barresi-ye adabiyāt-e manzum-e enqelāb-e eslāmi* (Tehran: Palizan, 2001).

⁸ Sa'id 'Alai, *Jaryānshenāsi-ye she'r-e enqelāb-e eslāmi* (Tehran: Markaz-e asnād-e enqelāb-e eslāmi, 2008).

⁹ Gholamreza Kafi, *Shenākht-e adabiyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi* (Tehran: Bonyād-e hefz-e āsār va arzeshhā-ye defā'-e moqaddas, 2010).

official literature that consciously promotes the state ideological apparatus. Having been sponsored by official cultural bodies responsible for the promotion of official literary discourse, these anthologies explore the emergence of Islamic republican literature. In addition, they provide insight into the mechanisms at work in mobilising and promoting a genre of poetry that promotes the Islamic ideology of the state, including the extensive censorship of cultural production and the Islamisation of the cultural realm.

Themes of commitment and Islamic ideology are repeatedly emphasised in state-sponsored works of literary criticism from 1980 onwards, a tactic that primarily serves as an attempt to distinguish the Islamic republican genre from pre-revolutionary modernist literature. In its evocation of the style of early Islamic and Shi'ite literary discourses, this genre is seen by official critics such as Sangari as a continuance of the thought-worlds and ideologies particular to these aforesaid discourses. In the first volume, Sangari provides a historical background for his definition of official literature under the Islamic Republic by showing how religious poetry written in praise of the Shi'ite Imams informed official poetry after the revolution, especially during the war. Apart from the previously mentioned four-volume set by Sangari, Mirja'afari's book on Islamic republican poetry is instrumental in highlighting the trend's most influential poems.¹⁰

Such initiatives are inevitably compromised by the nature of the cultural and institutional frameworks under which they have been produced. In particular, the institutions that are utilised by Islamic Republic state apparatus. The lack of any ideologically neutral or

¹⁰ Seyyed Akbar Mirja'afari, *Harfi az jens-e zamān: ta'ammoli dar she'r-e enqelāb-e eslāmi* (Tehran: Nashr-e qu, 1998).

critical analysis of Islamic republican literature after the revolution is one problematic aspect of this official discourse. The predisposed nature of this narrative in relation to the institutionalisation of culture and literature after the Islamic Revolution – which has merely been created by official writers and the authorities – continues to reproduce prejudiced definitions and categorisations by both committed and independent literary scholars.

Given such a context, it is important to understand Islamic republican literary discourse both as a construct and in terms of the way in which it operates within the state's ideological apparatus. To this end, the aforesaid state-sponsored projects prove useful as primary sources in this research, particularly due to their collecting of the relevant poems. They are also interesting as historical documents in themselves and, when compiled, provide clues about the ideology of the state and its cultural apparatus. The fact that such works – heavily circumscribed both analytically and critically – are the main sources of discussion for the official and committed poets of the post-revolutionary era demonstrates the existing dearth in scholarship regarding literature and power in post-revolutionary Iran.

This scholarly blind spot is all the more surprising considering the amount of critical work (produced outside of Iran and its deadening cultural structure) devoted to independent literature concerned with the pre- and post-revolutionary periods. Since the mid-1990s, a number of studies have investigated the transformation of certain literary trends, both in the run-up to and in the immediate aftermath of the revolution. Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak's *Recasting Persian Poetry: Scenarios of Poetic Modernity in Iran* (1995), Kamran Talattof's *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature* (2000) and Nahid Mozaffari and Karimi-Hakkak's *Strange Times in Persia: An Anthology of*

Contemporary Iranian Literature (2009) all offer detailed accounts of the evolution of the literary scene up to the 1979 Revolution and during the first decade after the revolution. Although in fact, Karimi-Hakkak's essays on the Iranian Writers' Association and the troubled conditions pertaining to Iranian writers in the post-revolutionary context are the only literary assessments that cover the chronological timeline addressed in this thesis.¹¹ Yet in both Karimi-Hakkak's and Talattof's works, the post-revolutionary period and the revolutionary literary trend are not addressed in full. Despite touching briefly on what he calls Islamic literature, Talattof falls victim to certain ideological preconceptions by identifying all of the revolutionary poets as Islamists and in doing so fails to address the complexities and transformations of this literary trend. In these works, Islamic republican writers as a group are essentialised as conforming to a single 'Islamist' identity. Consequently, the lack of a detailed exposition of the specific tendencies and divisions within this trend is particularly conspicuous. These divisions include the disillusioned revolutionaries who began to revise their ideology following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini and the end of the war.¹² Understanding and including their works as part of the official literary discourse, as well as adding this depth to our understanding, provide far better tools for the construction of an understanding of the development of the cultural politics that formed and continue to form one of the central underpinnings of the Islamic Republic.

¹¹ Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, "Protest and Perish: A History of the Writers' Association of Iran," *Iranian Studies* XVIII (1985): 189-229; "Of Hail and Hounds: The Image of the Iranian Revolution in Recent Persian Literature," *State, Culture and Society* 1 (1985): 148-180; "Poetry Against Piety: The Literary Response to the Iranian Revolution," *World Literature Today* 60 (1986): 251-256; "Revolutionary Posturing: Iranian Writers and the Iranian Revolution of 1979," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23 (1991): 507-531.

¹² For a thorough analysis of this literary trend, see chapter 4.

One of the reasons for such a dearth in the English language scholarship concerning the post-revolutionary official literature is the silence of the literary critics and scholars outside of Iran. Those academic scholars in the field of Persian literature who left Iran following the aftermath of the 1979 revolution and as a result of ideological prosecutions chose to focus on the classical or pre-revolutionary literature. As a result of such ideological conflicts and overall detachment from the postrevolutionary literary transformations, even when working on the postrevolutionary era, these scholars have mainly focused on the alternative or censored voices, which have been pushed to the margins after the revolution. In their view, focusing on the actual process of institutionalisation of literature and the rise of official poetry has never been a topic worthy of scholarly attention. On the other hand, no scholar based inside Iran can openly challenge or criticise the official literary trend without fear of being persecuted for proposing of an alternative definition of war poetry.¹³ There is thus a huge gap in the existing scholarship regarding the postrevolutionary literary transformations, one which the present thesis aims to fill by presenting the first-hand accounts concerning the emergence and transformation of the official literary trend after the Islamic Revolution.

Apart from the above-stated English language scholarship, which is primarily concerned with independent literature, none of the existing Persian works on Islamic republican poetry published inside Iran offer a detailed thematic and chronological study of the Islamic republican trend that is free from ideological determinism of one kind or another.

¹³ In the past few years, official poetry festivals have hosted poets with critical views on the legacy of war. These poets have often been harshly criticised by hardliners for their distinct interpretations of the war. For example, see “Khoshunat, khiānat va nāomidi jāyezeh gereft,” *Farsnews*, 24 May 2014, <http://www.farsnews.com/printable.php?nn=13930231000389>.

These have been published on various official platforms, such as literary journals,¹⁴ newspaper columns,¹⁵ and books.¹⁶ Such discussions largely work to maintain Islamic republican poetry as the only official trend alive in the minds of its readers, but otherwise fail to provide readers with the suitably evaluative approach demanded by the concepts and complexities behind Islamic republican poetry.

It is only in more recent years that a number of academic scholars and reformist journalists have begun to offer a more nuanced and critical reading of certain official literary works and figures. Examples include Mahmud Fotuhi's article on the literary discourse analysis contained within Qaysar Aminpur's work, or Mohammad Quchani's controversial article on the evolution of his poetics.¹⁷ While Fotuhi offers an in-depth analysis of the use of colours in the poetry of Aminpur, Quchani aims to reclaim Aminpur's literary legacy as a disillusioned rather than a conformist voice of the post-war period. However, despite their original approach, such works are sparse and typically limit themselves to a single voice from within revolutionary poetry. In so doing, they fail to address the literary trend as a whole and, more specifically, as a politico-literary entity.

¹⁴ *Qamus* (1980-1981) and *Jong-e sureh* (1980-1987) were two of the most important state-funded literary journals during the 1980s that extensively published the works of Islamic republican writers. For a detailed introduction to these journals, see chapter 1.

¹⁵ *Jomhuri-ye eslāmi* newspaper was the one of the first literary platforms for the newly emerged religious intelligentsia who empathised with state ideology and sought to reach a wider audience through daily newspapers.

¹⁶ Apart from the aforementioned works by Sangari and 'Alai, a number of other official critics have written extensively on Islamic republican poetry. Identical titles and similar content and approaches in these works highlight the tedious nature of mass literary production in the current official scene. The only works that have proved useful to this project have been those that, despite ideologically charged readings of the poems, maintain a descriptive approach to the Islamic republican genre.

Among them, the following are worthy of note: Mohammadqasem Forughi-jahromi (ed.), *Maqūlehha va maqālehha: barrasi-ye adabiyāt-e defā'-e moqaddas* (Tehran: Khāneh-ye ketāb va bonyād-e hefz-e āsār va arzeshhā-ye defā'-e moqaddas, 2009); Mohammadreza Ruzbeh, "Shā'erān-e enqelāb-e eslāmi va naqd-e farhang-e gharbi," *Adabiyāt-e enqelāb-e eslāmi* 1 (2014): 76-96.

¹⁷ Mahmud Fotuhi, "Seh sedā, seh rang, seh sabk dar she'r-e Qaysar Aminpur," *Adabpajuh* 5 (2008): 9-30. Mohammad Quchani, "Shahidi keh shā'er shod," *Shahrvand-e emruz* (14/05/1386, 2007): 67-68.

When not neglecting the trend entirely, both groups of scholarly works apply only vaguely and broadly defined terms. This is echoed in critiques concerning the Iran-Iraq War, the commemoration of which is still a fundamental principle of Islamic republican ideology. According to these critics, a poem concerned with war is only worthy of attention if its author believes in the ideology of the Islamic republic.¹⁸ Such definitions have had a definite impact on shaping the general Iranian discourse concerning this particular war, most evidently through the elision of all unofficial war poetry, a consequence of explicit state cultural policies. In such readings, war poetry is only legitimate when it can be identified as the poetry of sacred defence (*She'r-e defā'e moqaddas*), which is distinguished by certain narrowly defined religious and political features.¹⁹ In a definition coined by leading critic Ziaodin Torabi, and one that has been welcomed by the majority of Islamic republican poets, a war poem is a spontaneous piece of work that reflects the inner feelings of the poet about the invader and which is written in defence of Islam and the Revolution.²⁰ As with many similar examples, this definition has shaped the dominant literary narrative of the Iran-Iraq War and is intrinsically aligned with the state ideology of warfare in political terms.

Research on the ideology of warfare under the Islamic Republic indicates that the same set of values and principles also operates in a broader context. Chubin and Tripp argue that one of the ways in which the ruling power “used war to entrench itself in the seat of

¹⁸ Seyyed Ahmad Nademi, “Taklif va takallof: negāhi beh ta'rif va vjehgihā-ye she'r-e defā'-e moqaddas,” *Maqulehā va maqālehhā*, 313.

¹⁹ Ziaoddin Torabi, “Darāmadī bar she'r-e defā'-e moqaddas,” *Maqulehā va maqālehhā*, 320-321.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 321.

power” was through “Islamising the vocabulary of political discourse relating to the war,” a viewpoint that the research presented in this thesis serves to reinforce.²¹ The thorough study of this Islamised discourse in the field of literature is understudied by academic scholars both inside and outside Iran. Such intellectual want exists because of a lack of independent funding bodies in the relevant cultural institutions and the continuing reality of literary and political censorship under the regime.

For the official poets of the Islamic Republic, challenging secularism and promoting Islamism was a goal in itself, while also being aimed at the broader task of reinforcing and reshaping each reader’s ideological principles throughout the eight years of war. With its ideological rhetoric – formulated through literary channels and the verbal refraction of the realities of war and revolution presented by way of the poet-regime to a mass audience – the ruling power has consistently tried to legitimise its ideological principles and the exercise of such a form of authorship. Therefore, attention needs to be given to the historical context within which the reprogramming of the minds and lives of the citizens of the Islamic republic was first pursued by the state through literary channels during the 1980s. The thematic and formal tendencies of Islamic republican literature that enabled poets to become a medium through which such a task might be pursued are also key to the examination presented herein.

²¹ Shahram Chubin and Charlse Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1988), 70-71.

3. Framework, Objectives and Methods

This thesis primarily falls within the field of the social history of literature, with specific focus on the relationship between poetry and power in post-revolutionary Iran. To this end, the research framework is developed by way of conceptualising the Islamic republican poetic trend as one influenced by scholarship concerning the relationship between poetry and political power in other contexts, such as Soviet Russia,²² Francophone Africa,²³ or China.²⁴ Although this thesis does not present a comparative study of official poetry in all of the above-stated examples, brief notes are made where necessary in order to construct a bridge between the various common features that pertain to a range of countries. For instance, the role played by the government and its official writers in Soviet Russia in promoting Social Realism as the mainstream literary genre,²⁵ or the process of disillusionment evident among the Chinese or Russian literati, will only be addressed briefly in order to situate the case of the Islamic Republic and provide a broader context for the ways in which the ruling powers in Iran use literary works for their own ideological ends.

For example, in exploring the theme of the village or disillusionment in Islamic republican

²² Ernest J. Simmons, *Through the Glass of Soviet Literature: Views of Russian Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953); Tolczyk, *See No Evil*.

²³ Thomas, *Nation-building Program and Literature in Francophone Africa*.

²⁴ Kang Liu, Xiaobing Tang, *Politics, Ideology and Literature in Modern China: Theoretical Interventions and Cultural Critique* (United States of America: Duke University Press, 1993).

²⁵ All Soviet literary and artistic organisations were dismantled and merged into the new Union of Soviet Writers on 23 April 1933. The term Socialist Realism first appeared in print on 23 May 1932 as the only acceptable form. By August 1934, Socialist Realism had been inaugurated as the official model for literature in Soviet Russia. For more information on Social Realism as the leading literary form in Soviet Russia, see Katerina Clark, "Social Realism in Soviet Literature," *The Routledge Companion to Russian Literature*, Nick Cornwell (ed.) (USA and Canada: Routledge, 2001): 174-84.

poetry, scholarship on Soviet literature and the experiences of the Soviet literati with the establishment inform the present study. *Voicing the Soviet Experience: The Poetry of Ol'ga Berggol'ts* (2004), by Katharine Hodgson,²⁶ documents the life of a prominent Russian Soviet poet whose accounts of heroism in wartime Leningrad brought her fame and informs this thesis in addressing the position of disillusioned Islamic republican poets whose ideological loyalties began to conflict with their demands for artistic and personal integrity after the war. However, to the author's best knowledge, despite the aforesaid sources – all directly sponsored by the state – no scholarly work has been devoted to the evolution of Islamic republican poetry and its poets that might claim to be equally well researched.

Apart from Hodgson's case study, Brown's comprehensive study of Russian literature since the Russian Revolution,²⁷ and Marc Slonim's study of Soviet writers,²⁸ both prove particularly inspiring in addressing the theme of the village in Islamic republican poetry. The study of both the life experiences and ideological perspectives of the relevant Soviet writers plays an important role in the development of the framework of the present study in terms of how to address the themes and perspectives of Iranian official writers while placing these within the socio-historical context.

As discussed above, there exists a shortage of scholarly work regarding the official literature of the Islamic Republic and the cultural policies that provided the context for its

²⁶ Hodgson, *Voicing the Soviet Experience*.

²⁷ Edward J. Brown, *Russian Literature Since the Revolution* (Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press, 1982).

²⁸ Marc Solimn, *Soviet Russian Literature: Writers and Problems* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

emergence. Consequently, the objectives of this thesis are threefold. First, it aims to investigate the process of cultural institutionalisation in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution and the ways in which a nationwide Islamisation campaign impacted upon the state of poetry in particular and the official cultural scene in general. The second aim is to indicate the thematic and technical features of Islamic republican poetry and the socio-historical contexts from which such themes and features have emerged. The third is to explore the circumstances that led to ideological divisions among Iran's Islamic republican poets. Like any other revolution, the 1979 Revolution was followed by a wave of ideological disillusionment and factionalism. This thesis discusses how the ideological divisions and disillusionments of the post-revolutionary era impacted upon Islamic republican poets and their works, including both those who eventually distanced themselves from the ruling power and those promoted to the level of state officialdom. The state's mechanisms for promoting the official poetry of the Islamic Republic are also discussed in order to understand the propagation of the prevailing cultural and political conditions of today and to provide the grounds for future scholarly research.²⁹

This thesis is not meant to present a comprehensive account of the political or cultural history of post-revolutionary Iran. Nor can it be categorised as a work of literary criticism that concerns poetry alone, regardless of its social context. Instead, it falls into the realm of the social history of literature, which aims to tackle poetry as a social phenomenon that affects and is affected by its context. A combined thematic-chronological approach is

²⁹ For further details concerning the politics of censorship in the Islamic Republic's era, see "Writer's Block: Story of Censorship in Iran," Small Media, accessed 10 July 2015, <http://www.smallmedia.org.uk/writersblock/#section2>.

sustained throughout in order to address both the historical and literary aspects of the topic.

Due to an explicit focus on Islamic republican poets and their work, alternative or unofficial literary trends present since the revolutionary victory, as well as those that have surfaced in the past three decades, are left to one side for future academic inquiry. This is not to say that such literary trends are irrelevant or insignificant compared to the official trend, but merely that they are not the chief concern of the present thesis. This thesis dwells at far greater length on the institutional and ideological circumstances and precedents that gave rise to an official network of poets in the context of post-revolutionary Iran. More broadly, it aims to focus on the wider cultural context (of which the official literature is an intrinsic component) that informed the scene and within which an unofficial literature emerged, even if only in reaction. Without a documented account of the official cultural scene, it is impossible to shed light on the ways in which unofficial literature is restrained or heavily censored before publication. Although the present thesis will not extend beyond its core topic, it provides the grounds for further inquiry into the realm of the censorship of literary works.

As a work of socio-literary history, this thesis adopts a combined thematic and chronological approach in order to tackle both the literary and historical aspects of the subject. In terms of chronology, the thesis covers the period from 1979 to 2009, during which the revolutionary poetic trend officially emerged before gradually splitting into factions and ending in disillusionment, purging or promotion to officialdom by the Islamic state. Despite the complex nature of this prolonged historical period, it is crucial that a thorough analysis of the transformations of the Islamic republican poetic trend is made and

that the ideological doctrine of the Islamic Republic is understood. The dynamics running between these elements are also crucial to this study. However, this does not imply that the thesis offers a detailed historical account of socio-political events during this multifaceted period. Detailing swift political and cultural changes, especially after the end of the Iran-Iraq War and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini (1990s onwards), is an ambitious goal that no single doctoral dissertation could claim to achieve. In order to avoid superficial generalisations and keep poetry as the focal point of the thesis, only those political events that have left a marked impact on the official literary trend are addressed.

This study does not pass the year 2009 for a number of reasons. First, from a historical viewpoint it is too early to provide any reliable and satisfactory account of post-2009 Islamic republican poetry in the aftermath of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad's controversial electoral victory. This is further complicated by the fact that since 2007, and more specifically post-2009, a number of central figures in the Islamic republican poetic trend have either passed away or distanced themselves from the inner circle of official poets who meet with the Leader of the Republic on an annual basis.³⁰ The scrutinising of a new post-2009 wave of ideological disillusionment among Islamic republican poets demands further research and cannot be discussed herein due to a lack of sufficient space.

Any discussion of the work of the Islamic republican poets needs to resolve the apparent duality in the role that they played within the state cultural apparatus, as well as the contradictions that this exposed in the post-revolutionary political and social order.

³⁰ See chapter 5 for further details about these annual meetings.

Ostensibly, their work was characterised by the overt and officially endorsed public support of the ideals and operations of the revolution and the Iran-Iraq War, but by consistently referencing the aspirations and ideals of revolutionary Islam they also provided an implicit critique of the divisions and compromises to be found within the Republic as it grappled with the aftermath of the revolution and the harrowing war that followed.

This critique became more explicit as the power that they publicly praised was reified and distorted during the tumultuous decade that followed its instigation. Simply put, the term “Islamic republican” refers to an evolving, politico-literary trend, not a discrete literary-historical phenomenon. Accordingly, even among ideologically aligned and/or self-identifying Islamic republican poets, significant variations in the ways that each poet understands poetics and politics are traceable and have not been scrutinised to date.

Aside from its chronological aspect, this thesis seeks to construct a thematic analysis of Islamic republican poetry. Through a close reading of selected poems and the circumstances of their production, this thesis places emphasis on the process of change in the content of these poems over the course of three decades. All of the poems selected, translated and presented in this thesis have been taken from the main anthologies written by the official writers of the Republic, including the four-volume set by Sangari, *Āvāzhā-ye nasl-e sorkh* (2006) by Abdoljabbar Kakai, *Harfi az jens-e zamān* (1998) by Mirja‘fari, *Gozideh-ye she‘r-e emruz* (1993) by Sa‘ed Baqeri and Mohammadreza Mohammadi-Niku, and *Gozideh-ye she‘r-e jang va defā‘-e moqaddas* (2002) by Hasan Hoseini. Other literary journals, especially *Jong-e sureh* and *Qāmus* and *She‘r*, as well as poem collections by Islamic republican poets and the literary columns of pro-state newspapers such as

Jumhuri-ye eslāmi, constitute primary sources for this research.³¹ The selected poems are representative of a large collection of works, not all of which can be presented here due to a lack of sufficient space. Apart from their relevance to the subject matter of each section, these poems have been agreed upon by the official literary authorities as being among the most widely read and influential poems of their time. Their publication in state-sponsored literary columns and periodicals has helped these works to be widely and freely accessible to the public. Therefore, regardless of their literary merit and content, these works often reach a wider public through various platforms, including the media.

All translations of the poems are my own unless stated otherwise. In translating the poems I have worked to remain loyal to the literal meaning of the original Persian, while conveying the sense and effect of the poem in English. The translations have been done only for academic purposes and therefore the literary qualities found in the original have, for the time being, been left aside. The poems are contextualised in relation to the social conditions prevalent at the time of their composition, with the aim being to emphasise that “while poetry cannot be reduced to a social function or political purpose, it nevertheless must be seen as taking shape within social contexts and interactions.”³² Therefore, reflections on the social contexts of the literary pieces will be presented along with analyses of poetic diction, syntax, metaphor, genre, form, rhythm and metre. Discourse analysis is also deployed in order to analyse the key themes of Islamic republican poetry,

³¹ Due to restrictions placed on travel after the 2009 post-election turmoil, a large body of print archives had to be transferred to outside Iran; a complicated and time-consuming process which, despite all difficulties, improved post-revolutionary literary archives outside the country. Different volumes of the *Jong-e sureh* (1980-1986), *Qāmus* (1980-1981), *Nāmeḥ-ye jang* (1985) and *Nāmeḥ-ye showrā-ye nevisandegān-e Iran* (1980-1982) are parts of the Islamic republican literary archive that have been transferred outside of Iran.

³² Shira Wolosky, *The Art of Poetry: How to Read a Poem?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 89.

while paying close attention to historical context. Alongside a close reading of a large body of poems, this thesis gathers original information about the cultural policies of the Islamic Republic and the ideological viewpoints and personal lives of a number of Islamic republicans through semi-structured interviews.

After a careful review of the aforementioned sources in the context of a thematic approach, the aforementioned interviews are analysed. These interviews have been conducted with a focus on the socio-political transformations that the subjects may have undergone. By applying due scepticism, the thesis aims to avoid any confusion or anachronism that may arise from possible personal bias or self-justification on the part of the interviewees.

4. Structure of the Thesis

This introduction, which is mainly concerned with objectives, questions, methodology and previous scholarship, is followed by the first chapter which discusses the ways in which the cultural policies and institutions of the Islamic Republic were formed in the first decade following the revolution. It offers an extended history of arguably the most significant cultural institution during the post-revolutionary period, namely the Centre for Islamic Art and Thought (Howzeh), where the seeds of Islamic republican poetry were first planted. In any socio-historical account it is vital to historicise and contextualise the relevant oeuvre and Iran's post-revolutionary Islamic republican poets are no exception. In order to provide an exposition of ideas, their intellectual and cultural milieu must also be described, as well as the political historicity that both preceded and shaped them. A basic reconstruction of the origins of post-revolutionary cultural politics and religious thought, and the many impulses driving their emergence, is applied to determine the factors that

compelled Iran's Islamic republican poets to promote and later question the ideological foundations of the theocratic state.

The first chapter provides an investigation into how an official state culture was manufactured in the first decade of the revolution, and in doing so offers the first detailed historical account of the Howzeh. The fact that this constitutes the first attempt at a detailed historical account of this centre in any language adds to the importance of the chapter. It illuminates the most pertinent historical phases of the centre and the evolution of the Islamic republican poetic trend, both of which are currently absent from existing scholarship, largely due to ideological restrictions on publications in the Islamic Republic or simply because of a lack of information or misrepresentation of the history of the centre in favour of the state's ideological apparatus. More importantly, this chapter offers a framework within which we can begin to understand how literature in general and poetry in particular have been used by the Iranian state as a tool for the dissemination of a particular political ideology. This chapter follows a chronological format since the historical context within which Islamic republican poetry has evolved lies at its heart. The development of a comprehensive account of this centre and its policies prior to any literary analysis allows the research to shed light on the processes of change, exclusion and disillusionment evident among Islamic republican poets, as discussed later in the thesis.

The second chapter reflects on Iranian pastoralism as a central theme in Islamic republican poetry. This chapter identifies a tendency towards "revolutionary pastoralism", a term that best captures the features of the revolutionary literary movement as an initially anti-modernist trend. As well as its thematic importance, the pastoral is tackled in order to connect official Islamic republican poets to pre-revolutionary literary traditions. After

providing a brief background to the role of the village as a literary idiom in literary traditions of the past, this chapter offers a detailed examination of the pastoral motifs evident in a range of specific poems and their application as a form of political response to the Shah's urbanisation program. This chapter further investigates the impact of the egalitarian discourse on the resurgence of village writing, which was initially a major element of the propaganda employed by the revolutionary government during and in the wake of the revolution;³³ it was a theme that resonated particularly strongly among prose writers during the 1980s. The chapter argues that the village is represented using the ideals of revolutionary collectivity during a period when the masses were represented – at least according to the official view – as having triumphed. At this point, collective interests were believed to have transcended individual desires in the revolutionary uprising. The idea of a return to the village is a signifier of the fundamentalist Islamic revolutionary principle of a return to the roots of the self and Islamic traditions. The literary ways in which representations of the idealised village functioned as symbols of the pro-poor ideology of the Islamic Republic are also clarified in this chapter.

When the Iran-Iraq War broke out, the notion of a collective force was developed across the nation, this time for nationalistic purposes. The village, seen as a singular literary symbol, was no longer enough to mobilise the masses against the neighbouring enemy. It never coalesced as a distinctive official trend the way that the eight years of war did.

³³ I use the term 'village writing' in this chapter in reference to a literary genre that became prevalent during the 1960s and 1970s, mostly among Iranian prose writers, in response to the rise of the White Revolution under the reign of Mohammadreza Shah Pahlavi, and later among Islamic republican poets as a critique of modernisation and urbanism and in admiration of the pastoral and authentic lifestyle. As discussed in more detail in the second chapter of this thesis, this genre became prevalent among Islamic republican poets from the late 1970s onwards. In this regard, the term should not be confused with that which has been described as the village writing trend in relation to nineteenth-century England or Russia.

Therefore, the third chapter, 'War in Islamic Republican Poetry', focuses on how, as a product of the war, collective discourse was further enhanced through a mystic-militant ideology. It focuses on arguably the most significant period in the evolution of Islamic republican poetry, namely 1980-88, when the war between Iran and neighbouring Iraq took place. Moreover, it underlines the significant reciprocal impact of the prolonged war on the poetic discourse of the official poets.³⁴ By way of a thematic analysis of several influential war poems, an examination is made of how the use of symbols and literary idioms in these poems placed this poetic tendency within two important ideological trends with regard to war: anti-war realism and pro-war idealism. Moreover, both of these can be traced in the poetic works of this period. Last but not least, the chapter aims to present the most common features of war poetry as written by the leading voices of Islamic republican poetry and the ways in which poetry was used as a significant social medium by the state to promote war as a sacred cause.

With a ceasefire in place after eight years and the passing of the founder of the revolutionary state, namely Ayatollah Khomeini, less than a year after the ceasefire, the ideological façade of the Islamic Republic and the collective revolutionary discourse shattered. The loyal voices of revolution and war poetry yielded to silence and isolation. The first sparks of individual longings, ideological disillusionment and disagreement, and a sense of isolation caused by an ideological void after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, only became apparent at the beginning of the 1990s. The fourth chapter, 'The Fall of Utopia', focuses on the notion of disillusionment in the works of Islamic republican poets.

³⁴ By reciprocal, I mean that the poetic discourse and poet responses had as significant an impact on the war itself as the war did on the poetry. For further details, see chapter 3.

By providing a brief historical account of critical socio-political events, such as factionalism in the political arena, this chapter offers a better understanding of the transformation of themes and expressive devices of this period in comparison to the early revolutionary period and the Iraq-Iran War. By means of a thematic exploration of post-war Islamic republican poetry, it is argued that by the early 1990s the revolutionary idealism of the 1980s had largely vanished and been replaced by everyday issues, existential and ideological doubt, as well as antipathy toward dogma. Through a close scrutiny of the works and life of Qaysar Aminpur, a leading figure in the disillusioned camp of Islamic republican poets, this chapter provides a more tangible evaluation of post-war disillusionment in the context of post-revolutionary Iran.

As the 1990s drew to a close, ideological stability, state formation and the restoration of a fallen revolutionary utopia were underlined as the main priorities of the government, with different socio-cultural channels, including literature, providing the means for this process.

The fifth and final chapter investigates the ways in which poetry has been used in a ceremonial manner during the past decade under the direct supervision of the head of state. Although the current thesis focuses on the post-revolutionary period, an inspection of the ideological manifestations of Islamic republican poetry can only be done in light of the medieval court poetry tradition. The same can be said for a study of the power relations between poets and the seat of power in the past decade, which are reflected in the annual poetry ceremony with the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic. Despite any disavowels by the state apparatus of linkages between courtly medial motifs and current manifestations of state's cultural power, it is my contention that the legacy of the courtly poetic tradition is an intrinsic although implicit factor within the state's ceremonial use of

poetry. A full investigation into the nostalgic reception of the past and its influence on the politics and poetics of the current ruling power deserves to be addressed in separate scholarly research. However, due to its significance and relevance for our argument, the politics of nostalgia are briefly noted in this chapter.

After the conclusion, a bibliography of Islamic republican poetry collections is presented. This particular bibliography has been selected with the aim of helping readers and future scholars of the field to appreciate the ways in which the Islamic republican poetic trend has been approached and studied to date. The appendix the end of the thesis includes an important politico-literary who's who, that is to say, a brief anthology of the political and literary figures whose names or works appear in the following chapters. Reading this brief biography at the beginning will help the reader to understand why the highlighted figures throughout the thesis are of particular importance and relevance to this research. Along with their key works, the main roles played by each figure in the Islamic republican poetic trend and corresponding political arena are detailed in this section.

In light of the above, the themes discussed in the different chapters advance existing scholarship on the Islamic republican poetry of post-revolutionary Iran. This thesis hopefully succeeds in problematising certain existing assumptions about the trend being a homogeneous entity, and also about the complexities of relations between revolutionary poets and the state. It aims to make clear the fact that not all Islamic republican poetry is equally conformist, and even less so occasional or purely ideological. In doing so it fills a major gap in existing scholarship that is concerned with the development of Islamic republican poetry in either Iranian or Western scholarship. It offers the first detailed and sustained analytical discussion of the relationship between poetry and state power in the

Islamic Republic of Iran. Moreover, it is the first study of Islamic republican poetry to be informed by relevant scholarship on revolutionary states and literature from other contexts.

Finally, this thesis concludes by drawing an important distinction between two categories of work: those that exemplify committed, state-sponsored literature and those that can be read as disillusioned or even critical works but which have still been welcomed by the cultural bodies of the government. The second group can also be described as works that are representative of Islamic republican literature but not specifically conformist. Many in the latter category are even officially promoted (for example, Qaysar Aminpur's post-war poems, which are discussed in the fifth chapter). Therefore, one should not assume that all Islamic republican poets were merely 'straitjacketed' in the Khomeini and post-Khomeini eras. After all, a number of them were broadly appreciated by the public and have enjoyed a wide readership due to their ambiguous or at times even controversial content. In short, this thesis investigates the literary aspects of the 1979 Revolution with the aim of bringing to light its complexities for the first time in such scholarship.

Chapter 1. Revolutionary Institutionalisation and Cultural Engineering

“A book should be a powerful means of educating, of mobilizing and organizing the masses toward the goals of economic and cultural construction.”³⁵

“Our message to the Howzeh is that on every border everything should be firm. You are the border guards of the Islamic culture.”³⁶

1. Introduction

The role played by the state in the shaping of an official national or political culture is a subject that has been afforded considerable attention, particularly with regard to countries where political establishments have proven intent on shaping cultural scenes that fall into line with their respective totalitarian ideologies. Such studies focus on literary and poetic works written in favour of such states’ ideological principles.³⁷ Soviet Russia, China, Latin America and francophone Sub-Saharan Africa can be cited as specific examples of the manufacturing of propagandist cultures. Yet post-revolutionary Iran has been overlooked in this respect, in spite of the well-oiled cultural machinery run by the state.

Katerina Clark’s account of official socialist realist literature under Stalin provides a

³⁵ From the Bolshevik Party Central Committee’s 15 August 1931 resolution, in: Evgeny Dobrenko, *The Making of the State Reader: Social and Aesthetic Contexts of the Reception of Soviet Literature*, Trans. Jesse M. Savage (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1997), 163.

³⁶ Ali Khamenei, “Gozāresh-e ‘amalkard-e Howzeh-ye Honari-ye Sāzmān-e Tablighāt-e Eslāmi tavasot-e Hojatoleslam Zam dar didār bā rahbari,” *Sureh-ye andisheh* 49 (Tehran, 1993): 21-3.

³⁷ For more information regarding the official literature of post-war East Germany, see William Grange, *Historical Dictionary of Post-war German Literature* (United States of America: Scarecrow Press Inc., 2009). For Stalinist Russia, see Dariusz Tolczyk, *See No Evil: Literary Cover-ups and Discoveries of the Soviet Camp Experience* (Syracuse, NY: Yale University Press, 1999). For China, see Eugene Perry Link, *The Uses of Literature: Life in the Socialist Chinese Literary System* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000); Bonnie S. McDougall, “Dissent Literature and Contemporary China: Varieties of Official and Non-Official Literature in and about China in the Seventies,” *Contemporary China* 3 (1979): 49-79.

starting point from which an investigation into how an official state culture was manufactured in post-revolutionary Iran can be approached. Specifically, it offers a framework within which we can begin to understand how literature in general and poetry in particular have been used by the Iranian state as tools for the dissemination of a particular political ideology. To date, and in a way similar to Soviet Russia, in post-revolutionary Iran the state has come to view literature “in a utilitarian way in terms of how it might engineer certain habits of thinking in the populace.”³⁸ As with post-revolutionary Russia, the entire process of creating, manufacturing, publishing and disseminating cultural products in Iran has fallen under state control since the 1980s.

The state control of cultural products is facilitated by the creation of state-funded institutions to cleanse and monitor the cultural scene. In the same way that Zhdanov and Gorky characterised official Soviet writers as “the engineers of the human soul”, cultural commentator Amirali Roshan has described the activities of the leading state-sponsored cultural centre in post revolutionary Iran as engaging in the “surgery of the soul” (*jarrāhi-e ruh*).³⁹ The evolution of this centre, namely the Howzeh, represents a major focus in the argument developed in the present chapter.

One of the oldest and most influential official cultural centres, the Howzeh has been active since the immediate aftermath of the revolution and its activities continue today. As shown later, this grassroots cultural centre was initially formed out of a mosque literary circle

³⁸ Katerina Clark, “Socialist Realism in Soviet Literature,” *Reference Guide to Russian Literature*, (eds.) Neil Cornwell and Nicole Christian (Chicago, Illinois: British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data, 1998), 57.

³⁹ Amirali Roshan, “Jarrahi-ye ruh: moruri bar seh daheh fa’āliathā-ye Howzeh-ye Honari-ye Sāzmān-e Tablighāte Eslāmi,” *Kheradnāmeḥ-ye hamshahri* 30-31 (2009): 98-101.

before moving on to play a key role in the formation of Islamic republican art and literature. Historically, the centre is the oldest gathering place for religious-minded literati, which began to form before the Revolution, prior to all other state cultural bodies. It differs greatly from two key state-founded organisations of the post-revolutionary period, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG) and the Organisation for Islamic Propaganda (OIP), which were both founded by the state with the intention of setting up cultural policies, controlling the cultural scene and disseminating Islamic culture after the revolution.

The Howzeh was not initially founded or funded by the state, despite it being one of the first pro-revolutionary institutions to produce explicitly Islamic republican art and literature.⁴⁰ It was primarily a grassroots cultural centre whose members comprised religious-minded, pro-revolutionary cultural activists, writers and artists. While after the formation of the state-sponsored cultural bodies mentioned above, the Howzeh fell under their supervision and now works in parallel with them, historically it remains the first and most influential centre in the formation of Islamic republican literature, film and artwork.

During the past two decades it has also gone on to play a decisive role as an agent and facilitator of state censorship. However, despite its centrality in such activities scholarly works that concern the post-revolutionary cultural scene have almost completely

⁴⁰ Vezārat-e Farhang va Ershād-e Eslāmi, known previously during the reign of the Shah as the Ministry of Culture, has been the leading supervisory force of the state in the realm of cultural affairs throughout the post-revolutionary period. It is responsible for large-scale cultural policymaking and the licensing of films, books, newspapers, magazines, music albums, festivals, concerts, theatres and any form of cultural production. After the Islamic Revolution, various other cultural institutions were founded. These were given responsibilities that overlapped with those of the Ministry of Culture. The Howzeh and the OIP comprised two of the main cultural arms of the state and functioned as parallel cultural bodies beside the MCIG.

overlooked the activities of the Howzeh.

Understanding the complex and understudied history of the centre is crucial for creating a basis upon which an analysis of official Islamic republican poetry can be developed and then situated both nationally and internationally. More so than any other institution, the Howzeh was and still is held responsible for the tracking and training of artists who fall into the categories of ‘committed’ and ‘faithful’ according to its constitution.⁴¹ In this chapter the historical events that occurred during the formation and subsequent ideological development of the centre are investigated with a view to understanding how the institutionalisation of cultural affairs for ideological purposes became a central pillar in the cultural policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

2. Creating the Context

The 1979 Revolution proved an empowering force for the organisations and institutions held responsible for constructing a revised cultural outlook that propagated the ideals of the newly established state. From the outset, Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers insisted on founding a nationwide cultural revolution as part of their national mobilisation strategy. Throughout the 1980s this mission focused on drawing material from the ongoing war with Iraq in order to generate an overriding source of legitimacy for the promotion of

⁴¹ For the full account of the constitution of the Howzeh, see “Asās-nāmeḥ-ye Howzeh-ye Honari,” *The Howzeh’s Official Website*, accessed 15 October 2013, <http://artostanha.ir/Page/1298/Default.aspx>.

Islamic ideology through education and culture.⁴²

The Islamisation of cultural affairs is outlined in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic (1980), according to which the guardian jurist (*Vali-ye faqih*) is responsible for the supervision of general cultural policies and the appointment of key cultural agents, including the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) and the OIP. In the 1980s, a vast body of officials joined the Supreme Leader in being accountable for the drafting, revising and finalising of cultural policies; this included the president, two hundred and ninety members of parliament, twelve members of the Guardian Council (GC), the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution (SCCR) and the MCIG. These figures were further swelled by the apparatchiks of the various state organisations that operated under the direction of the revolutionary state.

By the early 1980s, the revolutionary political establishment had succeeded in consolidating its power across the majority of Iran's cultural, political and economic sectors.⁴³ Having first established a hold in the individual bodies that made up these sectors, the next step was to use this position of control to promote a distinctive Islamic ideology in the public sphere. In doing so, the government aimed to realise one of Ayatollah Khomeini's main ambitions, namely the formation of Islamic institutions (*nahādsāzi-ye eslāmi*) and the concomitant cultural purification (*pāksāzi/tasfiyeh-ye*

⁴² Ruhollah Khomeini, "The Meaning of Cultural Revolution, April 26, 1980," *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (1941-1980)*, Trans. Hamid Algar (United States of America: Mizan Press, 1981), 295-307.

⁴³ For more on the process of power consolidation developed during the early revolutionary period, see Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays On The Islamic Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Farhad Noami and Ali Rahnama, *The Secular Miracle: Religion, Politics and Economic Policy in Iran* (London; New Jersey: Zed Books, 1990).

farhangi) of pre-revolutionary cultural institutions, including universities and cultural associations.

Following orders issued by the Cultural Revolutionary Headquarters (CRH), and later those issued by the SCCR, all universities were closed for an indefinite period, which eventually ran to a total of three years (1980-83). During this interregnum various academic sources were banned across the humanities, thousands of secular and leftist academics and students were purged, and revised syllabi were created to conform to the principles of the Islamic Revolution. Beyond the nation's universities, most cinemas were closed, a large number of films, magazines and books were banned, and thousands of Iranian artists and academics emigrated.⁴⁴

This state-sponsored expansion of Islamic ideology into the cultural sphere was initially facilitated through the censorship of existing sources. This was soon followed by the establishment of new cultural centres that undertook an active role in the promotion of Islamic art, literature and culture. On an organisational level, Islamic institutions (*nahāhā*), committees (*komitehhā*), foundations (*bonyādhā*) and headquarters (*setādhā*) were subsumed into the state apparatus and redesigned so as to act in parallel with their superior ministries and organisations.⁴⁵ Many such entities had originally been formed as grassroots institutions and operated within the broad remit of providing educational, medical, economic and welfare support to the nation. Yet during the revolution and the Iran-Iraq

⁴⁴ For more information about those writers whose works were subject to censorship after the revolution, see Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, "Introduction: Iran's Literature 1977-1997," *Iranian Studies* 30 (1997): 193-213.

⁴⁵ Manouchehr Vaziri, "Islamic Man and the Society in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *Iran: Political Culture in the Islamic Republic*, eds. Smith K. Farsoun and Mehrdad Mashayekhi (London; New York: Routledge, 1992): 80-91.

War many such institutions were gradually converted into monitoring bodies of the state through a process of institutional entrepreneurialism. This entrepreneurialism flourished within a context of active top-down encouragement by state authorities interested in maximizing control over society and culture. In addition, a general tendency towards institutionalisation within a big, revolutionary, war-time state that extended its grip over all areas of life (social, economic, welfare, and so on) reinforced the change from grassroots organisations to state monitoring bodies.

As a result, these institutions gradually came to represent the forefront of the battle against secularism in the socio-cultural sphere. By renaming streets and cinemas, banning certain names for newborn babies, and censoring books and movies, these institutions helped the state to penetrate all aspects of Iranian life. In the fields of art and literature tens of cultural institutions were founded, of which eight were authorised by the government to issue permissions for publication.⁴⁶ As the duties of different revolutionary organisations and institutions began to overlap factionalism became a common feature of Iranian politics, with ideological chasms in both cultural and political decision-making processes evolving in line with the development of these institutions, as discussed later in this chapter.

3. The Formation of the Howzeh

The origins of the core of the Howzeh can be found in the years leading up to the revolution in three groups with differing religious orientations. Originally an entirely

⁴⁶ For more information on the role of state-run cultural organisations and the differing regulatory bodies in the field of art, see Unknown, "Vaz'iyat-e honar dar Iran (1)," *Āshnāna'i bā motevaliān-e 'arseh-ye honar* (Tehran: Markaz-e pajuheshhā-ye majles, 2005).

grassroots movement, the Howzeh emerged as part of a revolutionary process of cultural awakening that was, at first, free from legislative authorisation. Most of its members came from a literary circle that gathered in a small mosque called Javād-al-a’emmeh, which was located in the neighbourhood of Si-metri-ye Jey, Tehran. Over time this mosque became a meeting place for a group of young Muslim writers and artists who played an active part in the revolutionary uprising. Indeed, the founding members and most of the first generation of the Howzeh had been members of this circle and would later become known as the *Bachehā-ye masjid*.⁴⁷

The second home of the founding members of the Howzeh was the Islamic Movement Cultural Association (Kānun-e Farhangi-e Nehzat-e Eslāmi), which had been established in Tehran at the time of the 1979 Revolution.⁴⁸ With the aid of contributions from Mirhossein Musavi, a painter and Islamic cultural advocate, and his wife Zahra Rahnavard, an Islamist, cultural activist and sculptor, the association orchestrated Tehran’s first Islamic sessions of performance art. Other key members of the association included Ali Khamenei, Ali Musavi-Garmarudi, Mohammadreza Hakimi and Tahereh Saffarzadeh. The significance of this group is apparent due to the fact that the majority of its members later split into two main factions, namely the Islamic left and right, and occupied strategic governmental and political posts following the revolution.⁴⁹

A third and final component in the early composition of the Howzeh was the Hor

⁴⁷ By ‘first generation’ I mean those key figures who formed the Howzeh, namely Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Hasan Hoseini, Farajollah Salahshur, Majid Majidi and Amirhosein Fardi, as well as other members who joined the centre during the first year of its foundation.

⁴⁸ Tahereh Saffarzadeh played an incisive role in founding this centre.

⁴⁹ See chapter 4 for further details on the factional politics of the post-war era.

Association (Kānun-e Hor). Similar to the *Bachehhā-ye masjid* circle (Youngsters of the Mosque), the Hor Association consisted of young and pious members of the revolutionary literati who were active in the revolution. In addition to these three Islamic associations, various members of the Howzeh found their way there via channels such as the *Jomhuri-ye eslāmi* newspaper, the main publishing platform for the first poetic works that would later be considered as the first works of the revolutionary literary trend. Yousefali Mirshakkak and Qaysar Aminpur joined the Howzeh through their collaborations with this particular newspaper.

The story of the official establishment of the Howzeh begins in 1979. Just days before the victory of the 1979 Revolution a group of visual artists gathered in Hoseiniyeh Ershād,⁵⁰ their intention being to hold an art exhibition. The event had been organised in response to an earlier show arranged by artists with Marxist leanings who were students in the Faculty of Fine Arts in the University of Tehran. The early stages of the revolution saw frequent clashes between followers of the two leading ideological trends, namely Marxism and Islamism – a pattern that seeped from the streets into the country's artistic and literary scenes. Hosein Khosrowjerdi describes the formation of the centre as follows:

I remember the day I came back home from the art exhibition to the faculty of Fine Arts with a couple of fellow visual artists, Naser Palangi and Kazem Chalipa, who were both supporters of the revolution. All of us agreed upon the fact that the whole exhibition had a strong Marxist tendency, which in our view offered a misleading interpretation of the revolutionary movement. We did not

⁵⁰ Hoseiniyeh Ershād acted as a centre for religious activities in Tehran that organised public lectures, including those of Ali Shari'ati, an Islamic intellectual with Third-Worldist and anti-imperialist views. For more information about the influential role of this religious and cultural centre in years prior to the 1979 Revolution – predominantly thanks to the lectures given by Ali Shari'ati – see Ali Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shari'ati* (London; New York: I. B.Tauris, 1998).

believe in the Marxist thinking of the artists since according to them the labour movement was the only true driving force behind the 1979 Revolution. This indeed stood in opposition to our views about the revolution as a group of artists largely inspired by Ali Shari‘ati. I told my colleagues that we had to immediately clarify our own interpretation of this revolution in a separate art exhibition. We chose Hoseiniyeh Ershād where Shari‘ati used to give his public lectures prior to the revolution. The exhibition later gave birth to the formation of the Howzeh.⁵¹

Following the art exhibition in the Hoseiniyeh Ershād – which remained open until the day of the referendum on the creation of an Islamic Republic on 1 April 1979 and later toured the country – the Cultural Islamic Association decided to support the artists involved. According to Khorrojerdi, Ali Rajabi, an influential revolutionary activist and the son of a well-known and sympathetic cleric, brought the artists under the supportive wing of the association. The artists had been looking for a space in which they could develop their artistic performances and with the help of the association their early gatherings took place in a building located in Palestine Avenue in central Tehran.⁵² The group quickly began to grow and so the members decided to find a new building independent of the centres they had collaborated with so far.⁵³ Khosrowjerdi proposed that they move to the Hazirat-al-qods building, the main reason being the remarkable architectural features of the green dome that, in his view, perfectly suited the members’ interests and the agenda of the promotion of revolutionary art.⁵⁴

I remember walking over the College Bridge (Pol-e Kālej) with Reza Tehrani and Mostafa Rokhsefat, who later wrote the Howzeh’s constitution. We

⁵¹ Hosein Khosrowjersi, Interview by Fatemeh Shams, London, 16 October 2013.

⁵² Unknown, “Negāhi be seh daheh fa‘āliyat-e Howzeh-ye Honari: Howzeh-ye Honari movāzi-e Vezārat-e Ershād,” *Āsemān* (Tehran: 2012), 68.

⁵³ Other centres that temporarily hosted members of the Howzeh during gatherings included Shahid Motahhari High School, under the supervision of Ayatollah Emami Kashani, a then pro-revolutionary cleric, Daftar-e nashr-e qalam (Qalam Publishing House) in Etteḥād Avenue, and the Anjoman-e Falsafeh (The Philosophy Association) in Tehran. For more information on the details of these centres, see Unknown, “Avvalin shabhā-ye she‘r-e enqeāb,” *Farsnews*, accessed 17 September 2014, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13910915000652>.

⁵⁴ Hosein Khosrowjerdi, Interview by Fatemeh Shams, 21 September 2012.

suddenly came face-to-face with the green dome of Hazirat-al-qods. I was unaware of the fact that it had initially belonged to the Baha'i community during the pre-revolutionary period. At that point other revolutionary groups occupied the building. A week later, after making an agreement with the revolutionary forces resident in the building at that time, we moved into Hazirat-al-qods and became the building's new occupants.⁵⁵

As Khosrowjerdi notes, primarily Hazirat-al-qods had been a centre for the religious and cultural activities of the Baha'i community prior to the revolution. Yet the building was occupied by revolutionary forces during the 1979 uprising and quickly became a hub for the activities of the Islamic Agricultural Organisation (IAO). By way of an agreement made between the new occupants of the building and the founding members of the Howzeh, from 1980 onwards Hazirat-al-qods was transformed into the main base for revolutionary artists and members of the literati.

The centre was not funded by the government from the outset since it had been designed as a self-governing institution sponsored by a small group of voluntary revolutionaries, including Reza Tehrani and Mostafa Rokhsefat, both of whom had been political prisoners before the revolution. They became the main fundraisers for the centre and the authors of its constitution.⁵⁶ Although the ideology of the group turned out to be in agreement with that of the revolutionary state, from its earliest days the founders of the Howzeh made a great effort to maintain independence from the OIP, thus refusing and indeed avoiding the state-provided financial support offered to them.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ In unpublished interviews with Boyuk Maleki, he claimed to never have seen this constitution. Moreover, Hosein Khosrowjerdi mentioned in an interview with the author that the members were not permitted to take part in sessions concerning the drafting of this constitution. They were later given a copy of the constitution, the main focus of which fell on the supreme leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini and the necessity of a firm commitment to Islam and the revolution as two main conditions for membership in the Howzeh. Boyuk Maleki, Interview by Fatemeh Shams, 14 September 2014.

An early member of the Howzeh, and at the time a 21-year-old poet who wholeheartedly supported the revolution, Aminpur recalls that the title of the Howzeh was selected in reference to the prestigious seminary of Qom (Howzeh-ye ‘Elmiyeh), the intention being to promote an Islamic outlook in the fields of art and literature.⁵⁷ The group’s motivation was, as Ali Gheissari suggests, the production of “*Maktabi* art and literature.”⁵⁸ In accordance with the ideology argued for in the works of Ali Shari‘ati, this entailed the production of an ideologically grounded genre of literary works that spoke in favour of Islamic ideology.⁵⁹

The members of the Howzeh used rhetoric as a tool through which “to express their ideological militancy and populism and to dissociate themselves both from the secularists (and secular intellectuals in general) and from the moderate or, as they put it, liberal Muslims.”⁶⁰ The group was quick to draw a line between itself and the secular intelligentsia, making the delineation of and adherence to such borders the first and foremost goal on its agenda. As Ali Khamenei asserted at a meeting with members of the Howzeh in 1993, the necessity of creating an ideological distinction from pre-revolutionary leftist artists and the members of the Tudeh Party was an early and predominant concern:

During the early revolutionary phase, everything was led and owned by the

⁵⁷ Unknown, “Negāhi be seh daheh fa‘āliyat-e Howzeh-ye honari,” 68.

⁵⁸ *Maktab* refers to traditional religious schools or even a school of thought or a path. In the then revolutionary parlance of Islamists, as well as Marxit-Leninists, the term *maktabi* was used to mean ideological.

⁵⁹ See chapter 4 for further discussion of Shari‘ati’s influence on the official literary discourse.

⁶⁰ Ali Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century* (United States of America: University of Texas Press, 1998), 112.

Tudeh Party members. [...] I could feel that Tudeh members dominated everything and wanted to mislead the revolution. At first, the situation was chaotic and no one knew what was to be placed where. Many were not even aware of the role of artistic matters in creating the revolution. Suddenly, we witnessed a green, fresh plant [The Howzeh] flourishing in a nourishing ground [...] and I put my hope in it. The Howzeh should watch its borders. You have defined a border and must therefore preserve it. Do not let the artistic trend that is dependent on the party of wealth and oppression and imperialism, which is contaminated with all humanistic and animalistic problems, rule the mind set of the people in your society.⁶¹

Accordingly, members of the Howzeh engaged in very little or no communication with members of the Writers' Association of Iran from the pre-revolutionary period, whose members were typically secular-minded writers with leftist inclinations. Yet despite such an ideological gulf the term 'committed art and literature' (*Adabiyāt va honar-e mote'ahhed*) appears to have been borrowed from pre-revolutionary leftist poets such as Sa'id Soltanpur, Khosrow Golsorkhi and Siavash Kasra'i. These poets referred to themselves as 'committed' to the people (*khalq*) and expressed critical views against the monarchy in their literary works. Members of the literary branch of the Howzeh used the same terms to describe the Islamic republican literature that was beginning to take shape. The revolutionary literati adopted the term 'committed' but replaced the term '*khalq*'⁶² with '*mardom*', another equivalent that allowed people to distance themselves, in Persian, from the Marxist tendencies of the pre-revolutionary literati.⁶³

In the terminology of pre-revolutionary leftist literature, 'commitment' referred to a state

⁶¹ Ali Khamenei, "Bayānāt-e rahbar dar didār bā a'zā-ye Howzeh-ye Honari," *Sureh-ye andisheh* 49 (1993): 9-13.

⁶² The term *khalq* had been thoroughly appropriated by the Marxists in Iranian revolutionary discourse and so could not be used without suggesting Marxism and the Marxist understanding of revolution. *Mardom*, by contrast, was neutral in ideological terms and available for the Islamists to appropriate (also *mardomsālāri*, later became the Islamic intellectuals' preferred term for democracy, avoiding the Western and liberal associations of democracy).

⁶³ See chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of the notion of commitment according to the Islamic republican poets.

of conflict and dialectical engagement between writers or poets and the ruling ideology. Conversely, during the post-revolutionary period, and particularly among emerging revolutionary literary figures, ‘commitment’ was used to signify conformity with the ruling regime on the part of an author.⁶⁴ In the eyes of the Islamic republic’s official cultural bodies, such as the OIP, a committed artist was a pious and loyal Muslim whose artistic interests and output fell in line with the ideals of the revolution. In almost all aspects of social life, *ta’ahhod* (commitment) superseded *takhassos* (professionalism), and the political loyalty of the people to the revolution and its ideology became the foremost criteria by which the truthful commitment of an artist was judged, in relation to both the revolutionary system and the state.⁶⁵ Holding openly religious views in both the private and public spheres of life, while maintaining a critical stance towards the pre-revolutionary regime and not holding any record of collaboration with the monarchical system were essential components of this artistic and literary stance.⁶⁶ All of these principles were included in the constitution of the Howzeh from its inception.

During the early 1980s, members of the Howzeh were intent on reviving the notion of Islamic resistance (*moqāvēmat-e eslāmi*) against world superpowers such as the United States and Britain, and regional powers such as Israel. They did so by holding poetry nights and arranging occasional lectures at which the significance of Islamic values and

⁶⁴ Mohammadreza Hakimi formulates these ideals in *Adabiyāt va ta’ahhod dar eslām* (Qom: Dalil-e mā, 2006). During the first years of the revolution, this book was a source of inspiration for many young Islamist writers.

⁶⁵ For more information, see James A. Bill and William Roger Louis, *Musaddiq, Iranian Nationalism and Oil* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1988), 123. Also, for a thorough and meticulous study of the theme of commitment in Persian poetry, see Samad Alavi, “The Poetics of Commitment in Modern Persian: A Case of Three Revolutionary Poets in Iran,” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkley, 2013).

⁶⁶ As Hoseini notes in his definition of the literature of the Islamic Revolution, the three major themes in this literary trend were Imam Khomeini, martyrs and the war. For more details, see Hasan Hoseini, *Sureh* 5 (1983): 159.

Shi'ite beliefs in examples of popular literature would be discussed. They also organised lectures in memory of the martyrs of Āshurā during the month of Muharram, thus utilising an occasion and a theme that resonated in a society engaged in an unceasing war with neighbouring Iraq. Poetry nights in the Howzeh were modelled on the Ten Poetry Nights (*Dah shab-e Goethe*) organised by the Iranian Writers' Association at the Goethe Institute in Tehran prior to the revolution and which, according to the literary scholars, was one of the main triggers of the revolutionary uprising.⁶⁷ Eight years of war and the state's unremitting emphasis placed on martyrdom as representing the core of the Islamic faith guided the poetic discourse of those poets loyal to the state.⁶⁸ The centrality of the Iran-Iraq War in the poetry of members of the Howzeh was later emphasised by Khomeini's successor, even after the war had ended:

It might be the case that during our daily commutes in the streets of Tehran we don't protect ourselves in certain ways. However, when we go to the border, where the enemy has targeted us, we are unable to walk and go about our commute safely and comfortably. If we want to walk here or there, or recite poetry, it must be the poetry of war; a kind of poetry that reminds us of the enemy and reminds us that our guns are not to be stolen.⁶⁹

Shortly after its official formation, the Howzeh began to publish a periodical called *Jong-e Sureh* (sureh, a chapter of the Quran).⁷⁰ This periodical acted as a replacement for the earlier magazine *Youngsters of the Mosque*. Consisting of poetry, short stories, art and daily accounts of war, the *Jong-e Sureh* became the central focus for official works of art and literature. One of the *Jong-e Sureh*'s key activities was the publishing of articles and

⁶⁷ For further details on the Ten Nights of Poetry at the Goethe Institute in Tehran, see Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, "Introduction: Iran's Literature 1977-1997," *Iranian Studies* 30 (1997): 193-213.

⁶⁸ See chapter 4 on Islamic republican war poetry.

⁶⁹ Ali Khamenei, "Gozāresh-e 'amalkard-e Howzeh-ye Honari-ye Sāzmān-e Tablighāt-e Eslāmi tavasot-e Hojatoleslām Zam dar didār bā rahbari," *Sureh-ye andisheh* 49 (Tehran, 1993): 12.

⁷⁰ Many of the poems that appear in the following chapters are taken from this literary journal.

reports that revolved around issues, such as the significance of Islamic writing and revolutionary poetry or art festivals. Most of the artists and poets whose works were published in the periodical did not have any record of publication prior to their involvement with the Howzeh. This lack of experience was largely due to their young age, the fact that they had played an insignificant role in the pre-revolutionary literary scene and their weak or non-existing links with the leading intelligentsia of the pre-revolutionary period.

From 1980 to 1988, writings of a similar ilk proved prolific in subsequent volumes of the *Jong-e Sureh*, all of which emphasised sanctification of martyrdom (*shahādat*), the idea of Islamic resistance and the Shi'ite tradition of Āshurā. Benefiting from state sponsorship, having access to the main publishing houses and finally their inclusion in school textbooks provided them with a broad readership during this period.

4. The Howzeh as a Division of the Organisation of Islamic Propaganda

Following the establishment of the Islamic state in 1979-80, Ayatollah Khomeini ordered that all revolutionary committees and institutions must be taken under the control of the state's central revolutionary organisations in order to avoid any possible conflict during decision-making processes. Thus many of the cultural organisations that had been formed during the early revolutionary phase were merged with their superior bodies, creating regulatory umbrella organisations. The OIP, one of the two chief cultural bodies of the

state,⁷¹ was deemed responsible for the supervision of all cultural institutions, including the Howzeh.

During 1980 and 1981, the Howzeh faced several challenges, including a catalogue of financial difficulties brought about by a lack of sponsorship. This gave the OIP the chance to exert its influence over the institution. In return for receiving annual financial aid from the OIP, the Howzeh agreed to adhere to the OIP's regulations. Given the founding principles of the Howzeh, this cession of autonomy did not pass unnoticed and internal conflicts about the decision eventually led to the resignation of two of the group's founding sponsors, namely Reza Tehrani and Mostafa Rokhsefat.

One key cause for this split was the OIP's insistence on having a representative present at all decision-making sessions held by the Howzeh and on monitoring the cultural activities of all its members and their cultural output. This proposal was initially rejected by a number of the Howzeh's founding members who were concerned by the idea of both direct and indirect interference in decision-making processes on the part of the OIP. They were aware of a plan proposed by the staff of the OIP that called for the expulsion of Islamic leftists from the Howzeh.⁷²

⁷¹ MCIG was the other significant state institution that dealt with cultural affairs.

⁷² In the four categories that comprise the post-revolutionary political factions, Homa Katouzian identifies this group under the title of revolutionary radicals with socialist leanings. See Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Medieval and Modern Iran* (New Heaven; London: Yale University Press, 2010), 354-64. In the case of the Islamic republican poets who belonged to this ideological trend, they could be further divided into two factions during the post-Khomeini era. Some joined the camp of religious intellectuals and reformists, while the rest joined the conservative camp. For more details on the internal politics of the Howzeh, see "Interview with Mohammadali Zam," *Khabaronline*, accessed 15 August 2013, <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/303438/culture/Cultural-Management>.

At this stage, members of the OIP faced two choices with regard to the fate of the Howzeh. First, they could follow the radical proposal that was put forward by radical cleric Faker and purge any members who showed tendencies towards Islamist-socialist views, along with those who collaborated closely with non-members professing secular and leftist viewpoints. Second, they could bring the Howzeh under the direct supervision of the OIP and amend the group's structure by appointing an OIP member as the director of the centre.⁷³

After much debate, the head of the OIP approved the second approach, which was swiftly put into action. On 27 June 1981, Mohammadali Zam was appointed director of the Howzeh. Reza Tehrani and Mostafa Rokhsefat, the principal founders and fundraisers of the Howzeh, immediately resigned in protest. Those who continued to collaborate with the redesigned Howzeh agreed to rename the centre the Arts Department of the OIP (Howzeh-e Honari-ye Sāzmān-e- Tablighāt-e Eslāmi). Poignantly, the word *andisheh* (thought) was removed from the title.⁷⁴ The remaining members also attempted to safeguard their independence in relation to the content of literary and artistic productions by making the said independence a condition of their acceptance of the OIP funding. They further noted in their meeting with the OIP officials that the umbrella organisation's representative should not interfere with the content and production of the group's cultural output and

⁷³ In an interview with Hosein Khosrowjerdi, he maintained that many of the centre's members, including himself, were not unwaveringly religious. In his view, the Howzeh always hosted numerous members who followed a relatively secular lifestyle in private. He mentions himself as an example of this trend, having remained a member of the centre up to the present regardless of various transformations and ideological shifts in the centre.

⁷⁴ The key figures of the Howzeh who remained within the organisation following the 1981 restructuring included Qaysar Aminpur, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, Hasan Hoseini, Kazem Chalipa, Habib Sadeqi and Hosein Khosrowjerdi.

publication affairs, thus limiting its role to that of financial sponsor and reporter for the centre's activities.⁷⁵

Despite the aforesaid agreements between the OIP and members of the Howzeh, those who remained there witnessed swift ideological and structural shifts as state bureaucratisation began to take hold. The first step in this process entailed an overhaul of the structure of the centre's leadership and the replacement of the council-based management method with an authoritarian system, giving the sole responsibility of decision-making to one individual. As director of the centre, Zam maintained a presence at all of the Howzeh's events and activities, cultural and administrative, in order to control the chaos that had begun to grow from countless ideological disagreements among members. Under Zam's fifteen-year management of the Howzeh it turned into an official state-run cultural organisation that opted for a path that diverged from its initial plans concerning the promotion of art and literature. Specifically, it moved away from a grassroots revolutionary cultural centre towards a giant monitoring state organisation that adopted a business-oriented approach to cultural production. As shown later, this shift led to the expulsion of a large number of key members in 1987.

5. The Howzeh During the Iran-Iraq War

During the Iran-Iraq War, the responsibility of establishing a cultural industry that rooted itself in war propaganda fell to revolutionary institutions and committees under the control

⁷⁵ Unknown, "Negāhi beh seh daheh fa'āliyat-e Howzeh-ye Honari," 69.

of the state. In the fields of art and literature, the MICG, the OIP and the Howzeh were placed in charge of launching a campaign that promoted cultural production in support of the war. Among the organisations deemed responsible for the manufacture and distribution of war poetry, it was the Howzeh in particular that benefited from having particularly active members. Numerous collections of war poems, stories, films and examples of visual art began to emerge from the official cultural scene and the Howzeh proved to be the driving force behind this development.

However, while striking in volume, this pro-war literature left much to be desired in terms of quality. Most of the poems published in different volumes of the *Jong-e Sureh* are of poor literary quality and characterised by trite imagery and lexicon. Yet the revolutionary authors and poets who penned these works considered such criticism representative of a typically elitist approach to popular literature. They contested that the metaphors and literary devices that they employed had been chosen in order to make their output accessible to as broad an audience as possible and, more specifically, ordinary people with a limited knowledge of literature. At this stage, the Howzeh's war poets endeavoured to promote a popular form of literature and art (*Adabiyāt va honar-e mardomi*) in response to opposing monarchical, socialist and cosmopolitan tendencies. In several articles, the founding members of the Howzeh emphasised the importance of the populist features of Islamic literature. The following paragraph is an excerpt from a detailed note on the poetry of the Islamic Revolution, written by Hasan Hoseini:

The poetry of the Islamic Revolution falls into the category of popular poetry

(*she'r-e mardomi*). The revolutionary poet sympathises with his people, suffers their pain, their delight and their joy, and feels proud of their victories and fury in response to their rage.⁷⁶

Just as Hoseini argues in his article, the relationship between Islamic republican poets and the people proved reminiscent of that demonstrated by constitutionalist poets (*she'r-e mashruteh*).⁷⁷ Yet the thinker maintained that although poets of the constitutional era came close to popular discourse in their idiomatic lexicon, unlike Islamic republican poets (whom he saw as the 'real' advocates of popular literature) "they never genuinely sympathised with the people."⁷⁸ Such ideological differentiations, which are grounded in the content of the literature produced, resemble those seen in the socialist realist literature of Stalinist Russia, for which authors were instructed to avoid "all approaches and language that might not be accessible to the masses."⁷⁹

Indeed, Lenin's definition of 'party literature' in his famous article 'Party Organisation and Party Literature' (1905)⁸⁰ is reminiscent of the definitions of Islamic republican poetry put forward by Islamic republican literary theoreticians such as Hoseini. Apart from the presence of historically contextual adjustments, such as changing the term 'the proletariat' for that of 'the people', the remainder of the content is relevant to the ideological views of

⁷⁶ Hasan Hoseini, "Negāhi beh she'r-e enqelāb," *Jong-e Sureh* 5 (1983): 157.

⁷⁷ A detailed discussion of the similarities and contrasts between the poetry of constitutional era and post-revolutionary official trend in terms of content and form falls beyond the scope and limit of the present study. The aim here is to shed light on a gap in the existing scholarship for future scholarly research. In particular, a comparative approach in studying the works of Nasim Shomal, Mohamadtaqi Bahar of the constitutional period with works of Qaysar Aminpur and Hasan Hoseini of the post-revolutionary era may prove helpful in understanding the shared trends and contrasting elements in the works of these two periods.

⁷⁸ Hasan Hoseini, "Negāhi beh she'r-e enqelāb," 157.

⁷⁹ Clark, "Socialist Realism in Soviet Literature," 55.

⁸⁰ Marxists Internet Archive, *Lenin Collected Works*, Vol. 10 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), accessed 13 November, 2014, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/cw/volume10.htm>.

cultural advocates of Islamic republican literature and poetry of the 1980s:

What is this principle of party literature? It is not simply that, for the socialist proletariat, literature cannot be a means of enriching individuals or groups: it cannot, in fact, be an individual undertaking, independent of the common cause of the proletariat.⁸¹

About eight decades after the publication of this statement the common cause of the proletariat that lay at the heart of Marxist-Leninist ideology was replaced by the cause of Islam in the Islamic ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Yet the role played by such an ideology remained largely the same:

When we say Islamic art what are we talking about? Islamic art is an artistic trend that must be created with Islamic content, goals and ideals in order to be capable of fighting against those forms of art that mislead people and our youth, entertaining them with unreal and fake ideals, stopping the people from reaching their goals or helping oppressive powers around the world without supporting the disinherited. Do not let these forms of art dominate our people.⁸²

Accordingly, in the official poetry of the Islamic Republic both form and content are crucial elements. As the revolutionary trend took shape its adherents showed an interest in reviving classical forms, such as the ghazal, masnavi, qasideh and quatrain, especially during the Iran-Iraq War. The general formalistic tendency that developed among the advocates of Islamic republican poetry, especially its older generation, did so in line with classical forms for predominantly ideological reasons. According to Hamid Sabzevari, during the rise of the revolutionary uprising, writing broken verse was considered a sign of secularism and Marxism and was therefore to be avoided:

⁸¹ Ibid, 44-49.

⁸² Ali Khamenei, "Gozāresh-e 'amalkard-e Howzeh," 12.

Writing poems without meter and rhyme was not welcomed among our Muslim literary circle. It was only common among a few poets that belonged to a small and insignificant group. I never saw any modern poems being chanted in demonstrations against the shah.⁸³

The Islamisation of the cultural scene that took place under the direction of the Howzeh did not only occur within the realm of poetry, in another prominent push towards an all-encompassing and official state culture cinema was cleansed and Islamised. The work created by Mohsen Makhmalbaf is representative of the 'Islamicate cinema', to use Hamid Naficy's term, that this momentum generated. Makhmalbaf proved to be a prolific filmmaker during the first six years of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-86),⁸⁴ with his *Nasuh's Repentance* (*Towbeh-ye nasuh*) and *Two Sightless Eyes* (*Dow cheshm-e bisu*) of 1983 and *Boycott* (*Bāykot*) of 1984 representing the revolutionary ideal of a war against both materialism and Western values, as encouraged by the state.

The promotion of Third-Worldist values based on Shi'ite beliefs emerged as another theme in these and other similar movies. Makhmalbaf also played an active role in formulating the idea of 'Islamic cinema' in his writings for *Jong-e Sureh*. The Islamic scenario writing (*filmnāmehevisi-ye eslāmi*) that was developed by filmmakers such as Makhmalbaf during the early 1980s was a key project in this sense, with samples published in the form of essays in *Jong-e Sureh*. This formed part of a cultural purification plan that also included the closure or renaming of cinemas and the purging of a large number of artists

⁸³ Unknown, "Interview with Hamid Sabzevari," *Keyhān farhangi* 11 (1983): 21.

⁸⁴ Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema: The Islamicate Period, 1978-1984* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2012).

and films.⁸⁵ In a piece published in 1983 in the fifth volume of *Jong-e Sureh*, Makhmalbaf discussed the necessity of the Islamisation of cinema and the requisite ideological commitments for any potential director or screenwriter:

The first and foremost condition for an ideal directorship is consistency with the scenario. Both the director and the screenwriter should be in line with each other ideologically. Some consider art as a type of social service that does not need any ideological commitment. But how can one expect a Marxist, an Orientalised humanist (*umānist-e sharqzadeh*) or an Occidentalised nihilist (*nehilist-e gharbzadeh*) to make films in support of Islam and its values?⁸⁶

As with Stalin's Soviet Russia,⁸⁷ it appears that the dominant regime in Khomeini and Khamenei's Iran saw art as something that could shape the reality they wished to see. As Lina Khatib maintains, in the case of the Iranian Revolution the state tried to "create routinised ideology for the Iranian people"⁸⁸ through carefully designed murals, both during and after the war. In addition to these murals, the visual arts section of the *Jong-e Sureh* presented ideologically charged paintings and posters, the contents of which denounced various imperialist powers and Israel, thus affirming Iran's support for the Palestinian cause and its approval of acts of martyrdom during the war.

Islamic republican cultural centres were reminiscent of their Third Reich and Stalinist

⁸⁵ For more information regarding the Islamisation of Iranian cinema after the revolution, see Hamid Naficy, "Islamizing Film Culture in Iran," *Iran: Political Culture in the Islamic Republic*, ed. Smith K. Farsoun and Mehrdad Mashayekhi (London; New York: Routledge, 1992): 123-149.

⁸⁶ Mohsen Makhmalbaf, "Nokāti darbāreh-ye filmnāmeḥ dar sinamā-ye eslāmi," *Sureh* 5 (1983): 130.

⁸⁷ The prohibitions faced by the socialist realist writers of the Stalinist era, such as expunging from "their work any trace of 'physiologism' [read mentioning of sex and other such bodily functions]" or "avoiding all approaches and language that might not be accessible to the masses", are among the things they had in common with Islamic republican writers. Clark, "Socialist Realism in the Soviet Literature," 55.

⁸⁸ Lina Khatib, *Image Politics in the Middle East: The Role of the Visual in the Political Struggle* (New York: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2012), 81. Apart from the Howzeh, the visual artists of another revolutionary cultural organisation, namely the Association of Writers and Artists of Iran (*Showrā-ye Nevisandegān-va Honarmandān-e Iran*), were also involved in the making of these ideological murals. One famous example is the prominent mural on the walls of the American embassy in Tehran, which was painted by prominent visual artist Hanibal Al-Khas. To read his first-hand account of the murals on the walls of the American embassy, see Hanibal Al-Khas, "Gozāreshi az naqāshi bar divār-e lāneh-ye jāsusi," *Showrā-ye nevisandegān va honarmandān-e Iran* 1 (Tehran, 1980): 68-72.

equivalents in that artists in different fields were given strong incentives to adhere to the regulations and ideologies outlined by such institutions in order to receive funding or contracts. This approach allowed the Islamic state to establish firm control over creative production within the nation and facilitated the fiscal collapse of any organisation that refused to comply. During the final stages of the war, the supervision and control of the cultural output of compliant institutions intensified, leading to structural changes in centres such as the Howzeh.

6. Ideological Dilemmas and Transformations

From approximately 1987, and as a result of more than half a decade of costly warfare, Iran's political establishment began to struggle with the deleterious consequences of the war, including a gradual loss of legitimacy among its supporters. Members of the Howzeh who had previously stood by the state with unwavering support began to split into two groups: those who welcomed an extension of the war and those who did not. Moreover, various financial obstacles and the authoritarian nature of the leadership of the Howzeh strengthened objections towards the centre's cultural policies.⁸⁹

Contrary to the initial promise made by the OIP regarding its policy of non-interference, the centre had in actual fact been under extensive OIP surveillance since its absorption within the umbrella organisation in 1981. Correspondingly, Aminpur has since confirmed that the 1987 expulsion of thirteen members was due to the comprehensive monitoring of

⁸⁹ For further details about the factional politics of the post-war era, see chapter 4.

literary and artistic production:⁹⁰

The situation was such that they would decide which movie should be produced or not, which poem should be written or not, why this story is written this way and why that movie is made that way. Such interferences caused serious confrontations and subsequently thirteen members left the Howzeh in 1987.⁹¹

Among those who left the Howzeh in 1987 were a number of influential and renowned Islamic republican artists and literary figures, including Aminpur, Hosseini, Maleki, Amuzadeh-Khalili and Makhmalbaf. They published a statement in the *Kayhān* newspaper denouncing a set of regulations introduced in the mid-1980s that placed restrictions on publications, liberal economic policies and business trading in the Howzeh.⁹² They further raised concerns about the decline of revolutionary values and ideals in the wake of business-oriented changes in at the centre. In their statement, the expelled or departed members noted that the Howzeh had deviated from the original path of the Imam (Khomeini) and the spreading of revolutionary slogans based on social equality and justice. They also stated that if the present state of affairs in the Howzeh were to continue in the same direction then ‘opportunists’ (*forsattalabān*) would occupy the centre, ultimately rendering it unrepresentative of Islamic republican literature. Protests in the press against the heads of the OIP and the Howzeh triggered repeated clashes between radical Islamic socialists and the conservative right-wing faction in the years that followed.

While Islamic leftist members of the Howzeh supported pro-justice, anti-capitalist and

⁹⁰ This incident will be detailed later in this chapter. For now, it’s worth noting that while the expelled members of the Howzeh insisted on the term ‘expulsion’ in various interviews, Zam refused to call it expulsion, partly in order to avoid further questions about the dispute. He described the episode as comprising insignificant disagreements that caused a lack of motivation among those who chose to leave the Howzeh.

⁹¹ Unknown, “Negāhi beh seh daheh fa’āliyat-e Howzeh-ye Honari,” *Āsemān* (Tehran: 2012).

⁹² Boyuk Maleki, email message to author, 3 April 2014.

Third-Wordlist ideologies in their works, as well as criticisms of social inequality within the post-revolutionary context, Zam set aside such ideological concerns in favour of the development of a series of far-reaching business plans that were, in his view, vital for the survival of the centre during the war. He began to engage in economic activities that impacted on the cultural image of the centre as a revolutionary and grassroots organisation, thus leading to an about-face in its purpose and aims. These activities included the founding of a cigarette business, collaborations with various oil companies, the buying of shares in football teams, engagements with the car import industry, and the building of malls and universities. Zam justified his actions by blaming the state for lack of financial investment in cultural activities, which he claimed placed the survival of the centre in danger. In a recent 2013 interview, Zam deemed Khamenei responsible for turning the Howzeh into an economic body:

Ayatollah Khamenei asked me to prepare a cultural agenda for the Howzeh, which included a detailed plan for thirty years. When I prepared the plan, the Leader arranged a meeting in which he raised concerns about funding opportunities for the extensive cultural plan that I had proposed. He asked how the Howzeh would afford to put this plan into action in financial terms. I told him teasingly: I believe with your support! He refused to accept this. It was the Ayatollah's view that the Howzeh should remain financially independent from the state. With his agreement I commenced a new range of economic activities designed to sustain the Howzeh.⁹³

After the 1987 expulsions, the Howzeh entered into a new phase in which a second generation of Islamic republican artists joined the centre and launched a set of changes set to reshape the character and duties of the centre. This fresh generation emerged from a series of recruitments made by the centre following the expulsions, thus resulting in the

⁹³ Unknown, "Interview with Mohammadali Zam," *Khabaronline*, accessed 15 August 2013, <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/303438/culture/Cultural-Management>.

production and dissemination of material that was markedly different in its artistic objectives and tone. Various expelled members, such as Aminpur and Amuzadeh Khalili, moved to the *Sorush-e Nowjavān* periodical, a magazine for young adults that fell under the direct supervision of IRIB.⁹⁴ A number of other expelled members went to *Kayhān-e Farhangi* magazine, a centre for Islamic republican writers that held views on politics, religion and revolution that were of a socialist inclination; the latter of these was founded by Reza Tehrani and Mostafa Rokhsefat.

In its early days, the poetry and story section of the Howzeh had been the most powerful part of the centre. The Islamic republican poetry nucleus took form in the Howzeh. Yet by the end of the war, following the discharge of a number of leading poets and authors,⁹⁵ it gradually lost its impact and film production rose to take its place. Upon the purge of Makhmalbaf and the arrival of Morteza Avini a new wave of pro-war documentaries were produced under the auspices of the centre. After a period of discontinuity, *Jong-e Sureh* was republished under the supervision of Avini and adopted a new approach towards Islamic cinema and literature, the core of which constituted the commemoration of the war and support for oppressed Arab or African or Latin American countries. As discussed in the following section of this chapter, fundamental events such as the end of the war, the death of Khomeini, the emergence of new political factions and the rise of reformist movements introduced changes to the social and political scenes of the 1990s, not least

⁹⁴ See section 8 of this chapter.

⁹⁵ As previously mentioned, the controversy surrounding whether what happened in the Howzeh could be called an expulsion or not still continues up to this day. But what has become apparent from the interviews with both sides, both with those who left the centre and its director, is that they certainly received an expulsion letter at the end and left the centre. Working in such a high-pressure environment caused tensions between the director of the centre and these thirteen members, as a result of which an official letter of expulsion was issued.

exerting a remarkable impact on the structure and outlook of the Howzeh.

7. The Howzeh in the Post-war Period

With the end of the war in August 1988, and again with the death of Ayatollah Khomeini on 3 June 1989, internal struggles within the Islamic state resulted in the effective reestablishment of its ideological apparatus. Since this apparatus never constituted a singular and united entity during the lifetime of Khomeini, the death of the Supreme Leader created a void within which existing political factions became riven by internal conflict and division.⁹⁶ This leadership vacuum, coupled with the huge losses sustained during the war, gave rise to a period of turmoil.

The rise of a more pragmatic president, namely Aliakbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, led to what is generally considered the period of reconstruction (*dowreh-ye nowsāzi*) in the history of the Islamic Republic. Expansionist economic policies and the improvement of Iran's relations with Western countries provided two major supports for Rafsanjani's post-war political platform. Yet the President's structural adjustments and economic reforms failed to reduce the ideological conflicts and gaps that had emerged among Khomeini's successors.⁹⁷ Following ideological shifts in the political scene in general,⁹⁸ and the 1987 expulsions from the Howzeh in particular, a combination of conservative right and fundamentalist figures gradually took control of the centre. The major cultural policy of

⁹⁶ For more information on the political factions of the post-war period, see Katouzian Homa, *The Persians*, 359-364.

⁹⁷ See chapter 4 for further details about Hashemi-Rafsanjani's politics.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

the Howzeh during this period entailed combating secular intellectuals and budding religious intellectuals within the reformist faction.⁹⁹ Over the past 20 years this endeavour has been expounded in a prolific outpouring of books regarding the ‘imposed war’ (*jang-e tahmili*) and the ‘sacred defence’ (*defā‘-e moqaddas*). The principal publishing house of the Howzeh, *Sureh-ye mehr*, has consistently published war narratives and war memoirs written by veterans and the families of war victims as part of its emphasis on the continuing commemoration of the war, an endeavour designed to keep it, and the ideological purities it embodies, fresh in people’s minds.¹⁰⁰

At the start of the 1990s, this political factionalism was driven by the fact that the Islamic state was struggling with the ideological cracks prompted by the end of the war and the death of Khomeini; martyrdom, seen as an essential virtue, was replaced by an alternative that responded to changing circumstances. The main strategy thus became one of publishing copious war memoirs. As an exercise in propaganda however, this glut has proved selective in terms of the voices chosen to tell such war narratives. Majid Qaysari, an author of Iranian war fiction, asserts the following:

Most of the books on war that have been published by the Howzeh so far follow a particular approach to the war. If one looks at the war memoirs that have been published to date, they mostly represent themes of bravery and

⁹⁹ The term *Rowshanfekrān-e dini* (religious intellectual) was later proposed by Abdolkarim Soroush and applied to this generation of revolutionary thinkers, politicians, authors and artists. This was the first time in the history of the Islamic Revolution that the term ‘*rowshankfer*’ had been employed to describe a group of religious literati and thinkers. The founder of this movement, Abdolkarim Soroush, is arguably one of the most influential Islamic liberal thinkers ever to have existed. Having himself been a disillusioned revolutionary, Soroush was initially the former member of the Committee of Cultural Revolution during the first years of revolution. During the course of the war, and due to growing ideological disagreements, Soroush resigned from his governmental work and dedicated himself to philosophy and mysticism. During the 1990s, *Kiān* magazine provided a gathering point for religious intellectuals who had been expelled from *Kayhān-e Farhangī* due to the controversial writings of Abdolkarim Soroush on issues concerning Islam. See the next section for more details.

¹⁰⁰ Unknown, “Negāhi beh seh daheh fa‘āliat-e Howzeh”, 69.

courageousness for those who lost their lives in war, while failing to depict the dark and bitter aspects of war.¹⁰¹

This new group of official war writers working with the Howzeh included Mohsen Mo'meni-Sharif, an author of short stories on the war who was appointed head of the centre in 2009. A second influential figure was Morteza Avini, editor of the *Jong-e Sureh* quarterly from 1990 to 1992. Avini's involvement in the Howzeh opened a new page in the history of the Islamic film industry and also in the ideological discourse propagated by the *Jong-e Sureh* magazine. His life therefore deserves closer scrutiny herein.

Prior to the revolution, Avini was known as Kamran among his acquaintances.¹⁰² He was a fan of Western classical and jazz music, as well as the poetry of Forugh Farrokhzad and Mehdi Akhavan Sales. During his studentship in the faculty of literature, he developed close ties with intellectual figures that harboured secular leanings, such as Ghazaleh Alizadeh, a famous Iranian novelist who committed suicide in 1996.¹⁰³ In the wake of the revolution Avini began to call himself by his original given name, Morteza, a religious name favoured by the Shi'ite community. He began to adhere to the Islamic ideology of the revolution, eventually shifting towards a religious lifestyle and fully rejecting his past.

In his own words:

I threw all my writings, from philosophical writings to short stories to poems, in a few gunnysacks and burned them, for I had decided never to write another 'auto' biographical work, never to speak about my 'self' again. I attempted to annihilate my 'self', so that all that remained would be God, I am thankful that I remained steadfast.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Majid Qaysari, "Tabdil-e tārikh beh adabiyāt," *Āsemān* (Tehran:, 2012): 14-15.

¹⁰² For further details on his background, see the politico-literary who's who section.

¹⁰³ Ataollah Omidvar, "Mo'jezeh-ye tamām'ayār," *Avini's Official Website*, accessed 24 January 2014, http://www.aviny.com/occasion/enghelab_jang/aviny/89/Mosahebe_Omidvar.aspx.

¹⁰⁴ *Revātat-e sheidā'i*, quoted in Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, vol. 4 (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2012), 13.

During the course of the war (1984-87), Avini launched a lifelong project: a documentary called *Chronicle of Victory (Ravāyat-e fath)* that was to be filmed in five series.¹⁰⁵ His intention was to provide the public with an account of the daily lives of Iranian soldiers fighting in the battlefield. The documentary series played a significant role in stimulating a mystical ('*erfāni*) attitude towards war. The war was depicted as a lifelong spiritual journey and was portrayed through the lens of Avini's camera, which offered a perspective that was charged with the Islamic ideology of the revolution. The primary motivation for the making of this documentary was that of showing the real face of the war and the personnel and cameramen who joined Avini were ready to devote to their God while undertaking their work. As Avini himself stated, "If they were not willing to die, the best film directors of the world could not be useful to, or be respected by, us."¹⁰⁶

Many other documentaries about the Iran-Iraq War made during the same period were subject to censorship, whereas Avini's documentary enjoyed explicit state sponsorship and was screened on national television both during and after the war.¹⁰⁷ In addition to his involvement in the production of war films, Avini joined the battle against secularism and religious intellectualism, both of which were seen as Western and capitalist phenomena. In a series of articles in the *Jong-e Sureh*, Avini called for a campaign against the 'cultural onslaught' (*tahājom-e farhangī*) and its advocates, while in the television series *Mirage*

¹⁰⁵ A film institute was later founded by Avini under the direct order of Ayatollah Khamenei which held the same title, *Chronicle of Victory*, and was responsible for the production of official war documentaries.

¹⁰⁶ *Yek tajrobeh-ye māndegār*, quoted in Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, vol. 4, 12.

¹⁰⁷ Among the war documentaries that were censored and never granted screening permission by the state, *The Nine Day Occupation of Ābādān (Noh ruz mohāsereh-ye ābādān)* by Alireza Moghaddasian and *Freedom Bridge (Pol-e Āzādi)* by Piruz Kalantari were two of the most famous examples from this period.

(*Sarāb*, 1988) he offered a jaded image of the lives of Iranian emigrants living in Western countries. Other films created by the director, such as *the Pinnacle of the Mountain of Victory* (*Setigh-e jebāl-e fath*, 1987), were made during the war and carry the clear objective of promoting the act of martyrdom as sacred.

Avini was killed on 9 April 1993 by a landmine left over from the Iraq-Iran War while making the most recent series in his documentary about missing soldiers in the former warzone of Fakkeh, Khuzistan. His *Chronicle of Victory* team continued to work as a war-film unit for many years after his death, contributing a number of important productions to the commemoration of the war. In 2010, an official institution, which was founded by Avini's supporters, released a copy of the *Chronicle of Victory* documentary. Bajoghli and Naficy, two prominent scholars of Iranian film and cinema, cite a deep ideological gap between the new and old generations of the post-revolutionary era as the reason behind the apparent disappearance of the series. A new generation of post-revolutionary ideologists could not relate to Avini's out-dated narration, meaning that his work had to be removed from the official state cultural collection.¹⁰⁸

8. Alternative Platforms for the Islamic Left: *Sureh-ye Mehr* Versus *Sorush-e Nowjavān* and *Kiān*

After the 1987 expulsion of the Howzeh and establishment of the *Sureh-ye Mehr* as the main platform for its new members under the supervision of Avini, the expelled members

¹⁰⁸ Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, vol. 4, 21.

of the Howzeh sought to work as editors and contributors of private journals or newly established state-sponsored journals. In order to understand the dynamics of cultural change in the official post-Khomeini scene, the important roles played by journals as platforms for the poets and intellectuals of the Islamic left need to be elaborated upon. Since the members and sympathisers of the Islamic left faction had gradually been excluded from the executive and legislative branches of government,¹⁰⁹ the cultural figures of this faction who were at that time scattered among various cultural groups and institutions, formed two significant journals, namely the *Sorush-e Nowjavān* (1989-90) and the *Kiān* (1990-91).¹¹⁰ The former was a subdivision of the *Sorush* journal, which, despite its attachment to the IRIB, was kept as independent as possible until 2003 when conservative fundamentalists successfully applied excessive pressure for its closure. The *Kiān* journal, which presented a less literary programme, was formed in 1990 following the closure of *Kayhān-e farhangi* as the main platform for Islamic leftist thinkers and activists during the 1980s. This section discusses the transformation of these journals, which took place during the two decades following the revolution, and their substantial role in the promotion of the Islamic left and the rise of reformism.

The central figures of the *Kiān* circle were either from the Line of Imam Students (*Dāneshjuyān-e khatt-e Imam*)¹¹¹ of the 1980s or former officials of the Islamic Republic. Aboldkarim Sorush, who initially served as a member of the SCCR, had become highly

¹⁰⁹ This process is detailed in chapter 4.

¹¹⁰ It is important to bear in mind that this process of change and marginalisation started with the expulsions from the Howzeh in 1987 (see chapter 2) and peaked in 1993.

¹¹¹ Zealous revolutionary students with Islamic leftist leanings who wholeheartedly supported Khomeini in the wake of the revolution and played an important role in the hostage-taking crisis and occupation of the American embassy in Tehran. Numerous official poets, such as Aminpur and Hoseini, were among the members of this group.

critical of the revolutionary state and its ideology by the mid-1980s and began to publish critiques of the roles played by clerics and religion in politics, first in *Kehyān-e Farhangi* then in the *Kiān*.¹¹² Religious pluralism lay at the core of Soroush's writings in the *Kiān*, a publication that soon acted as a focal point for reformist intellectuals of a predominantly religious background. The founders of the *Kiān* came from the staff of the *Kehyān-e Farhangi* and included Reza Tehrani and Mostafa Rokhsefat, former financial sponsors and members of the Howzeh. The *Kiān* went on to become the main platform for religious intellectuals during the 1990s. They all shared one principle: that of revising their religious and ideological beliefs after a decade acting as revolutionaries. They soon became the promoters of dialogue with Western civilisations and propagators of Western philosophy and culture to the Iranian public through translations and journal articles.

From its very first issue, the *Kiān* dedicated a section to Western literary works and translations, yet poetry remained a rarely published literary genre in this particular journal.¹¹³ Unlike state-sponsored literary journals such as the *Sureh-ye Mehr*, which openly rejected the translation of Western literature and scholarship, seeing it as a form of Western cultural onslaught,¹¹⁴ the *Kiān* was one of the first intellectual journals to be run by disillusioned Islamic leftist intellectuals. Although, as time progressed, the presence of literature in the journal diminished.

¹¹² Soroush's controversial articles in the *Kayehān-e Farhangi* appeared under the title of *Qabz-o bast-e te'orik-e shari'at* (Expansion and Contraction of the Theory of Shari'a), prompting increasing pressure on the editors and eventually causing the closure of the publication in 1990.

¹¹³ Arthur Koestler, "Vasvasehā-ye romānnevis," trans. Saeid Shahrtash, *Kiān* 1 (1991): 52-70; Carlos Fuentes, "Malakeh-ye 'arusaki," trans. Maryam Khuzan, *Kiān* 1 (1991): 62-67.

¹¹⁴ For further details about the views presented in this official journal, which to a large extent reflect the socio-cultural views of neo-fundamentalists, see Morteza Avini, "Sarmaqāleh: pas az yāzdah sāl," *Sureh-ye andisheh* 12 (1989): 4.

It was during this period that a number of official poets from the Islamic left, such as Aminpur, Abdolmalekian, Hoseini and Mahmudi, started to either implicitly or explicitly ally themselves with the religious intellectual circle. However, these poets never officially joined any reformist circle, including that of the *Kiān*. Hoseini and Mahmudi published a number of pieces in early issues of the *Kiān* on apolitical themes such as the Indian school of poetry (*Sabk-e Hendi*) or the significance of love in poetic thought.¹¹⁵ Aminpur published a most controversial piece under the title of *Revolutionary Literature and Literary Revolution*, (*Adabiyāt-e enqelābi va enqelāb-e adabi*, 1999) in the very same journal.¹¹⁶ For the first time ever, after wholeheartedly having dedicated himself to the Islamic republican literary trend, Aminpur publically questioned the extent to which social revolutions stimulate literary change.

Making specific references to the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11) and the literary movement that ensued, he argues against an understanding of socio-political revolution as a driver of literary change. In its place, Aminpur suggests that literary change constitutes an independent transformation that may give birth to social revolution but cannot be born by it. The article clearly indicates a remarkable about-face in Aminpur's ideological attitude towards the revolutionary literature of the 1980s since the poet conceptualises literary change as something driven by the substantial modification of form, content and

¹¹⁵ In an online correspondence with a former member of the *Kiān* circle, Ebrahim Soltani, it is evident that none of the Islamic republican poets used to be part of this circle. However, some of them showed support at the beginning by publishing a selection of pieces in the first issues of the journal. For Hoseini's and Mahmudi's articles, see Hasan Hoseini, "Jahān-e man, zabān-e man," *Kiān* 1 (1991): 44-51.

¹¹⁶ Qaysar Aminpur, "Az adabiyāt-e enqeābi tā enqelāb-e adabi," *Kiān* 4 (2000): 62-67.

structure, as opposed to originating from within ideological and political change.¹¹⁷ Aminpur also engaged in more radical actions, for example, signing petitions in support of religious intellectuals. Following the physical assault on Soroush in Qom in 1996, when he was beaten by a group of *basijis* and *hezbollahis* while delivering a speech, members of the *Kiān* circle, among them Aminpur, signed a formal letter of complaint to then President Rafsanjani in order to voice their concerns about the threat of physical assault at the hands of radical hardliners and excessive state censorship.¹¹⁸

Despite occasional collaborations with religious intellectual circles, these poets saw themselves as occupying a different ideological position from that of the ruling power. Consequently, in the wake of the war and the passing of Khomeini they founded the *Soroush-e Nowjavān* (1989-90) and Centre for Young Poets (Daftar-e She'r-e Javān, 1990). The latter was a centre for young poets and was linked with a parallel poetry circle that developed within the Howzeh. After Khatami's presidential victory the centre was transformed into a major cultural institution. It fell under the supervision of the MCIG and most of the key members of the association came from the growing body of disillusioned poets.

The *Soroush-e Nowjavān*, a subdivision of the *Soroush* journal, itself the official magazine of the IRIB post-revolution, was formed in 1990 by three expelled members of the Howzeh. Aminpur, who collaborated extensively with the *Soroush* as the head of the poetry column during the 1980s, joined the jury of the *Soroush* after the 1987 expulsions from the Howzeh.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.,

¹¹⁸ Abdolkarim Soroush, *Siāsatnāmah* (Tehran: Serāt, 1999), 84-87.

The other two members placed alongside Aminpur were Amuzadeh-Khalili and Maleki, both of whom were expelled from the Howzeh in 1987. For most Iranian young adults who had spent their fundamental teenage years living through the aftermath of the war, this journal played an important role in shaping their socio-political views. Many young and talented poets and writers based in Iran's provincial areas were never given the opportunity to be seen or recognised, making the journal and its monthly gatherings in Tehran a pivotal opportunity for many. After years of radical Islamisation and strict gender segregation in the public sphere, these gatherings were the first public events at which young Iranian adults could find the opportunity to meet and hold conversations with the opposite gender about everyday social matters, as well as entertaining literary discussions. Although it has to be said that such gatherings were still held under strict surveillance and the experience of attending such gatherings was not so universal. The following is an extract from an interview with one of the members of *Sorush-e Nowjavān*, Shadi Sadr, a pioneering voice of the feminist movement in Iran. Sadr's recollections of how this journal and its gatherings influenced her teenage years pays testament to the important role played by the journal in gathering marginalised and ignored voices, including those of women, during the 1990s:

It was during *Sorush-e Nowjavān*'s monthly meetings that I could have a face-to-face discussion with the opposite sex after a decade of absolute gender segregation. The presence of Aminpur and Amuzadeh-Khalili was very important and influential in introducing critical thinking and creative writing to young adults. I joined the *Sorush-e Nowjavān*'s circle of young writers and poets in 1990 and will never forget the important impact of that journal on my life and way of thinking.¹¹⁹

After Khatami's resignation from the Ministry of Culture in 1993 and the subsequent

¹¹⁹ Shadi Sadr, interview by the Fatemeh Shams, Oxford, 16 November 2012.

appointment of Ali Larijani, a member of the conservative modern-right faction, the press and film censorship that had been relaxed during Khatami's ministry was revived. Most of the staff in state-sponsored cultural institutions that held Islamic leftist views were replaced by conservatives and the pressure rose for official poets with reformist leanings. *Sorush-e Nowjavān* did not remain unaffected by such transformations. Following the replacement of Islamic leftist adherents such as Mehdi Firuzan by more conservative figures such as Aliakbar Ash'ari, and later the conservative fundamentalist Mohammad Hoseini, *Sorush-e Nowjavān* and Aminpur became the target of attacks by the conservative hard-line newspaper *Kayhān*. Maleki's note on the reformist leanings of the founders of *Sorush-e nowjavān* and the difficulties that came with it merit reference:

Those days, speaking of the "right" and the "left" was a serious concern. Reformism was beginning to form part of the debates in public. We had reformist tendencies but these were mostly our personal political stance. Mr Ash'ari,¹²⁰ the newly appointed director of the *Sorush* who belonged to the conservative camp, could barely tolerate our political views.¹²¹

Mostafa Rahmandust, a pioneering official poet for children and young adults and a member of the *Sorush*, confirms Maleki's claim regarding obstacles encountered when working with the journal:

The worst period for us was when Mohammad Hoseini was appointed head of the *Sorush*. He later became minister of culture during Ahmadinejad's presidency. With the help of Dorri-Akhavai, who at the time was editor of the journal, they provided the grounds for its closure. We were greatly harmed during this period.¹²²

¹²⁰ One of the members of the conservative right faction who, despite his political leanings and ideological disagreements, allowed Islamic leftist members with reformist leanings to remain working with the journal.

¹²¹ Boyuk Maleki, "Goftogu bā Boyuk Maleki: 'Ozv-e sābeq-e tahririyeh-ye Sorush'," *Mehrnāme* 35 (2014): 287.

¹²² Mostafa Rahmandust, "Ānqadr sānsor kardand keh raftim," *Khorasan: Special Issue on Sorush-e Nowjavān* (2014): 297.

The years immediately after the landslide victory of Mohammad Khatami in 1997 saw on-going clashes between factions of the left and the right. Although the reform movement brought Islamic leftists back to the official scene, life became tougher for supporters of the reform movement. The murder of secular intellectuals, the banning of reformist newspapers and the purging of official poets with reformist leanings from the *Sorush-e Nowjavān* were just a few of the oppressive actions implemented against reformists. In 2003, following on-going ideological clashes, the reformist editors were forced to step down and the journal was closed:

When Hoseini and Dorri were appointed head and editor in 2003 to 2004, Aminpur left without even bidding farewell to the staff. When our turn came they pressured us so much that we had to leave. I remember that censorship was at its peak. Once, in *Sorush-e Kudak*, a story was published in which a baguette held a conversation with traditional Persian bread. The whole point of the story was that bread is God's blessing and should not be wasted. The editor who saw censorship as his main duty wrote a note on the piece and criticised it for the use of non-Iranian baguette as a symbol of cultural onslaught. They did not pay any of the staff members in order to make them leave. There was a period when I would write all the columns for the journal by myself since there was nobody left to write for the journal.¹²³

Reformist poets such as Mahmudi, Sa'edi, Rake'i and Abdolmalekian began to hold poetry gatherings in the House of Young Iranian Poets (Khāneh-ye Shā'erān-e Javān-e Iran) and the Centre for Young Poets, which had become central meeting points for reformist poets. Despite receiving funding from the Council and the Ministry of Culture, these centres remained closed to the reformist faction and have since been subject to persistent attacks and accusations from radical hardliners on charges of spreading anti-Islamic and anti-revolutionary thoughts.¹²⁴

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ The peak of the controversy occurred in 2010 when members of the centre decided to give the annual poetry prize, which was named after Qaysar Aminpur, to an exiled female poet with secular leanings. *Farsnews*, the main news agency of the country's radical hardliners, published a series of articles and

The aforementioned disillusioned literary figures went their different ways after the various exclusions and expulsions. Amuzadeh-Khalili joined the Islamic IPF and began two new journals, *Āftābgardān* (1997) and *Chelcherāgh* (2002), focusing on younger readers as their principal audience. The former was banned with the electoral victory of Khatami but the latter continues to be published, despite occasional threats and acts of censorship.¹²⁵ Another influential member of the *Sorush-e Nowjavān* was Aminpur. Despite his sympathy for the reform movement and close friendship with Mohamad Khatami, the poet decided to detach himself from party politics, choosing instead to re-engage with academia. Similar to religious intellectuals whose main agenda was bridging the gap between tradition and modernity, Aminpur's goal in his academic research was, from the very outset, to connect the literary traditions of the past with various emerging and innovative techniques that were, to his mind, intricately rooted in older literary traditions. Yet the poet hardly succeeded in observing a modern, secular lifestyle and often used contradictory terms in a poetic fashion in order to support his reformist ideological approach in the field of literature.¹²⁶

interviews in which the founders of the prize (all of whom were former Islamic republican poets) were accused of having crossed a redline marked out by the state. See Unknown, "Daftar-e she'r-e javān yek nahād-e hokumati ast," *Farsnews*, accessed 11 October 2014, <http://www.farsnews.com/printable.php?nn=13901012001233>.

¹²⁵ See chapter 5 for further details on these journals and literary figures.

¹²⁶ In his detailed critique of Aminpur's literary discourse, Fotuhi maintains that the notion of modernity was never discussed in detail by Aminpur. He only offers a paradoxical notion entitled 'sonnat-e nowāvari' (the tradition of innovation), which mirrors the paradoxical lifestyle of the poet and the ideological transformation that he experienced throughout his life. Fotuhi identifies Aminpur's paradoxical views of the modern and traditional aspects of life, thought and literature as, above all, a sign of his revolutionary idealism. Fotuhi's ground-breaking critique of Aminpur was written during a time when the government was investing heavily in the official commemoration of Aminpur as a national heroic figure on the seventh anniversary of his death. Mahmud Fotuhi-Rudma'jani, "Qaysar Aminpur and the Paradox of 'the tradition of innovation'," email message to author, 29 October 2014.

It is important to note that entering into the world of academia and literary research helped Aminpur to confirm the intellectual and ideological distance that he had developed from his previous literary milieu. His ideological inclinations towards the state also underwent massive alterations as he gradually came to place himself within the category of *Adibs*, a literary rank granted only to those who are simultaneously active in the fields of literary scholarship and creative writing.

Regarding the publication policies of the period and the ideological transformations apparent among Iran's official poets, in the field of official literature the disillusioned official poets who had begun to build ties with the reformists started to publish their works through private or semi-independent publishers. During the 1980s and 1990s, *Barg* (which later transformed into the Howzeh-ye Honari publishing house) and *Sureh-ye Mehr* were the most renowned publishers of official literature. After the rise of the reform movement, poets who sympathised with the reformists published their collections with private and accredited publishers such as *Morvārid* or more moderate publishers such as *Khāneh-ye Shā'erān-e Javān*.¹²⁷ In light of a context in which the state ideological apparatus reached into both the public and private sectors, these changes in publishing indicate a sharp shift in ideological inclinations among the nation's writers. The poets and authors who remained close to the establishment continued to publish their work with the *Sureh-ye Mehr*, which was sponsored by the Howzeh and the OIP, as well as by a small selection of other state-sponsored publishers.

¹²⁷ For example, poets such as Aminpur, Mahmudi and Kakai, who published most of their works with the Howzeh, began to collaborate with alternative publishers after the rise of the reform movement. Working with a private publisher like *Morvārid*, which specialises in the field of literature, gives weight to the quality of a literary piece. For this reason, Aminpur, who published his last two poetry volumes with *Morvārid*, succeeded in gaining greater fame as a widely read and recognised poet in comparison to his fellow poets.

9. Howzeh in the Most Recent Period

Following the death of Avini the publication of *Sureh* was temporarily discontinued. In this period, following the expulsion of the founder members of the poetry circle in the Howzeh and the Avini's interest in film, more emphasis was put on the film production activities of the Howzeh, instead of the *Jong-e Sureh*, a new periodical called *Māhnāmeḥ-ye Mehr* and headed by Ali Mirfattah, who had previously collaborated with Avini on the *Sureh*, was published in its place for a short while. The *Mehr* tried to introduce new voices to the art and literature of the Islamic revolutionary trend, yet this change did not endure and the periodical quickly turned into a weekly bulletin covering news from within the Howzeh. Although much of the Howzeh's activities fell within the realm of film production, one literary journal was also launched that was specifically concerned with poetry. The *She'r (poetry)* came into production in 1992. Sponsored by the Howzeh as a division of the OIP and supervised by Hadi Saidi-Kiasari, a literary critic and poet who strictly followed official state-endorsed trends, the *She'r* journal was in fact a continuation of the poetry section of the *Sureh*. Accordingly, since the 1990s it has continued to provide a central outlet for emerging poets of the Islamic Revolution and resistance. Most of the articles and poems found in this quarterly continue to engage with the themes of classical literature, war, Islam and a worldwide poetry of resistance, placing particular focus on Palestine, Egypt and Africa.

As a result of Hashemi-Rafsanjani's policies, from the mid-1990s onwards the Howzeh was able to temporarily open up its cultural policy and thus began to work towards the mass production of popular modes of cultural output, including literature and film, a move that allowed the centre to strengthen its claim for increased financial support and enlarge

its audience.¹²⁸ The films that were produced from the mid-1990s until the end of Khatami's presidency in 2005 reflect a change towards more liberal ideas in the cultural outlook of the Howzeh. Following this change, young director and member of the Howzeh Davud Mirbaqeri released arguably the most controversial film of the 1990s, namely *Snowman* (*Ādambarfi* 1995). The movie consists of two stories that run in parallel with one another. The first of these narrates the life of an Iranian man stranded in Turkey who is trying to obtain a visa to move to the United States. After a number of failed attempts he decides to disguise himself as a woman in the hope of marrying an American man in order to obtain US citizenship. The second narrative describes the life of an Iranian woman who, also stuck in Turkey, runs a hotel and dreams of returning to her homeland.

Despite receiving financial support from the Howzeh the film was banned for three years and the director of the centre was criticised for funding a movie that, in the eyes of conservatives and neoconservatives, went against both revolutionary and Islamic principles. The radical right-wing *Keyhān* newspaper published a series of critical notes against the movie and campaigned for an embargo, largely due to the presence of a cross-dressing male character that was seen to contradict Islamic principles. The backlash from the radical right that ensued led to the beginning of a new period of censorship in Iranian cinema. After a period of collaboration with the Howzeh, directors such as Mirbaqeri disassociated themselves from the centre due to extensive censorship and constant troubles

¹²⁸ As a result of liberal socio-economic policies that were introduced by Hashemi-Rafsanjani's government, a new wave of change also occurred in the state-sponsored cultural organisations, which reflected a similar change taking place in a broader socio-political context. During this period the Howzeh was still under the supervision of Zam, whose political inclinations and economic tendencies were much closer to those of Hashemi-Rafsanjani. This conformity of views between the director of the Howzeh and the government in power gave way to the implementation of relatively liberal cultural policies in the centre.

in the film production process.

Despite its limitations, the Howzeh still constituted the main governmental sponsor of film during the presidencies of Rafsanjani and Khatami (1990-2005), making it a source of funding for independent filmmakers such as Naser Taqva'i. Collaborations with such filmmakers represented a new point of ideological difference between the Howzeh and the neoconservatives of the *Keyhān* newspaper, a development that yet again bore witness to a shift in the policies of the Howzeh during this period.¹²⁹

Such ideological conflicts were accompanied by managerial and financial complexities. As the head of the Howzeh, Zam continued to sign contracts with petrochemical and oil companies, even going so far as to become involved in cigarette smuggling. As a result of such activities, which practically turned the Howzeh into a giant cartel rather than a cultural centre, Zam was to receive constant criticism from within and outside the Howzeh. The decline of the cultural output and unsatisfactory and highly suspect commercialisation of cultural affairs were at the core of such critiques. As a result of such protests and after twenty years of involvement with the Howzeh, Zam was forced to resign in 2001.¹³⁰

After Zam's dismissal in 2001, Hasan Bonyanian became the new director of the centre. A conservative technocrat, Bonyanian dedicated his time to expanding the Howzeh across Iran by founding a number of regional branches. Under Bonyanian's direction the centre grew into a giant bureaucratic institution famous for its plentiful civil servants and reduced

¹²⁹ For example, see the critical notes in *Kayhān* and the Howzeh's response to them: Unknown, "Muriānehā-ye zedd-e farhangi dar *Keyhān*," *Naqd-e sinamā*, 19 (Tehran: 1999): 34-39.

¹³⁰ Unknown, "Negāhi beh seh daheh fa'āliat-e Howzeh-ye Honari."

cultural output. As Ali Mirfattah, one of the editors of the *Sureh* asserts, “with so many employees, the Howzeh does not have any cultural output. It is due to its deficient management and the managers lack of knowledge about revolutionary art and culture.”¹³¹

Although Bonyanian placed limits on the centre’s economic activities, he did maintain certain financial trading activities with travel agencies and tea factories.¹³² As a consequence, the Howzeh began to gain a reputation as a financial machine devoid of a concrete cultural output, thus losing its reputation as a centre for the promotion of Islamic art and literature. In response to the criticisms he received, Bonyanian cited financial obstacles as an on-going struggle for the centre, stating, “I have to take part in at least some of these economic trading activities in order to be able to sustain the centre and its activities and I believe that this is a perfectly rational decision to make.”¹³³

On a cultural level, those who were appointed as the editors and advocates of cultural affairs customarily belonged to the neoconservative faction. After a period of interruption in the publication of the *Sureh*, the quarterly was reissued in 2001 under the supervision of Vahid Jalili, who was aligned with the neoconservative faction and a fervent critic of both the reform movement and liberal Islamist intellectuals.¹³⁴ This time the *Sureh* constituted a platform from which radical neoconservatives decided to launch a campaign against both

¹³¹ Amirali Roshan, “Jarrahi-ye ruh”, 99-100.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ After Avini’s death, the production of the *Sureh* was temporarily halted for a couple of years. It was then republished for a short period under the supervision of Ali Mirfattah and Abdoljavad Musavi. In the late 1990s, the *Sureh* did not go to press due to internal disputes among the members of the Howzeh. From 2001, under the supervision of Jalili, the *Sureh* began to be published again. Despite internal disagreements among the members of the Howzeh regarding its leadership and relationship with the OIP, the *Sureh* has continued to be published up to this day.

pragmatists and reformists, accusing them of deviating from what they called the original path of revolution and condemning their anti-Islamic, liberal approach to cultural affairs. This fundamental divergence in outlooks inevitably led to a clash between Jalili and Bonyanian, the intensification of which led to the expulsion of Jalili in 2005.

The fundamental incident that led to Jalili's expulsion was a piece he wrote for the thirtieth issue of *Sureh*, in which he harshly criticised the socio-economic and cultural policies of ostensibly revolutionary (*enqelābi*) officials. Without naming specific individuals, Jalili condemned those in power for their compromising semi-liberal cultural policies and associated economic corruption. In an article, entitled *Revolutionary Culture without Cultural Revolution* (*Farhang-e enqelābi menhā-ye enqelāb-e farhangi*, 2013) Jalili questioned the authenticity of claims made by most Islamic Republic officials involved in cultural affairs, stating that, "The last thing that one could claim about the culture of the Islamic Revolution is that it is a revolutionary culture."¹³⁵

Jalili was eventually dismissed from the Howzeh and established his own cultural institution under the title of the Islamic Cultural Front (*Jebheh-ye farhangi-ye eslāmi*). He founded a new journal called *Rāh* that represented the neoconservative faction within Iran's cultural scene and through it took an openly critical stand against the conservative cultural advocates of the Howzeh, religious reformists and secular intellectuals.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Vahid Jalili, "Farhang-e enqelābi menhā-ye enqelāb-e farhangi," *Rāh*, accessed 11 February 2013, <http://www.rahmag.ir/content.php?id=86>, 2005.

¹³⁶ Along with his brother, Sa'id Jalili, who appeared on the electoral scene as the rival candidate of Hasan Rohani in the 2014 presidential election, today Jalili remains a principal cultural consultant and advocate of the neoconservative Islamist faction.

Aside from various internal conflicts, the Howzeh has occasionally provided a bridge between incongruous cultural figures and thus acted in a somewhat inconsistent manner. This makes it difficult for cultural analysts of the Islamic republican era to offer a simple and straightforward account of its activities. As it had done in the past, for example with the release of the *Snowman* and the controversies that surrounded it, from 2006 to 2009 the Howzeh took some risky decisions in the realm of cultural production, especially in its promotion of popular art and literature. By aiding the release of a controversial music album by Mohsen Namjoo,¹³⁷ called *Bergamot Orange (Toranj, 2007)*, the centre introduced one of the most prominent avant-garde singers from post-revolutionary history to Iranian society. Yet *Bergamot Orange* was the first and last album by Namjoo to obtain a license from a governmental cultural organisation. Following its release, the Ministry of Islamic Guidance criticised the head of the Howzeh for giving a license to an album that was, in its view, ineligible for such permission. According to avant-garde artists such as Abdi Behravanfar, and indeed Namjoo himself, the license was granted due to the chaotic nature of the Howzeh's bureaucratic system as opposed to it representing an act of approval for avant-garde music.

During this period blame was placed upon the Howzeh for offering financial support and licenses to non-*maktabi* movies. It was not only in relation to music that the Howzeh took risks. Controversial movies such as *Offside (Āfsāyd, 2006)* were released after having

¹³⁷ A native of Torbat-e Jam in Khorasan, Namjoo is widely recognised for an approach that combines traditional Persian music with rock and jazz music, as well as incorporating varying modes of song writing and composition. To read more about Namjoo and the politics of music under the Islamic Republic, see Nahid Seyedsayamdoost, "Iran's Troubled Tunes: Music as Politics in the Islamic Republic," (PhD Diss., University of Oxford, 2013).

received financial help from the Howzeh.¹³⁸ Bonyanian no longer seemed to be *maktabi* enough to be the head of a revolutionary state-run cultural centre. In 2009, after eight years of directorship, Mo'meni-Sharif, who held closer ties with the neoconservative faction, replaced Bonyanian. From the commencement of Sharif's term of management to date, the Howzeh's authoritarian role as a cultural institution that works in parallel with the MCIG and represents a decision-making force in the realm of cultural production has increased. Since the appointment of Mo'meni-Sharif, revisiting war values and the commemoration of martyrdom have again been placed at the heart of the cultural agenda of the centre. This represents part of a broader national strategy endorsed by the state, which has seen the publication of war memoirs, pro-war stories and poem selections, as well as the organisation of state-sponsored war literature as part of the commemoration of war project.

Under the direction of Sharif, the Howzeh developed close ties with the Supreme Leader's office and took charge of a vast number of cultural divisions and cinemas across the country.¹³⁹ Ayatollah Khamenei himself has emphasised the important function carried out by this centre in the realm of culture, referring to it as the main camp of revolutionary art and literature.¹⁴⁰ The poetry section became active once again in this period. Annual poetry nights held in the company of the Supreme Leader have been organised in

¹³⁸ *Offside* by Jafar Panahi tells the story of the troubles that women faced when entering stadiums to watch football matches due to legal obstacles with regard to such taboo activities in Iran.

¹³⁹ Apart from a large number of cinemas, the Howzeh was also deemed responsible for the control of the Research Centre for Islamic Art and Culture (Pazhuheshgāh-ye Farhang va Honar-e Eslāmi), the Visual Arts Division (Vāhed-e Tajassomi), the Centre for the Research and Study of the Literature of Resistance (Markaz-e Tahqiqāt-va Motāle'āt-e Farhang va Adab-e Pāidāri), the Music Division (Vāhehed-e Musiqi) and the Centre for the Development of Cinema (*Sāzmān-e Towse'eh-ye Sinamā'i-ye Sureh*).

¹⁴⁰ "Didgāh-e Ayatollah Khāmenei darbāreh-ye honar dar zamān-e riāsat-jomhouri," *Mehr News Agency*, accessed 15 August 2014, <http://goo.gl/7UTGYW>.

collaboration with the Howzeh since the mid-1990s.¹⁴¹ The centre has also assumed an active role in the selection of poets for these annual poetry readings. Furthermore, as one of the main sources of authority for the licensing of books and movies, and as a major recipient of state funds, the Howzeh has become one of Iran's most powerful and influential state-controlled regulatory bodies.

Over the course of thirty-five years, the Islamic Revolution has brought significant changes to the institutionalisation of literature and art in Iran. Parallel organisations have been established to empower the state's ideological apparatus and still play a significant role in shaping the direction of Iran's official literary and artistic scenes. The radical ideological shift discussed in this chapter has been brought into effect through the formation of parallel cultural organisations with decisive roles in the realm of cultural production. As detailed in this chapter, the formation of institutions like the Howzeh has entailed profound implications for both literature and art, the most important of which has been the emergence of official Islamic republican literature.

Despite all factional disputes and institutional complications, the Howzeh has played a significant role in the ideological homogenisation of the cultural scene and the production of official art and literature. After thirty-five years of constant involvement in the production of ideologically charged art and literature however, the works that have emerged from or in collaboration with the centre lack ideological coherence. Subject to change under the direct impact of different political factions, both the output and history of

¹⁴¹ See chapter 5.

the Howzeh highlight a profound link between Iran's cultural industries and changes in the political establishment. The history of ideological and structural transformations within the centre brings to the forefront a point that warrants further research in the field of the political culture of contemporary Iran; that is to say, the most significant shift among governmental cultural institutions towards Islamic extremism occurred the period of Ahmadinejad's presidency, which falls beyond the scope of this research. The story of the Howzeh and its transformation has proven pivotal in the shaping of Iranian cultural policy under the Islamic state during the past three decades. The story of the Howzeh and its position within the political establishment, as well as the centre's production processes, has not yet reached its end. The same can be said for the transformations of ideas and themes evident in the official poetry of the Islamic Republic, as discussed in detail in the following chapters.

Chapter 2. The Village Theme in Islamic Republican Poetry

*The land reforms that were implemented by the Shah had no result but to dissolve Iran's agriculture, imposing a single-product economic model on our country to the extent that even today we still have to import our food from outside. After their lives were destroyed, peasants and villagers left their villages and poured into the cities.*¹⁴²

1. Introduction

After having discussed the context in which the Islamic republican poetry came to the fore, this chapter and those that follow explore the most prevailing themes in the official poetry of the Islamic republican era. This chapter in particular concentrates on the pastoral theme and the ways in which these notions were utilised by Islamic republican poets to disseminate the revolutionary message to their audience.

From the classical to the post-revolutionary period, Persian poets have not been alone in tackling the pastoral in their work. The pastoral as a set of literary motifs and understanding of the world has been a recurring feature within multiple literary traditions – a brief discussion of these will help us to better locate the specifications of the pastoral within the context of Islamic republican poetics.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Ruhollah Khomeini, "Interview with a German Journalist in Aban 4, 1357 (6 October 1978)," *Sahifeh-ye nur* vol. 4 (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye nashr-o tanzim-e āsār-e Imam Khomeini, 1994), 506.

¹⁴³ To briefly reflect on the theme of the pastoral as part of the literary heritage of the Renaissance in the Western literary tradition, it is worth noting that pastoral literature became prevalent in the fifteenth century and reached its climax in the seventeenth century. It was mostly concerned with the life of the shepherd as an independent agent, free from the complexity and corruption of city life. Uncomplicated and simple rustic living was venerated as an object of literary focus in the works of Renaissance writers who adopted the idea of the natural and beautiful setting as the basic standard of pastoral literature. The first novels to be written in France adhered to this genre, embracing the theme of love as expressed between a shepherd and a shepherdess within a magnificent natural setting. One of the reasons behind this fashion for pastoral literature was its reception as the most ancient of genres. In particular, the shepherd-poet was a prevailing concept through which Renaissance poets might, "announce their literary vocation and place themselves in a

The poets of Soviet Russia address extensively the theme of the village in their work. The first literary works to focus on the village that can be identified within Russian literature and date back to the mid-eighteenth century, with the theme later becoming prevalent in the works of Karamzin, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Bunin and Gorky. The pastoral has also been pursued by both the prose writers and poets of twentieth-century Russia. The words of Sergei Esenin (1895-1925), the popular poet of Soviet Russia, are particularly pertinent in this context. Esenin spoke of his emotional attachment to the village as the site of his roots and understood it as having shaped a fundamental element of his identity. Esenin's personal perspective on the pastoral perfectly suits the theme that runs through this chapter since it addresses the nostalgic and ideological meanings of the village for Islamic republican poets: "I was on the side of the October Revolution, a most fiery fellow traveller, but I interpreted it in my own way, giving it a peasant slant."¹⁴⁴ It is argued herein that, similar to Esenin's understanding of the October Revolution, the perceptions of the leading Islamic republican poets of the 1979 Revolution exhibited a bias towards the rural. Both glorify the beauty of villages and the perceived authenticity of rural living as a way to reject the advance of modernisation. Most of the related poems are filled with cynical views about urban life and a sense of loss following migration to the cities.

In Iran's neighbouring literary traditions, for example, the nationalist Five Syllabists (Beş Hececi) who were active in the first quarter of the twentieth century in Ottoman

tradition that reached back to the very origins of poetry. For more details on this theme, see Michelle O'Callaghan, "Pastoral," *A New Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*, vol. 1, (ed.) Michael Hattaway (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2010), 225.

¹⁴⁴ R. N. Chakravarti and A. K. Basu, *Soviet Union: Land and People* (New Delhi: Northern Book Centre, 1987), 82.

Turkey are also worth noting since they exhibit shared features with the case study presented in this chapter. “Straightforward and unsophisticated language based on the Istanbul dialect and motifs from folk poetry,” Laurent Mignon notes, were common features among the Works of the five Turkish Syllabists, whose writings were concerned with the nationalist cause and its presentation in Turkish literature.¹⁴⁵ While the five poets idealised the “national” village and depicted pastoral landscapes in their early works, the two who experienced life in Anatolian village during the National Liberation War, stand to depict the harsh realities of peasant living instead of romanticising the natural beauty of the rural way of life and nature. The result was the creation of a hostile rural imagery that depicted the struggles and hardship faced by the rural inhabitants of Anatolia. As Mignon details in his article, village writing as a literary channel for voicing nationalistic concerns is an important aspect that is to be taken into account in an analysis of their work. In the Islamic republication official poetry the village may also reflect such nationalistic stands, as discussed later in this chapter.

However, in the works of some of the leading Arab poets, pastoral life is both understood and approached in a different manner from the way in which the above-mentioned Turkish poets perceived it. While the Five Syllabists combine harshness with nationalism, similar to the European and Russian poets, the Arab poets employ the pastoral as the representation of simplicity, goodness and authenticity. In the village poems by leading Iraqi poet, Badr Shakir-al-Sayyab, the village is represented as a source of goodness, simplicity and authenticity, in contrast to the evil of the city and urban settings in general.

¹⁴⁵ Laurent Mignon, *Neither Shiraz nor Paris: Papers on Turkish Literature* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2005), 77-92.

As a modernist poet who emerged on the literary scene after World War II, Al-Sayyab is known for having broken away from the classical Arabic literary tradition by introducing innovative broken rhyming, metering and content into Arabic literature. Similar to many of the Islamic republican poets, coming from a rural background and having experienced forced migration from his childhood village of Jikur to an urban setting, Al-Sayyab never fully embraced the urban life of Baghdad and a sense of estrangement remained palpable in his verse up until his death.¹⁴⁶

A quick glance at the above literary traditions shows the significance of the pastoral motif in world literary traditions, as well as the diverse perspectives from which this motif has been approached. The provision of this brief but important contextual background aids in a better understanding of the case of Iran during the pre- and post-revolutionary eras. Due to space, this chapter does not elaborate upon the theme of the village in classical or pre-revolutionary literature. However, a brief note on both is crucial for showing the continuity of this particular literary theme across centuries and among poets from differing periods. Classical Persian poets used the shepherd-poet or the peasant figure extensively as a reference to the figure of the sage (*hakim*) or to depict the wilderness, sincerity and illumination in the simple life of the peasants. Classical literary references to the natural setting are predominantly limited to imageries of nature and metaphors that adopt the garden (*bāgh*) or rose garden (*golestān*) in particular, which are arguably not pastoral but instead artefacts of civilisation. However, as time went on, especially after the rise of modernist literature in the 1940s, and later in the wake of the 1979 Revolution, the ways in

¹⁴⁶ Javad Ghorbani, “Taqābol-e shahr va rusta dar she‘r-e mo‘āser-e arab va fārsi dar āsār-e Badr Shaker-al-Sayyab va Qaysar Aminpur,” *Faslnāmeḥ-ye takhassosi-e adabiyāt-e fārsi-ye daneshgāh-e Mashhad* 9 (2011): 351-364.

which the village was depicted in the works of the pre- and post-revolutionary poets came to be remarkably different from those of the classical period.

For pre-revolutionary prose writers, the village came to represent both the deprivation and illiteracy of the masses. Following the implementation of the land reforms of the 1960s in particular, the village came under constant threat of complete destruction and rapid modernisation. Those intellectuals who protested against rapid modernisation and the destructive impact of land reforms on village life used the short story, the monograph and, to a lesser extent, poetry as tools by which to develop critiques of the state's modernisation policies. Apart from a few poets such as Nima Yushij (1895-1960) and Sohrab Sepehri (1928-1980), who came from rural backgrounds and had a strong emotional attachment to the pastoral setting, both of whom write about the village either under the influence of French romanticism or Buddhism, other poets of the modernist trend paid scant attention to the village as a natural setting in their work. This negligence is partly due to the rise of committed political poetry after the 1950s.

Apart from the prose samples produced during the post-White Revolution era, it was not until the mid-1970s that the village once again became a source of inspiration for poets of a religious leaning with largely rural backgrounds. In their poetry the village was a heavenly space, a representation of the divine to be venerated and reconstructed under the pro-justice, pro-poor rhetoric of the Islamic state. For Islamic republican poets, city life did not bring with it a sense of elegance, or indeed magnetism, the way it had for European

intellectuals such as Walter Benjamin or Karl Marx.¹⁴⁷ Despite their critical views of urbanism and industrialisation, leftist intellectuals such as Benjamin or Marx did not fail to recognise the significance of the city in enhancing human thought and life. For Benjamin, the city was both beautiful and bestial, bringing with it both hope and despair at the same time. For Marx, the city was a source of emulation and revolution. In this sense, Islamic republican poets were not only anti-Marxist in their views but also anti-modern in a broader sense. Even after the end of the war, and in the wake of the reconstruction era when extensive modernisation projects were prioritised by the conservative pragmatist state, most of the Islamic republican poets disillusioned with the revolution still perceived the village as an authentic entity to which they often yearned to return. In recent decades, with the rise of factional politics during the post-Khomeini era,¹⁴⁸ the complexities of power consolidation and modern state-building processes have given way to fading depictions of the village in official poetry as it is now less often a topic or source of imagery. However, negative depictions of urban life are still part of the official poetic discourse, as explained later in this chapter.

2. The Pastoral in Pre-revolutionary Modern Literature

Only by way of a historical sketch can the final and refined idea of the village as authentic and semi-divine in Islamic republican poetry be understood. Before charting the development of the image of the village in pre-revolutionary literature, it is crucial to first

¹⁴⁷ To read more on Benjamin and his view of the city, see Gilmon Gilloch, *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996). To read more on the village and caste in Marx's view, see Karl Marx, "The British Rule in India," *New York Herald Tribune*, 25 June 1853, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/06/25.htm>.

¹⁴⁸ See chapter 4 for further details about this period.

outline its ideological meaning as a symbol of anti-Western and Third-Worldist thinking among the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia. Once this has been completed in the following section, the chapter goes on to emphasise the filtered image of the village in the works of Islamic republican poets as a symbol rooted in the anti-machinist and anti-urban intellectual project that was initially formulated during the 1960s and 1970s.

The climax of the romantic attitude towards the village in the post-revolutionary period should be understood as an outcome of not only the urbanisation wrought by the modernisations of earlier decades, but also of the pro-poor, pro-social justice rhetoric of the Islamic Republic. To begin with the former, modern manufacturing in Iran began in the early twentieth century and expanded in the mid-1920s during the reign of Reza Shah. Between 1926 and 1941, with the construction of ninety-two new factories, the industrial scene began to develop under the supervision of the state.¹⁴⁹ A direct consequence of the mechanisation of industry and the industrialisation of the economy was a massive increase in the process and speed of urbanisation.¹⁵⁰

As part of the urbanisation process, the construction of buildings such as theatres, picture houses, shops, hotels and embassies was begun by the state during the 1930s. A new lifestyle, and one that differed greatly from the dominant traditional model, began to take shape in cities and urban areas. By the early 1940s, Iranian cities had been modernised to a

¹⁴⁹ Homa Katouzian, *The Persians: Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern Iran* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2009), 222.

¹⁵⁰ The most reliable proof of Iran's rapid urbanisation would be demographic – to chart the rising proportion of Iranians who lived in cities. See, for example, the UN World Urbanisation Prospects Page (<http://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/>), which gives data going back to 1950. In it, Iran went from 27% urban in 1950 to more than 67% urban in 2001. Urban and rural populations were each at 50% circa 1980, the time of the Revolution.

large extent. However, for years the agricultural system and residents of the rural sector remained technologically backward and totally segregated from urban cities as a result of the state's modernisation policies.

The state's modernisation program soon received criticism from the intelligentsia of the time. In the early 1930s, Ahmad Kasravi, who had formerly worked as a religious scholar and preacher but later abandoned his religious profession and lifestyle to become a strident critic of Islam and Shi'ism, was one of the first intellectuals to position himself against Iran's modernisation drive. He labelled it a form of 'moral decline' rooted in the failed European machine age. In his view, as part of the East (*sharq*), Iran was on the verge of losing her authenticity by importing "machinism" from the West.¹⁵¹ Kasravi was not alone in adopting a critical stance. Conservative clerics such as Sheykh Fazlollah Nuri and mildly religious, Western-educated figures such as Fakhreddin Shadman also raised their voices against the perceived evils of industrialisation, placing particular emphasis on the alienating and alien forms of European civilisation and the need to return to more authentic roots in relation to the self.¹⁵² Shadman, for instance, proved fiercely critical of what he saw as the Europeanization of Iran during the 1940s, when urbanisation had been implemented to a great extent, and expressed his concerns in his published works.¹⁵³

Although these reforms were initially designed to enhance the welfare of rural settings,

¹⁵¹ Ahmad Kasravi, *Ā'in* (Tehran: Nashr-va pakhsh-e ketāb, 1977), trans. and quoted in Homa Katouzian, *The Persians*, 294-5.

¹⁵² Ibid., 293-7; Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, "Book Review of Iranian Intellectual and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism," *British Journal of Middle East Studies* 34 (2000): 565-71.

¹⁵³ Fakhreddin Shadman, *Tarazhedi-ye farhang* (Tehran: Tahuri, 1967); *Taskhir-e tamaddon-e gharbi* (Tehran: Gām-e now, 2003).

they instead transformed Iran's social structure irrevocably, particularly in terms of socioeconomic relations between rural and urban regions, and led thousands of landless peasants to depart from their villages and head to the cities in search of a better life. Rapid modernisation, combined with swift waves of migration into Iran's cities and the devastation of the rural setting, did not pass unnoticed in the literature of the period. It is important to note that before and after the White Revolution, indeed up until the Islamic Revolution, the theme of the village was more commonly pursued by prose writers than by poets. A number of poems written by pre-revolutionary poets are worth noting here in order to illustrate the continuity of this particular theme in the works of contemporary poets, as well as the ways in which they differ from one another in terms of meaning. By way of this discussion, the symbolic role that the village has played in differing poetic discourses will also become evident.

The first and foremost poet to have made a notable contribution to the introduction of the village and the natural setting into the discourse of modern poetry is Nima Yushij (1895-1960). In Yushij's poetry, rural themes alternately offer an idealised simplicity and wild natural setting and, albeit less often, the opposite, with the village presented as a stultifying repository of rustic boorishness. For Nima Yushij (1895-1960), a poet with a rural background who received an urban education and later became the founder of modernist Persian poetry, the village as part of the natural setting is a frequent and compelling topic. An indication of the importance that the rural world held for Nima can be found in the surname that he chose for himself. Yushij refers directly to the village of his birth, Yush in Mazandaran, a location that can be regarded as an exemplar of rural remoteness. Originally named Ali Esfandiyari, Nima's emotional attachment to his rural roots is made clear in recollections of his childhood memories. It should not be forgotten that Nima's

endless passion for his village and his romantic depictions of it were partly a result of his acquaintance with romantic French literature.¹⁵⁴

Looking at Nima's personal accounts of village life, it is apparent that he never fully adopted the urban lifestyle and preferred to commute between the city and the village. Such a deep sense of attachment to his birthplace makes Nima a unique example among Iran's modernist poets, most of whom can be categorised as urban poets. Even Nima himself found the urban setting more suitable to the development of his modern poetic discourse. In the autobiographical sketch that Yushij read at the First Congress of Iranian Writers in 1946 he portrays the village as the place of his birth by recourse to an example of the rural lifestyle of the 1920s, itself identifiable by a lack of literacy and the insular poverty prevalent among remote villages:

My early life was spent among the shepherds and horse-breeders who, seeking pasture, travelled to faraway lands to set up a tent, gathering at night around fires on mountain tops for hours on end. Of all the years of my childhood I remember nothing but savage fights and other adventures characteristic of a nomadic people's simple pleasures through the unchanging cycles of life made in blind oblivion to the outside world.¹⁵⁵

Nima rarely makes direct reference to the village per se in his verse and although his symbolic discourse is deeply inspired by natural elements borrowed from his rural surroundings, the village as a symbolic place is rarely traceable in his poetry. Apart from the wild, natural setting of the village depicted in his biographical sketch, as well as occasional romantic pastoral motifs, Nima's rare depictions of the village often betray a

¹⁵⁴ Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, "Nima Youshij: A Life," *Essays on Nima Yushij: Animating Modernism in Persian Poetry*, (eds.) Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak and Kamran Talattof (Leiden: Brill Studies in Middle Eastern Literatures), 16.

¹⁵⁵ Karimi-Hakkak, "Nima Youshij: A Life," 17.

darker tone. For example, in his famous poem ‘*The Soldier’s Family*’ (*Khānevādeh-ye Sarbāz*, 1947) the village is saturated with poverty, suffering and despair. In ‘*Māneli*’ (1957) the village is depicted as a “dark, stagnant and unattractive place” to which *Māneli* has no desire to return.¹⁵⁶ In the detailed analysis of another poem by Nima, ‘*Māneli*’, Kamran Talattof suggests that, “the village brings to mind old ideas and in some instances the old poetry.”¹⁵⁷ As Karimi-Hakkak notes in relation to the origins of Nima, “the longer he lived in the capital city the more pride he felt for his rural origins.”¹⁵⁸ Indeed, this attachment is apparent in his extensive use of symbolic natural motifs in his poetry.¹⁵⁹

Among the modernist poets of the post-1940s, nobody showed an emotional attachment to the rural setting in the way that it is visible in the work of Nima. Even in the works of poets with leftist leanings, the symbolic cultivation of the village theme as a political allegory is a unique thematic feature. ‘*Mist*’ (*Meh*, 1956) by Shamlu portrays the village as a dusky, quiet place that brings to mind the post-1953 oppressed face of Iranian society:

“*Biābān rā sarāsar meh gereftast, miguyad beh khod ‘āber*
Sagān-e qaryeh khāmushand [...]
Cherāgh-e qaryeh penhān ast
Mowji garm dar khun-e biāban ast.”

The mist has thoroughly haunted the desert, the passer-by whispers to himself
 The dogs of the village are silent [...]
 The light of the village is invisible
 A warm wave runs through the desert’s blood.¹⁶⁰

“*Darighā, darreh-ye sabz-o gerdu-ye pir*
Va sorud-e sarkhosh-e rud
Beh hengāmi keh deh

¹⁵⁶ Kamran Talattof, “Ideology and Self-Portrayal in the Poetry of Nima Yushij,” *Essays on Nima Yushij*, 83.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁵⁸ Karimi-Hakkak, “Nima Youshij: A Life,” 16.

¹⁵⁹ It is important to note however that Nima was more in love with nature than the village and peasantry, which places him apart from the post-revolutionary pro-peasant poets, as discussed later in this chapter.

¹⁶⁰ Ahmad Shamlu, “Meh,” *Havā-ye tāzeh* (Tehran: Nil, 1967), 49-50.

*Dar do jāneb-e āb-e khonyāgar
 Beh khāb-e shabāneh foru mishod
 Va darighā Bāmdād
 Keh chenin beh hasrat
 Darreh-ye sabz rā vā nahād-o
 Beh shahr bāz āmad
 Cherā keh beh 'asri chenin bozorg
 Safar rā
 Dar sofreh-ye nān niz, ham bedān doshvāri beh pish mibāyad bord
 Keh dar qalmrow-ye nām."*

Alas, the green valley and the old walnut tree
 And the cheerful song of the river
 When the village
 On both sides of the magical waters
 Was sinking into nocturnal sleep.
 And alas *Bāmdād*,¹⁶¹
 Who with such urge
 Left the green valley, and
 Came to the city,
 In an era, eventful as such
 A journey to make bread is as difficult as the journey of fame.¹⁶²

And the same theme could be also traced in the following lines by Sohrab Sepehri:

*"Shahr peidā bud
 Ruyesh-e hendesi-ye simān, āhan, sang,
 Saqf-e bi-kaftar-e sadhā otubus
 Golfrushi golhāyash rā mikard harāj."*

The city was visible
 The geometrical growth of cement, iron, stone
 The roof of one hundred buses with not a single dove on them
 A florist putting out his roses for sale.¹⁶³

As discussed in the next section of this chapter, this form of reception of the urban setting is prevalent among Islamic republican poets, some of whom were inspired by Sepehri's poetic discourse and spiritual take on village life. Sepehri's apolitical discourse was one of the main reasons for his high level of acceptance and fame during the Islamic republican era. While works by poets such as Shamlu, Naderpur or Farrokhzad are constantly subject to censorship and criticism under the Islamic Republic, Sepehri's poetry collections are

¹⁶¹ *Bāmdād*, Shamlu's pen name, meaning 'dawn'.

¹⁶² Ahmad Shamlu, "Shabāneh," *Majmu'eh-ye 'āsār* (Tehran: Negāh, 2004), 116-119.

¹⁶³ Sohrab Sepehri, "Sedā-ye pā-ye āb," *Hasht ketāb* (Tehran: Tahuri, 1991), 267.

regularly published in a variety of editions by both official and private publishers.

Recounting stories of peasant displacement and rural-to-urban migration as a theme of the *engagé* literature of the 1950s and 1960s was seldom employed by the poets of this era. Simin Behbahani's (1927-2014) treatment of the impact of industrial progress and unbridled urbanisation on the peasant community is rare for this generation. In her first poem collection, '*Footprint*' (*Jā-ye pā*, 1954), which includes works written during the period 1946 to 1957, Behbahani included a poem in the *Chārpāreh* form entitled 'Towards the City' (*Beh su-ye shahr*, 1954). This particular poem provides a realistic account of the life of a landless peasant. Having lost ownership of his land, a peasant and his family leave the village with the hope of settling in the city. The poem ends with the gloomy image of six footprints on the road:

*"Mālek resid o bord az u sahmi
Vaz bahr-e u cheh mānd nemidānad
Ammā yaqīn beh musem-e yakhbandān
Ahl-o 'ayāl gorseneh mimānad.*

*Guyand shahr chāreh-ye u dārad
Dar shahr kār hast-o farāvān hast
Anjā kasi gorosneh-o 'oryān nist
Gham nist... ranj nist... vali nān hast.*

*Fardā seh rahnavard, rah-e khod rā
Suy-e omīd-e gomshodeh peimudand
In har seh rahnavad –agar porsi-
Dehqān-o hamsar-o pesarash budand:*

*Dar pish, sarnevesht-e por az ebhām
Dar pey, gham-e gozashteh-ye mehnatbār
Shesh pā-ye pinehbasteh-ye bipāpush
Mikuft ruy-e jādeh-ye nāhamvār."*

The landowner came and took a share of the peasant's corn
And he does not know how much is left from him
But when the cold, freezing winter arrives
His family will surely go hungry.

They say the city offers him solutions

With so many jobs and occupations
 No one is left bare or hungry there,
 There is no sorrow...no hardship...but there is bread.

Tomorrow, three travellers will have trodden their path
 Towards a lost hope
 If you wonder who these three travellers are,
 Here they are: the peasant, his wife and his son.

In the front, an uncertain fortune
 Behind, the sorrow of a painful past
 Six bare and callused feet
 Step over the rutted road.¹⁶⁴

The poems discussed above cannot in any way be described as village writing per se. Such occasional occurrences of the pastoral in the poetry of this period are rarely noticeable if one compares them with the extensive presence of the village in the prose writing of the same period. Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923-69), Gholamhosein Sa'edi (1936-85) and Mahmud Dowlatabadi (b.1940) are three of the most prolific authors of the 1950s and 1960s who shaped the village writing of this period with their novels, novellas, screenplays and anthropological monographs.

Al-e Ahmad, a pioneering voice in village writing, published *Urāzān* (1954) and *Tat People of the Boluck of Zahra* (*Tātneshinhā-ye boluk-e Zahra*, 1959) in the form of anthropological sketches of the extreme hardships of village life in the years preceding the White Revolution.¹⁶⁵ In *The Curse of the Earth* (*Nefrin-e Zamin*, 1967), which tells the story of an urban schoolteacher commissioned to teach in rural areas, Al-e Ahmad gives a detailed account of rural life in Iran after the implementation of the land reforms. The

¹⁶⁴ Simin Behbahani, "Jā-ye pā," in *Majmu'eh 'ash'ār* (Tehran: Negāh:2006), 51-52.

¹⁶⁵ Before the White Revolution of 1962, about eighty percent of Iran's population (17 million people) lived in its 67,000 villages. However, with the execution of land reforms this percentage greatly decreased. Social, economic and political life had, from very early times, been centred on the village.

novel predominantly revolves around the difficulties of rural living caused by socioeconomic deprivation and the decline of the agricultural sector. It also reflects on sharp differences between the rural and urban lifestyles and the attitudes of those leading each of these lives in the eyes of the schoolteacher. The following passage from the novel is worth quoting as an example of Al-e Ahmad's use of country scenes and vernacular, which heavily influenced contemporary prose writers, especially Sa'edi:

The problem is that when the tractor arrives at the village, Varzu becomes jobless. This problem should be resolved chief! Someone on the radio said that the factory produces one tractor per hour, pardon me chief, I meant per minute. But each cow gives birth to only one cow per annum. That's why even its shit is precious.¹⁶⁶

Al-e Ahmad published his most controversial work in this vein under the title of *Westruckness* (*Gharbzadegi*, 1962), in which his critique of the modernisation and destruction of villages is expressed as a form of anti-mechanisation. Here he laments the rapid urbanisation and mechanisation taking place in Iran, which in his view is responsible for "crumbling this traditional society at the hands of machines."¹⁶⁷ The following lines are particularly relevant:

As the machine entrenches itself in the towns and villages, be it in the form of a mechanised mill or a textile plant, it puts the worker in the local handicraft industries out of work, and it closes the village mill. It renders the spinning wheel useless. The production of pile carpets, and of flat carpets, is at an end.¹⁶⁸

As mentioned above, Gholamhossein Sa'edi (1936-1985), another influential writer of the same period, was also deeply influenced by Al-e Ahmad in his portrayal of the hardships of village life. In 1961, Sa'edi published a play entitled *Gol Village* (*Kalāt-e Gol*) which, in his own words, "tried to show how Reza Shah's modernisation program destroyed and

¹⁶⁶ Jalal Al-e Ahmad, "Mizān," *Nefrin-e zamin* (Tehran: Varrāgh, 1967), 25.

¹⁶⁷ Mehrzad Broujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 70.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

despoiled the landscape and ruined many villages.”¹⁶⁹ Prior to the 1953 coup, when an eighteen-year-old Sa‘edi was still based in Azerbaijan, he joined the Youth Organisation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party and began to work as a journalist.¹⁷⁰ “The main pillar of the Tabriz Democratic Party’s ideology,” according to Sa‘edi, “revolved around the idea of the village. The party’s main goal was to organise a peasant movement led by the peasants (*nehzat-e dehqāni*).”¹⁷¹

In 1964, during the land reforms, Sa‘edi published his famous book, *The Mourners of Bayal* (*‘Azādārān-e Bayal*), which contained eight interconnected short stories. All of the stories in this text concern themes such as drought, disease, poverty, famine, hunger and death in a village called Bayal. A year later, Sa‘edi published *Stick-wielders of Varzil* (*Chub-beh-dasthā-ye Varzil* 1965), in which a fictitious village provides the background for five plays. The village has become overrun with wild boars that threaten the lives of the villagers, who turn to the outside world to seek help. As explained by Gisele Kapuscinski, the symbolism of the play is obvious: “the hunters represent government officials who take their directives from a foreign power, the villagers are the people of Iran struggling against natural hardships and government exploitation.”¹⁷²

Later on, in the 1970s and 1980s, the renowned novelist Mahmud Dowlatabadi (b.1940) emerged as a major portrayer of village society who placed particular emphasis on rural

¹⁶⁹ Kānun-e nevisandegān dar tab‘id, *Sa‘edi beh revāyat-e Sa‘edi* (Berlin: Kānun-e Nevisandegān, 1995), 10. Kamran Talattof, *The Politics of Writing In Iran: A History of Persian Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 78-80.

¹⁷⁰ This party was supported by the Soviet Union and founded by Jafar Pishavari in September 1945 in Tabriz.

¹⁷¹ Nevisandegān dar tab‘id, *Sa‘edi beh revāyat-e Sa‘edi*, 16.

¹⁷² Ehsan Yarshater, quoted in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, “Azādārān-e Bayal.”

life in the north-eastern province of Khorasan. In his monumental ten-volume novel, *Kalidar*, Dowlatabadi tackles the impact of industrialisation and land reforms on the lives of the peasant community. The cycle portrays the tragic fate of the Iranian peasantry and nomadic tribes under the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty. Dowlatabadi's typical theme is that of a peasant community that finds itself in severe difficulties, usually as the result of outside forces.

3. Post-revolutionary Period: Village as Utopia

The damaging effects of rapid modernisation and the migration of an enormous number of village dwellers to marginal zones on the edges of towns continued to affect Iranian society up until 1977 and beyond. Its effect on an emergent intelligentsia with religious leanings was equally formidable. A new wave of village writing, this time more prevalent in poetry, emerged. While exhibiting some common features with the previous generation, in its religious and ideological leanings it created a new trend unique to Islamic republican poetry. Contrary to the trend of pre-revolutionary village writing executed in the form of Persian prose, Islamic republican poets created serene and occasionally sanctified pastoral imageries, most of which recalled the deteriorating state of the village and attributed its decline to urban development. Furthermore, many identified the pastoral with an authentic lifestyle that was to be promoted as falling in line with revolutionary ideals. For these particular poets, the destruction of the village constituted a manifestation of the social injustice exercised by an oppressive ruling power and, as such, it had to be confronted. One of the main reasons for this distinct take on the village is that much of the Islamic republican poetry that tackled the life of the peasant had been written by poets from rural backgrounds or those who at least appreciated this way of life.

One of the leading voices of Islamic republican poetry is Abdolmalekian, whose early poems (1974-86) largely venerate the village and tribal living, while offering an unfaltering critique of urbanism. Moreover, his nostalgic poems about the village stand out in terms of both quantity and quality when compared with those by his fellow revolutionary poets. As a native of Nahavand in Hamedan and a graduate student of agricultural engineering, Abdolmalekian was appointed to work at the Ministry of Agriculture after the end of the revolution, where his main responsibility was to reconstruct and improve ruined villages. Poems such as ‘*Village*’ (*Qaryeh*, 1974), ‘*Evil City*’ (*Shahr-e bad*, 1974), ‘*Father! Let’s Return to the Farm*’ (*Pedar beh mazra‘eh bargardim*, 1977), ‘*Tribal Man*’ (*Iliāti*, 1984), ‘*With this Entrenched, Rainy Heart*’ (*Bā in del-e rishehdār-e bārāni*, 1984), and ‘*Identity Card*’ (*Kārt-e shenāsā’i*, 1985) fall among the numerous examples of poems narrated by a disheartened urban dweller who greatly misses the village of his birth. Abdolmalekian is clearly sympathetic towards the peasantry, as well as to revolutionary ideas that advocated the superiority of villagers. Such ideas constructed villagers as authentic, as the deprived masses and as embodying the primacy of the rustic lifestyle, as is clearly identifiable in the works of revolutionary ideologues such as Khomeini and Shariati.¹⁷³

¹⁷³ In his public lectures, Khomeini often criticised the White Revolution as a “shameful and bloody revolution” which in his view made the life of the peasants and farmers more miserable. For more details, see Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye nur*, vol. II (Tehran: Mo’asseseh-ye nashr-e āsār-e emām, 1983-1994), 325. Fond of Frantz Fanon, who considered the “return to the true self” as the only way to defeat colonialism, Ali Shariati praised the peasantry as living an authentic lifestyle and often spoke in defence of the real rights of the workers and peasants. For more details, see Marke LeVine, Armando Salvatore, “Socio-Religious Movements and the Transformation of ‘Common Sense’ into a Politics of ‘Common Good’,” *Religion, Social Practice and Contested Hegemonies: Reconstructing the Public Sphere in the Muslim Majority Countries*, (eds.) Marke LeVine, Armando Salvatore (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 45.

The peasant figure in Abdolmalekian's work has a "gaze with the taste of milk", "hands with the scent of wheat", "a knock-pack full of companionship and love", "sandals made of compassion" and "a shirt the colour of sincerity".¹⁷⁴ Typical of romantic depictions of authentic village life, such imaginaries feed the peasant's unhappiness and bewilderment in the city. The scent of "gunpowder and homesickness" present in the city's air upon arrival prompts recollections of the oppressive nature of the urban setting at the peak of the industrialisation period in Iran. "The frowning square", "stone-made, dull alleyways", "grey, hazy sky" and "the deceiving absurd sunshine" are all parts of the urban setting that become essential imageries in Abdolmalekian's peasant poetry, thus creating a form of protest literature in the years preceding the Islamic Revolution.¹⁷⁵

Abdolmalekian penned most of these poems during the four to five years that preceded the Islamic Revolution, or at least during the first decade after the revolution. Except for a few examples, almost all were written during his stay in his native provincial town, Nahavand. In the *'Evil City'*, the poet's cynicism about urban life reaches its climax, as the city becomes a "zone of scarecrows where the ants think about leprosy."¹⁷⁶ The poet clearly feels the weight of the skyscrapers pushing on his chest as breathing becomes impossible. He expands and deepens a strain of class-oriented cynicism that goes against city life by involving real scenes from the everyday lives of secular urban dwellers and contrasting with them with scenes from the lives of the lower and deprived classes: "Perfumed women swallowing thirsty gazes" versus "poor men throwing up in their night seclusion and dreams"; "beautiful body organs all labelled by different factory brands" and "the

¹⁷⁴ Mohammadreza Abdolmalekian, "Qaryeh," *Gozineh-ye 'ash 'ār* (Tehran: Teyfneḡār, 2004), 20.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

¹⁷⁶ Mohammadreza Abdolmalekian, "Shahr-e bad," *Gozineh-ye 'ash 'ār*, 24.

seductive fake eyelashes that deceive hearts”.¹⁷⁷ The poem offers a critical approach toward urban industrialisation, placing it in contrast with the natural beauty of rural life.

Whatever belongs to the urban life seems artificial in the eyes of the poet:

*“Dar fasli beh shahr āmadam
Keh har ‘ozv-e zibā
Mārk-e kārkhāneh dāsht
Va mozhehhā-ye masnu ‘i
Delhā-ye tabi ‘i rā beh bāzi migereftand”.*

I came to the city
In a season when each beautiful organ
Was labelled by a factory
And artificial eyelashes
Would deceive natural hearts.¹⁷⁸

In another poem, ‘*Shepherd*’ (*Chupān*, 1984), Abdolmalekian recounts the story of a shepherd and his herd and their deteriorating state and all-consuming confusion in the urban setting. His depiction of the city as the source of alienation and ugliness echoes in the voices present in his poetry throughout this period:

*“Galleh dar vāhemeh sargardān ast
Dast-e shabdarkārān
Pā keshidast zeh dasht
Shahr-e bi ‘ātefeh chupān rā bal ‘idast
Galleh dar vahshat-e tanhāi-ye khish
Pey-e chupān migardad.
Cheh kasi marz-e jodā ‘i rā bast?
Risheh-ye shir-o chupān-o sepidārān rā
Cheh kasi zakhmi kard?
Gorghā rā cheh kasi vos ‘at dād?
Gallehhā rā cheh kasi parpar kard?
Āh chupān, chupān!
Az to dar hādeseh-ye fāje ‘ehhā
Kuh rā dozdidand.
Rud rā dozdidand.
Asb rā dozdidand [...]
Va dar in shahr-e gharib beh to āmukhteh shod
Kuh kham migardad*

¹⁷⁷ Mohammadreza Abdolmalekian, “Chupān,” *Gozineh-ye ‘ash ‘ār*, 26.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

*Rud dar varteh-ye mordāb mirizad.
Asb dar jangal-e āsfālt foru mighaltad."*

The herd is confused and fearful
The harvesters have left the plain
The cold city has swallowed the shepherd
The head, confused by a fear of solitude
Is in search of the shepherd.
Who has made the border of separation?
Who has uprooted the lion, the shepherd and the cedars?
Who has enlarged the number of wolves?
Who has wiped out the herds?
Oh, shepherd, shepherd,
In these catastrophic events
They stole the mountain from you
They stole the river
And the horse
You have been taught
That the mountain will bow down
The river will pour into the swamp
And the horse will fall in an asphalt forest.¹⁷⁹

In the poems penned prior to the Islamic Revolution, the rural or tribal identification of the poet seems to convey a sense of resistance towards the ruling state. The narrator of '*The Tribal Man*' is a deprived man of the Bakhtiari tribe who describes himself as belonging to the "generation of despair with fractured hands."¹⁸⁰ What is noteworthy in this poem is the visible confrontation of the narrator with the ruling power based in the city. The ending lines of the poem render the protesting voice of the poem more apparent as the narrator openly portrays the city as an oppressive environment that calls upon him to surrender:

*"Dardi 'amīq dāram
Injā, farzand-e kuh rā
Da 'vat beh ekhtenāq
Da 'vat beh band-o bim, beh taslim mikonand
Man iliātiyam
Man vasleh 'i beh pirhan-e shahr nistam.
Injā gharib māndeham-o deltang
Man sang nistam."*

¹⁷⁹ Mohammadreza Abdolmalekian, *Gozineh-ye 'ash 'ār*, 50.

¹⁸⁰ Mohammadreza Abdolmalekian, "Iliyāti," *Gozineh-ye 'ash 'ār*, 31-37.

I have a deep sorrow
 Here, the invite to the child of the mountains
 To the oppression,
 To chains, to fear and to submission.
 I am a tribal man
 I am not made for the city
 I have been abandoned here, homesick and alien
 I am not a stone.¹⁸¹

The poems written by Abdolmalekian that relate to the theme of rural life and the village are too numerous for them all to be included in this chapter. But the examples quoted above, as well as works of a similar kind, show how prevalent the theme of the village had become among adherents of the Islamic republican trend. Another early practitioner of village poetry from a rural background is Aminpur. A native of Gotvand in Khuzestan, and originally a member of the Bakhtiari tribe, Aminpur's '*Machine-baked Bread*' (*Nān-e māshini*, 1978) features a critical narrative of urbanised developments in his home village. More specifically, Aminpur depicts a rural setting with an unchanging and lifeless nature in a way that is pointedly political. The parallels between the anti-urbanism expressed in this work and that found in works by Kasravi or Jalal al-e Ahmad in *Westruckness* should not be overlooked:

"Āsemān ta 'til ast
 Bādhā bikārand
 Abrhā khoshk-o khasis
 Heqheq-e geryeh-ye khod rā khordand.
 Man delam mikhāhad
 Dasmāli khis
 Ruy-e pishāni-ye tabdār-e biābān bekesham
 Dastmālam rā afsus
 Nān-e māshini dar tasarrof dārad
 Āberu-ye deh-e mā rā bordand."

The sky takes a break
 The winds, unemployed

¹⁸¹ Mohammadreza Abdolmalekian, "Iliyāti," 37.

The clouds: dry and niggardly
 They swallow the lumps in their throats
 I wish to
 Spread a damp handkerchief
 Over the desert's fevered forehead
 Alas!
 The machine-made loaf of bread
 Has appropriated my handkerchief
 They have destroyed the reputation of our village.¹⁸²

The resident of a deteriorating village, the narrator of the poem finds his natural surroundings to be completely lifeless and polluted by the industrial gloom that fills the sky and engulfs nature. Even the bread-making tradition, one of the most important symbols of village life, has been demolished at the monstrous hands of industrialisation. The fall of the village, Aminpur reflects, is the fall of authenticity that has been replaced by a material and spiritual void following the destruction of the rural lifestyle.

In another poem, '*Composition*' (*Enshā*, 1978), Aminpur draws our attention to the deep disturbance that the land reforms created in the rural area of his boyhood. The narration of the poem is presented through the collective voice of primary school children obliged to write about the White Revolution. As the poem begins, the narrators are placed under constant surveillance during an examination. They eventually rebel by standing up and refusing to write:

*"Mā rā beh emtehān-e enshā neshāndand
 Mozu' pār bud-o pirār
 Qofl-e sokut rā
 Dar entehā-ye qalam mijavidam
 Va beh dād minegaristim
 Qalam beh dorugh del nemidād*

¹⁸² Qaysar Aminpur, "Nān-e māshini," *Tanaffos-e sobh* (Tehran: Soroush, 2007), 11-12. The poem was initially written in Gotvand, in the summer of 1979, and published in *Tanaffos-e sobh* in 1982.

Istādam va varaqeham rā tahvil dādam
Mozu‘-e mā ham
Enqelāb-e Sefid bud.”

They made us sit the exam
 The topic was the years before
 We were chewing the lock of silence
 At the bottom of our pens
 And were looking at each other in pain
 The pen was not willing to lie
 I stood up
 And handed in my paper
 It was blank
 Our topic too was
 The White Revolution.¹⁸³

The positive and, to a large extent, romantic reception of the village in a great number of works produced by both Aminpur and other Islamic republican poets should be read and understood in relation to the socio-political context of their time. The collective voice of revolution and war on the one hand, and the special attention paid to agricultural reform by the revolutionary state on the other, prompted these writers to leave their own impact on the rise of village writing during this period. To understand the context in which such poems were penned, a brief overview of major events from the period is crucial. Starting from June 1979, the Construction Crusade (*jahād-e sāzandegi*) began work as a voluntary agency that took as its main aim the reconstruction of allegedly neglected examples of Iranian agriculture and areas of the rural sector. The main goal of the Construction Crusade was to improve the quality of peasants' lives. In the course of the first decade following the revolution, the Ministry of Agriculture, which had existed before the revolution, resumed its activities expanding to incorporate almost 74,000 employees. Apart from the physical construction of village buildings, farmers were also provided with

¹⁸³ Qaysar Aminpur, "Enshā," *Tanaffos-e sobh* (Tehran: Howzeh-ye honari, 1984), 71.

state-sponsored financial credit under the newly introduced system of Islamic banking.¹⁸⁴ According to Linda Darling, “with five times the funding of the White Revolution and the social enthusiasm of crowds of young people concerned for social justice,” the Construction Crusade succeeded in enhancing agricultural productivity and contributing to the housing, health and essential needs of farmers.¹⁸⁵

Moreover, as part of its pro-justice rhetoric, in 1980, following the launch of the Agricultural Crusade (*jahād-e keshāvarzi*), the revolutionary government marked the fifteenth day of the month of *Sha‘bān* (the birthday of the twelfth Shi’ite Imam in the lunar calendar) as the Day of the Downtrodden (*ruz-e mostaz‘afān*), citing this decision as a tribute to the rural and urban working classes. The overall reception to this change forms the subject matter of another poem by Aminpur, namely ‘*The Ancient Heritage*’ (*Mirās-e Bāstāni*, 1980). The poem echoes the main slogans of the revolution that revolved around the noble nature of the poor and the empowerment of the working classes, both of which were embraced within this context under the aegis of Islamic justice. The use of concepts such as “decaying shoes”, “shoes of fatigue” or “shoes made up of calluses” in the second part the poem refers to the physical sensation and rustic qualities of such people and recapitulates a famous saying by Khomeini, who oftentimes alleged that the revolution belonged to the barefoot and the poor.¹⁸⁶

“*Mā az jens-e pineh kafsh beh pā dārim*

¹⁸⁴ Jahangir Amuzegar, *Iran’s Economy Under the Islamic Republic* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1997), 185-186.

¹⁸⁵ Linda T. Darling, *Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 208.

¹⁸⁶ For more details, see “Bāzkhāni-e seh mafhum-e mostaz‘afin, basij-e mostaz‘afin va tafakkor-e basiji dar sahifeh-ye emām,” *Jamārān*, accessed 25 November, 2013, http://jamaran.ir/fa/NewsContent-id_33930.aspx.

Harchand in kafshhā-ye kohneh-ye mā dard mikonad
Ammā
Bā kafshhā-ye khastegi-ye khod
Az rah residueh'im
Mirās-e bāstāni-e Ebrāhim bā mast."

Our shoes are made of calluses
 Even though
 These decaying shoes of ours hurt
 We have arrived
 Having walked in these shoes of fatigue
 We carry the legacy of Abraham with us.¹⁸⁷

The pastoral motifs evident in poems of this kind provide important evidence of an evolution in Islamic republican ideology. During this period, village poems often represented a departure from the secular, modernist views of a monarchic system that had pursued the industrialisation of villages, seeing them as inferior and deprived units that should be forcibly mechanised. The Islamist doctrine, however, provided ideological justification for the revival of villages and pastoral culture as major units and largely implemented this under the Construction Crusade program. This idea is more explicit in Aminpur's third collection, *Storm in Parentheses* (*Tufān dar parāntez*, 1985). This collection of prose for young adults was published during a period when the revitalisation of the agricultural sector was still at its peak. In a piece entitled 'Spring Manifesto' (*Mānifest-e bahār*, 1985) a farm is depicted in a state of severe trouble and its improvement rests in the hands of the revolutionary forces working under the Construction Crusade plan:

Oh spring! Don't you know that in our land still there are feudalists who eat up hectares of land with such primordial appetite? We will stop hoarding the spring. Our peasants migrate to cities, in search of the spring. We should follow Imam Khomeini's order and bring the spring to the villages. We must take the spring to the slums (*jonub-e shahr*). We should implement the equal

¹⁸⁷ Qaysar Aminpur, "Mirās-e bāstāni," *Tanaffose- sobh*, 15-16.

distribution of spring as soon as possible.¹⁸⁸

In his poems of the late 1980s, Aminpur touches upon the sorest of spots in the lives of peasants, namely their relationship with migration and the city. The process of internal migration evident in Iran in the 1970s and 1980s led to what Amirarjomand has described as, “an explosive geographic expansion of cities that was followed by extensive land seizure by squatters, and the so-called revolutionary housing.”¹⁸⁹ In practice, Islamic republican authors, albeit deliberately or not, leaned towards socialism in order to respond to this social change. Their works served the state’s agenda of both promoting its rhetoric of social justice and subverting the secular leftist literary trend. Imageries such as those of village peasants and the villager were gradually superseded by depictions of slum-dwelling and marginalised people within urban settings, people who had joined the frontline during the war. In Aminpur’s poetry of revolution and war, the slum dwellers of metropolitan cities (*mardom-e pa’in-shahr/jonub-e shahr*), the factory workers (*kārgarān-e kārkhāneh*) and margin dwellers (*hāshiyeh-neshinhā*), all of whom were originally villagers (*rustā’i*), later become martyrs of the war. Poverty, inferiority, ideological commitment and martyrdom became directly related to one another, as is visible in the war poetry of the Islamic republican movement.¹⁹⁰

For most Islamic republican poets of rural origin, to die in the city was to face a miserable fate and one filled with a sense of isolation and absurdity. The best manifestation of such

¹⁸⁸ Qaysar Aminpur, “Mānifest-e bahār,” *Tufān dar parāntez: Nasr-e adabi barāy-e nowjavānān* (Tehran: Howzeh-ye honari, 1985), 28.

¹⁸⁹ Saïd Amirarjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 123.

¹⁹⁰ For a detailed discussion of Islamic republican war poetry, see chapter 3.

imagery can be found in a poem by Salman Harati (1959-1986), who came from a village in the north of Iran, near Tonkabon. In ‘I Too Shall Die’ (*Man ham mimiram*’ 1984), which compares and contrasts dying in a village or dying in a city as meaningful and absurd forms of death respectively, Harati takes a typical distance from the urban mind set that may indeed be traced to the work of Sohrab Sepehri.¹⁹¹ The beginning and ending lines of the poem are as follows:

*“Man ham mimiram
Ammā na mesl-e Gholamali
Keh az derakht beh zir oftād
Pas gāvān az gorosnehgi māgh keshidand
Cheh kasi barāy-e gāvā ‘olufeh mirizad?
Man ham mimiram
Ammā dar khiābāni sholugh
Dar barābar-e bitafāvoti-ye cheshmhā-ye tamāshā
Zir-e charkhhā-ye birahm-e māshin
Māshin-e yek pezeshek-e ‘asabāni
Vaqti az bimārestān-e dowlati barmigardad
Pas do ruz-e ba ‘d
Dar sotun-e tasliyat-e ruznāmeh
Zir-e ‘aks-e sheshdarchāhār khāhand nevesht
Ey ānkeh raftēh ‘i
Cheh kasi satlhā-ye zobāleh ra por khāhad kard?”*

I too shall die
But not like Gholām-ali¹⁹²
Who fell off the tree
And the starving cows mooed for him
Who will feed the cows after him? [...]
I too shall die
But in a crowded street
In front of eyes filled with indifference
Under the cruel wheels of the car
The car of a grumpy doctor
On his way back from a public hospital
So, two days later,
In the newspaper’s condolences column
Under a formal photo, they will write:
Oh, you who are gone!

¹⁹¹ Harati was given the title of the revolutionary Sepehri (*Sepehri-ye enqelābi*) for his committed approach to the Islamic Revolution and its ideals.

¹⁹² A village dweller from the poet’s village of birth in the north.

Who will fill the trash bins?¹⁹³

The central feature of the above poem, along with that found in the following work ‘*Life*’ (*Zendegi*, 1986), is the dismissal of an undesirable urban life and an escape to the village to take refuge from this urban gloom. In terms of syntactic features, most of the village poems of this period are straightforward and uncomplicated, which perfectly fits the simplicity of village life and village attitudes. The unpretentious presentation of the contrast between the village and the city in the following poem by Harati is a fitting example of this:

*“Faslhā dar shahr yeksān ast
Zendegi dar shahr māshinist
Bastegi dārad beh benzin
Bastegi dārad beh naft
Zendegi dar rustā ammā
Bastegi dārad beh asb
Sādeh-o khoshrang.”*

In the city, seasons are alike
In the city, life is mechanised
It all depends on the petrol
It all depends on the oil
In the village, however,
Life depends on the horse
Simple and colourful.¹⁹⁴

During the 1980s, rural attitudes and imageries of the simple rural lifestyle were adopted extensively by Islamic republican poets as a way to dismiss the secular lifestyles of Iranians who did not conform to the Islamic lifestyle valued by the state. Such attitudes were mostly developed under the influence of the pro-justice rhetoric of the Islamic left. A poem by Harati, which was published only once in the *Soroush* journal during the 1980s

¹⁹³ Salman Harati, “Man ham mimiram,” *Gozideh-ye adabiyāt-e mo’āser* (Tehran: Neyestān, 1999), 48-50.

¹⁹⁴ Salman Harati, “Zendegi,” *Gozideh-ye adabiyāt-e mo’āser* (Tehran: Neyestān, 1999), 81-2.

and never appeared in any of his poetry collections until 2010,¹⁹⁵ provides a unique example of this trend. It echoes the ideological disagreements evident within a family after the revolution. Within this piece the utopian image of the village is manifested in the chastity of the woman and her Islamic dress. The piece describes in detail differences in the belief systems and the lifestyles of ‘modern’ Iranian citizens, in this case highlighting the situation of the poet’s brother and that of those revolutionaries who thoroughly dismissed such views. A significant excerpt from this extended poem is reproduced below:

*“Mā keshtzār rā
 Keh dar hojum-e malakhhā-ye masmum mimord
 Rahā kardim
 Va gusfandān rā
 Dar tanhāi-ye por az gorg-e biyābān.
 Āmadim va dar ghorbāt-e āhan-o dud gom shodim.
 Emruz ammā
 Barādaram hanuz ‘āsheq-e football ast
 Va barāyash masaleh’i nist
 Keh ruznāmezhā cheh minevisand
 U aslan beh bāgh-e āgāhi nemi’āyad
 Va yādash rafteh ast
 Keh gandomhā key sonboleḥ mibandand.
 Va kanduhā-ye ‘asal ra
 Bā konservhāy-e ‘Yek-o-Yek’¹⁹⁶ ‘avaz kardeh ast.
 Va odkolon-e “Boroot” rā
 Bar ‘atr-e gol-e yās-e vahshi tarjih midahad
 Va beh jā-ye āb-e zolāl-e cheshmeh
 Dust dārad Coca Cola benushad [...]
 Diruz dar khiyābān zani rā didam
 Keh mesl-e mardhā mikhandid
 Va bastani mikhord
 Va ba suwich-e māshinash bāzi mikard.
 Man az ān hameh bihayā’i
 Ghamgin shodam.
 Ammā barādaram goft:
 Motshakkeram! cheh mamlekat-e motemaddenī dārim!
 Man beh yād-e mādaram oftādam
 Keh hichgāh bichādor beh khiābān nayāmad
 Mādaram por az hayā-vo nejābat ast*

¹⁹⁵ This poem was republished by Qaysar Aminpur for the second time in a special issue on Harati’s life and poetry in 2010. *Māhnāmeḥ-ye hamshahri-ye javān* (Tehran: Shahr-dari-ye Tehran, 2010).

¹⁹⁶ The name of a famous grocery brand in Iran.

Va mesl-e rustā sādeh.”

We left the dying land
 When it was under the attack of poisonous locusts.
 We left the sheep
 In the terrifying solitude of the desert, filled with wolves
 We came [to the city] and got lost in the dust of iron and smoke
 But today
 My brother still loves football
 And he does not care
 What is written in the newspaper
 He never comes to the acacia garden
 And he has forsaken
 When the wheat blossoms
 And he has exchanged the beehives for “Yek-o-Yek” preserves
 And he prefers *Brut* cologne
 To the scent of the wild jasmine
 And instead of the running water of the lake
 He prefers to drink Coca Cola
 Yesterday I saw a woman in the street
 With a manly laughter, licking an ice-cream, playing with her car keyset
 I was saddened by seeing incredible boldness
 But my brother was grateful and said “what a civilised country we have!”
 I remembered my mother
 Who never came to the street without the *chādor*¹⁹⁷
 My mother is full of honour and modesty
 She is simple, like a village.¹⁹⁸

Harati never embraced the urban settlement and preferred to commute between the village of his birth in the north and the capital city, where he attended the poetry sessions of the Howzeh. He eventually died in a car accident on one of his return trips from Tehran to his hometown at the age of 28. Though he was mainly based in Tonkabon and only occasionally paid visits to the capital, his poetry expresses a constant sense of loss and nostalgia for his village, which may come from his fear that the face of the village as the manifestation of an authentic lifestyle would disappear.

It was essential that the revolutionary values attached to the village, the nostalgia of

¹⁹⁷ A black garment in the form of an open cloak worn by women in Iran.

¹⁹⁸ Salman Harati, “*Dar ruzgāri keh māshin savār-e ādam shod*,” *Māhnāmeḥ-ye hamshahri-ye javān* (Tehran: Shahrdari-ye Tehran, 2010), 53.

embracing the simple life and the anti-luxury views that accompanied this embrace, reached the post-revolutionary generations to come. This ideal was therefore promoted by the state and appeared in the textbooks used at primary schools in the wake of the revolution. One of the very first poems that every Iranian schoolchild would encounter during the first decade of the revolution was ‘*The City and the Village*’ (*Shahr va rustā*, 1986) by Ja‘far Ebrahimi-Shahed. The piece reflects the deep affinity felt by the poet for village life, as well as a palpable and nostalgic sense of loss, both of which are offered up by the urban city dweller who narrates the poem. The romantic imageries of the village employed in the poem are developed by way of contrast to the evil imagery of the urban setting. The narrator wishes to become a bird and fly away from the city in order to settle down in a village where the climate is favourable. Most Iranians of the second generation of the post-revolutionary period grew up learning this piece by heart, even though many of them were urban dwellers, either by birth or migration:

Khoshā beh hālat, ey rustā’i
Cheh shād-o-khorram, cheh bāsaḡā’i
Dar shahr-e mā nist joz dud-e māshin
Delam gereḡteh az ān-o az in
Dar shahr-e mā nist, joz dād-o faryād
Khoshā beh hālat, keh hasti āzād
Ey kāsh man ham, parandeh budam
Bā shādemāni, par migoshudam
Miraḡtam az shahr, beh rustā’i
Ānjā keh dārad, āb-o havā’i.

Lucky you villager boy!
 How full of joy, full of laughter you are!
 There is nothing in our city but the smoke of cars
 I am disheartened by anything and everything
 There is nothing in our city, but smoke and screaming
 Lucky you free village boy!
 I wish I were a bird with wings to fly
 To leave the city for a village

Where the climate is perfect.¹⁹⁹

A rural background was sometimes the only link, the bridge and connector between the pre- and post-revolutionary generations of poets who, despite their different ideological backgrounds, belonged to the same geographical location. Sometimes, the rural background acted as a mediator between the zealot revolutionary poets and those with socialist leftist leanings. Yusefali Mirshahak, who remains a key figure of Islamic republican poetry to date, dedicated a poem to Manuchehr Atashi, a pioneering poet of the secular leftist trend and member of the Iranian Writers' Association. Both belonged to the same provincial region in the south of Iran and Mirshakak used this as an excuse to develop a poetic dialogue with Atashi, whose poetics and politics differed greatly from that of the official poets.²⁰⁰ Mirshakak's rural tone and lexicon adds unique rural characteristics to his poetics:

*"She'r-e gharib-e man-o tow
Tow pir-e man, pedar-e man
Bāyad rahā koni qafas-e shahr rā va bedāni
Keh nowbat-e mā nist
Āri pedar!
Bāyad beh rustā bargardim.
Harchand rustā-ye man-o tow
Dar sineh,
Dar sedā,
Dar she'r-o enzevā-ye man-o towst
Har chand shahr niz
Rustā-ye man-o towst."*

Our alien poems
You! My guide, my father!
You should leave the cage of the city and know

¹⁹⁹ Ja'far Ebrahimi, "Shahr va rustā," *Ketāb-e fārsi-ye avval-e dabestān* (Tehran: Nashr-e āmuzesh va parvareh, 1988), 16.

²⁰⁰ In chapter 1 and in the section that discusses the closure of the *Sorush-e nowjavan* journal, we will see that the publication of Atashi's work in this journal was one of the accusations made against this journal by the conservatives.

That it is not our turn
 Yes, father!
 We should return to the village
 Although, our village
 Is in our chest
 And in our voice
 It is in our poetry and isolation
 Although the city too
 Has [somewhat] become our village.²⁰¹

As is apparent in this poem, local dialect and local expressions form the prevailing features of Islamic republican poetry and provide a strong tool of communication by which to connect with ordinary provincial readers. Poems dedicated to Iran's nomadic tribes or the natives of poets' villages are countless. '*Lorgāmishi*', which refers to poems written in the Bakhtiari dialect, is the title of a long poem by Mirshakkak that he dedicated to the Bakhtiari nomads and, in particular, to one of his fellow Bakhtiari tribesmen who fought in the Iran-Iraq War.²⁰² In this specific work the natural elements of the nomad setting are personified in the form of war veterans fighting in the war. The story of the war is narrated by the women, girls and men of a collective nomad tribe native to a southern region, the members of which protect their tribe during the war. The tribe is often the symbol of a nation that needs to be protected and defended. Mirshakkak's village poetry thus reads as a powerful plea to promote the collective and to eliminate the individualistic aspects of the urban setting, as is evident in the previous poem.

As the war ended, the massive destructions and economic hardships gave rise to another new wave of internal migration. The lives of these peasant immigrants later coalesced with those of the country's margin dwellers and urban proletariat (or proletarians) in the works

²⁰¹ Yusefali Mirshakkak, "Ghorbat," *Gozideh-ye adabiyāt-e mo'āser* (Tehran: Neyestān, 1999), 10-12.

²⁰² Yusefali Mirshakkak, "Lorgāmishi," *Az cheshm-e ezhdehā* (Tehran: Eqbal Lahuri, 1989), 86-9.

of the Islamic republican poets. During this period, a number of Islamic republican poets were engaged extensively in creating literature for children and young adults. Village and margin dwellers therefore entered into the realm of children's literature. Published in 1991, Aminpur's fifth prose collection, *Flying Without Wings (Bi-bāl paridan)* contained many poems of this kind. The bitter story of migration and dwelling in the margins is portrayed alongside the destruction of the villages, a contrast that constitutes a leading theme in this collection. In the poem 'Life in the Margins' (*Zendegi dar hāshiyeh*, 1986), the narrator is a youngster living in the margins of the city who describes his family background throughout the work:

We are margin dwellers. Your father was a margin dweller too, my mother says. He was born in the margin zone, he toiled in the margin zone and he died in the margin zone. I too was born in the margin zone. But I don't want to die in the margin zone.²⁰³

The word 'margin' (*hāshiyeh*) informs the entire piece. More specifically, the margin is presented as a black zone, and one that makes both death and a lifetime spent there seem equal. At the end of each stanza, we hear the narrative voice of a young adult and margin dweller in most of the pieces and he speaks of his urge to 'reform' the status quo:

My brother died at the margin line of a hospital. My sister is always sick. She always cries. Sometimes in the margins; she rarely laughs. "Our destiny is also written on the margin line of the tablet of fate," my mother says. Every night she shows me my fortune star in the sky's margin. But I say: "That is not my star".²⁰⁴

The same collection contains anti-industrialist prose pieces written in defence of the urban proletariat. In 'Equal Distribution' (*Taqsim-e ādelāneh*, 1986), the leftist and religious pro-justice doctrines are bridged by way of a confrontational tone:

"Man hamsenn-o sāl-e pesar-e tow hastam

²⁰³ Qaysar Aminpur, "Zendegi dar hāshiyeh," *Bibāl paridan* (Tehran: Ofoq 1991), 19.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.,

*Tow hamsenn-o sāl-e pedar-e man hasti
 Pesar-e tow dars mikhānad va kār nemikonad
 Man kār mikonam va dars nemikhānam.
 Pedar-e man na kār dārad, na khāneh
 Tow ham kār dāri, ham khāneh, ham kārkhāneh,
 Man dar kārkhāneh-ye tow kār mikonam
 Va dar injā hameh chiz ‘ādelāneh taqsim shodeh ast
 Sud-e ān barā-ye tow, dud-e ān barā-ye man.
 Man kār mikonam, tow khasteh mishavi.
 Vaqti keh man khasteh mishavam, tow barā-ye esterāhat beh shomāl miravi.
 Vaqti keh man mariz mishavam tow barā-ye mo ‘ālejeḥ beh khārej miravi.”*

I am the same age as your son,
 You are the same age as my father
 Your son studies and doesn't work,
 I work and don't study,
 My father neither has a job nor a house
 You have both a job and a house
 I work in your factory.
 And in this factory everything has been distributed equally:
 Its profit for you, its dusty smoke for me.
 I work, but you hoard
 I load, but you store
 I suffer, but you gain treasure,
 I work in your factory
 And there is no difference between you and me:
 When I work, you devastate,
 When I am devastated, you go to the seaside to holiday
 When I become ill, you go abroad for a medical trip.²⁰⁵

In the second half of the poem, the Islamic socialist ideology of the author becomes more apparent as he refers to God as the main disclaimer of urban capitalism:

*“Ammā kārkhāneh-ye tow harqadr ham ke bozorg bāshad,
 Az kārkhāneh-ye khodā bozorgtar nist
 Kārkhāneh-ye khodā az kārkhāneh-ye tow va hameh-ye kārkhānehā bozorgtar ast
 Dar kārkhāneh-ye khodā hameh chiz ‘ādelāneh taqsim mishavad
 Dar kārkhāneh-ye khodā hameh kār mikonand
 Dar kārkhāneh-ye khodā hattā khodā ham kār mikonad.”*

However big your factory is, it cannot compete with God's.
 God's factory is the biggest of all
 In God's factory everything is equally distributed
 In God's factory everyone works
 Even God himself is at work.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Aminpur, “Zendegi dar hāshiyeh,” 19

Such a critical depiction of the economic hardship experienced in Iran during the 1980s, as well as the prevailing tensions and conflicts between the rich and the poor, is rooted in the war and the development policies of the post-war state. By the end of the war in 1988, the state and society both came under economic pressure and serious ideological challenges emerged within the state factions. As Ali Gheissari and Vali-Reza Nasr suggest, “it was a period of continuity with and change from the revolutionary past during which new economic, social and political developments pushed the state and society in new directions.”²⁰⁷ Many of the development plans of the Pahlavi period that focused on industrial development and urbanisation had initially been rejected as part of an agenda for Westernisation. However, these were now revived as part of the reconstruction project that commenced during Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani’s presidency. Indeed, Rafsanjani’s development policies promoted the private sector, prompting the critical response in pieces such as ‘*Equal Distribution*’ and ‘*Life in the Margins*’.

Many Islamic republican poets ceased to write about the village after the war as they started to settle down in the country’s cities. Among those who persisted in maintaining the prominence of village motifs in his poetry was Aminpur. In 1993, when he published his sixth and most famous collection, *Sudden Mirrors* (*Āyenehhā-ye nāgahān*), he no longer identified himself as a villager but as a middle-aged urban poet with nostalgia for the lost connection he felt for his village. In the poem ‘The Sun of the Village’ (*Khorshid-e rustā*, 1989), Aminpur speaks wistfully of the village as a faded place that exists in his

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ali Gheysari, Vali Nasr, *Democracy in Iran: History and the Quest for Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 106-107.

inner world to which he still yearns to return:

*“Dar she‘rhā-ye man
Khorshid
Az moze‘-e mozāyeqeh mitābad.
Khorshidhā-ye zard-e moqavvā‘i
Va āsemān-e sorbi
Bā bādhā-ye sard
Dar she‘rhā-ye man jaryān dārad.
Harchand in barghā-ye kāhi
Bā in horuf-e sorbi-ye sangin
Bar bālhā-ye bād safar mikonand
Injā
Khorshidhā-ye she‘r-e marā bād mibarad
In dard-e kuchaki nist.
Dar rustā-ye mā
Mardom marā beh shur nemikhānand
Guyā zabān-e she‘r-e marā digar
In sādeqān-e sādeh nemidānand.
Va barghā-ye kāhi-ye she‘ram rā
She‘ri keh dar setāyesh-e gandom nist
Yek jow nemikharand.
Az man gozasht
Ammā delam hanuz
Bā lahjah-ye mahalli-ye khod harf mizanad
Ba lahjah-ye mahalli-ye mardom
Ba lahjah-ye fasih-e gol-o gandom
Gandom
Khorshid-e rustāst.
Vaqtī keh bād mowj miandāzad.
Dar gisu-ye talā‘i-ye gandomzār
Khorshidhā-ye she‘r-e man ānjāst.”*

In my poems
The sun
Stops shining
The yellow cardboard-made suns
And the lead sky
With cold winds blow through my poems
Although these straw leaves
Along with these heavy lead letters
Travel on the wings of the wind
But, here
The suns of my poems,
Are not real suns
Here,
The suns of my poems are gone with the wind
And this is not a minor sorrow
In our village
People no longer read my poems with enthusiasm
As if these simple, honest people
No longer understand the language of my poems
And do not buy the straw pages of my poetry

Which is not about wheat.
 I'm done
 But my heart
 Still speaks with its local accent
 With the local accent of the villagers
 With the eloquent accent of roses and wheat
 Wheat is the sun of the village
 When the wind
 Weaves the blond hair of the wheat fields
 The suns of my poem are there.²⁰⁸

Another example is that of an anti-utopian poem, namely '*Utopia*' (*Madineh-ye fāzeleh*, 2000), written by the same poet in the *Flowers are all Sunflowers* (*Golhā hameh āftābgardānand*, 2004). It depicts Aminpur's romanticised image of the village, which here resembles the sanctuary of allegorical gardens in classical Persian poetry. As the mystic poets might claim:

"*Khodā rustā rā*
Bashar shahr rā
Vali shā'erān ārmānshahr rā āfaridand.
Keh dar khāb ham khāb-e ān rā nadidand."

God created the village
 People created the city
 And poets created utopia
 A place that they never saw in their dreams.²⁰⁹

During the past decade, especially with the rise of the conservative fundamentalist government in 2004 and the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, promoting the village as representative of the lifestyle of the downtrodden has been prioritised as a main aim of the state. The second and third generations of Islamic republican poets have tried to revive pastoral motifs. Sa'īd Haddiadian, the official eulogist and poet, once voiced his concerns about the occasional absence of the village as a symbolic representation of the simple life of the deprived masses in Islamic republican poetry:

²⁰⁸ Qaysar Aminpur, "Khorshid-e rustā," *Āyenehkhā-ye nāgahān* (Tehran: Ofoq, 1993), 114-116.

²⁰⁹ Qaysar Aminpur, "Madineh-ye fāzeleh," *Golhā hameh āftābgardānand* (Tehran: Morvarid, 2001), 62.

Writing poetry in support of poverty and the poor was very visible in the works of the first generation of the revolutionary poets and it should therefore be revived. Committed poets of the Islamic republic should not be deceived by the luxurious life.²¹⁰

Poets who touched on such issues received state-sponsored poetry prizes and their verse was largely praised by newly appointed members and directors of the Howzeh during the 1990s and 2000s.²¹¹ The poetry of young Islamic republican poets has inherited the dark imagery of the city, filled with skyscrapers, cafes, smoke, hospitals and its dwellers having been deceived by “westruckness”. Although it falls beyond the timeline of this research, the poem by the young official Abbas Ahmadi, ‘*Parenthetic Poems*’ (*She’rhā-ye mo’tarezeh*, 2013), is worth mentioning in order to briefly note the prevailing rural-versus-urban themes in official poetry:

“*Shahrhā borj-e mast misāzand*
Borjhā botparast misāzand
Sharq-e mā heyf-e gharb vahshi shod,
Mahv dar dud-e kafeh’at kardand.”

The cities build drunk skyscrapers,
 The cities make idol worshippers of people
 Our city, alas, drowned in the vicious West,
 They drowned you in the heavy smoke of the café.²¹²

Islamic republican poets shared the conviction that the village consistently resembled goodness in all its capacity. As we trace the theme of the village through the works of three generations of this trend, similar patterns of the politicisation and romanticisation of the village become apparent. It can even be said that this trend represents a prevailing

²¹⁰ Sa’id Haddadian, “Tavajjoh beh mostaz’afin dar she’r-e Mo’addab jelveh mikonad,” *Farsnews*, accessed 14 October 2014, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13930522000179>.

²¹¹ Ali-Mohammad Mo’addab is a suitable example of this trend. Originally from Afghanistan, Mo’addab was raised in Iran and in his poetry the poor and village life are important components. To read more, see Vahid Jalili, “Marāsem-e nekudāsht-e Mo’addab,” *Ibna*, accessed 18 November 2014, <http://www.ibna.ir/vdcjtie88uqeyyz.fsfu.html>.

²¹² Abbas Ahmadi, “She’rhā-ye mo’tarezeh,” *Shahrestān-e adab*, accessed 15 September, 2013, <http://www.shahrestanadab.com/Default.aspx?tabid=105&articleType=ArticleView&articleId=2176>.

trend within Islamic republican literature.

To sum up, the political environment in which Islamic republican poets of the 1980s and 1990s penned most of their village poetry was one in which the masses had triumphed, at least according to the official view, and where collective interests transcended the individual in representations of the village as a shattered community. The collective and revolutionary 'We' present in the works of Islamic republican poets is thus often portrayed with reference to the village and the idea of a return to collectivity. It is also attached to a mystic belief in the village as an authentic entity in which the individual finds happiness. Moreover, the village manifested the pro-poor ideology of the revolutionary state to a large extent, even though this ideology did not remain fixed and unchanged throughout the course of the revolution. It is crucial, however, to investigate further the roots of this collective discourse as a product of wartime and the ways in which the mystic-militant ideology of warfare took over the theme of the village for a period of eight years. In the chapters to come, we will see how war and post-war literary themes were developed over time through the works of Islamic republican poets. It is also pertinent to bear in mind that despite its wide usage in the Islamic republican poetic discourse, the village theme never coalesced the Islamic republican poets as a distinctive official trend the way that the eight years of war did. It is therefore essential to further explore these eight years as arguably the most crucial period in the formulation of Islamic republican poetry in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. War in Islamic Republican Poetry

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this chapter is to examine the theme of war in the Islamic republican poetry. An acute and manmade form of human catastrophe, warfare has proven a significant force in shaping the imaginations of writers, poets, artists and above all nations throughout the course of history. As the political and ideological agendas of war have been fought out through a succession of destructive military events, literature has, in response, found itself pushed to its ideological, formal and propagative limits. The subject of warfare fills a substantial number of history books, plays and films, both fictive and real, as well as having contributed to the creation of some of the most powerful imageries and narratives in existence in the form of poetry. To take a particularly memorable example, the atrocities of the First World War have been narrated in the works of prominent poets across Europe in the fullest of details, henceforward forming the imaginations of countless post-war generations. When compared to the pre-war period, the form and content of such artistic production underwent fundamental transformations in the face of a radically new reality and mode of human experience. As Hynes notes of the role of poets during the First World War, “The past would have to be reassessed, the history revised, before a theory of art could be formulated that would accommodate it to this horrific presence.”²¹³

Although writing about war has never proved so influential as to avert future conflicts, it has certainly helped in the creation and preservation of accounts of various events that

²¹³ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Pimlico, 1990), 11.

have affected the lives of countless people, sometimes in line with and sometimes outside of and beyond the official, propagandist or restricted narratives provided by the political parties involved. Indeed, it is through wartime writing and its related post-war variations that innumerable forms of literature have reached their apogee and done so at the level of state officialdom as an ideological tool through which to aid in the politics of war. As Ernest Hemingway once wrote in a letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald, war is “the writer’s best subject as it groups the maximum of material and speeds up the action and brings out all sorts of stuff that normally you have to wait a lifetime to get.”²¹⁴

Despite their shared barbarisms, all wars differ from one another in terms of socio-historical context, state ideological apparatus and the form of those historical moments that shape the respective war literature. According to prominent war historian Kate McLoughlin, “the First World War and the lyric poem, the Second World War and the epic novel, Vietnam and the movie, the war on terror and the blog,” to name but a few, are examples of various artistic responses to wars across the world from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.²¹⁵

Similar to other countries at war, the sanguinary eight-year war between Iran and neighbouring Iraq left behind a large body of war writing that subsequently shaped the culture of post-revolutionary Iran. The involvement of the Iranian government in justifying and promoting the war with Iraq, especially between 1982 and 1988, is particularly well

²¹⁴ Ernest Hemingway, *Ernest Hemingway Selected Letters 1917-1961*, (ed.) Carlos Baker (London: Granada, 1981), 176, quoted in: *The Cambridge Companion to War Writing*, (ed.) Kate McLoughlin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 1-2.

documented. The extensive financial and conceptual resources invested in shaping ideological warfare during and after the war has been sufficiently examined elsewhere to render unnecessary further detailed documentation in the present study, the focus of which is the more specific subject of the poetics of the Iran-Iraq War.²¹⁶ In its quest to defend the war, the autocratic state replaced the word ‘war’ with the term ‘Sacred Defence’ which, in Khomeini’s terminology, made reference to acts of self-defence against the enemies of God that were undertaken to protect Islam.

Towards the end of the war, the term Sacred Defence acquired real currency in Iran. It denoted an official reading of the war as well as specifying loyalty and commitment to the state. Moreover, it was a reminder of how the newly established state had survived a prolonged conflict by virtue of internalising the rhetoric of martyrdom within the general population. The question at the core of this chapter, however, is not concerned with a detailed analysis of this particular ideology, since it has been discussed in detail elsewhere,²¹⁷ but instead with the trajectory that it has taken within Islamic republican poetry. The elements that deserve closer scrutiny herein are those that formed this revolutionary ideology through the lens of the official war poetry.

It is possible to discern two trends here. The first of these is official or Islamic republican

²¹⁶ For more information on the culture of war and ideology, see Mateo Mohammad Farzaneh, “Shi‘i Ideology, Iranian Secular Nationalism and the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988),” *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* (2007): 86-103; Roxanne Varzi, *Warring Souls: Youth, Media and Martyrdom in Post-revolution Iran* (United States: Duke University Press, 2006); Robert Johnson, *The Iran-Iraq War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010). *Iranian Perspectives on the Iran-Iraq War*, (ed.) Farhang Rajaee (United States: University Press of Florida, 1997).

²¹⁷ For a detailed account of the Islamic Republic’s ideology of warfare, see Saskia Gieling, *Religion and War in Revolutionary Iran* (London, New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1999).

war poetry, which was largely written by the poets of Howzeh and poets with religious leanings who empathised with the associated ideology of warfare. Despite their ideologically charged content, many of these poems expressed popular sentiments that proved strongly resonant during troubled times. War represented a critical phase for Islamic republican poets since they assumed control of the official literary scene and became the mainstream voice of poetry during the post-revolution era. The second of these trends is that of unofficial or anti-war poetry, the majority of which was written by independent poets who belonged to the Iranian Writers' Association or did not wish to collaborate with state-sponsored institutions such as the Howzeh. Despite harbouring reservations about the state, these poets also wrote about the idea of war as a national concern, but did so from a critical standpoint. Depicting the disappointments of war, rather than praising war, constitutes the main attribute of their work.²¹⁸ This chapter investigates the first of these two trends by focusing on the leading forms and themes that were employed by Islamic republican poets.

Before moving on to an analysis of the poetry concerned, a brief review of, first, the historical context within which the ideology of warfare promulgated by the state came to the fore and, second, its constituent elements, provides the necessary foundations for an understanding of the poetic works written in response to this ideology.

²¹⁸ I briefly refer to this trend in the course of this chapter. However, due to the lack of space a closer investigation of this trend stands beyond the scope of this research. As an understudied subject, it would provide a unique and original research question for future studies.

2. Fundamental Components of the State's Ideology of Warfare

Then the longest modern war in the region, the eight years of warfare between Iran and Iraq (1980-88) claimed more than one million lives. The Islamic republic was, at the time, a newly established government that, while still undergoing a transitional stage, managed to sustain itself throughout eight years of conflict despite remarkable disadvantages. Most notably, it lacked reliable allies and, as a direct consequence, lacked a decent supply of arms.²¹⁹ The fact that the Islamic state could not be defeated in the war can chiefly be ascribed to the cohesive power of its militant Islamic ideology. The clerical state conceptualised war in relation to its religious ideological imperatives, while simultaneously adopting various secular symbols in order to successfully consolidate its power throughout the course of the war and continuously reiterate its ideological stance.

The establishing of an ideology of warfare that at its core possessed the idea of self-flagellation in the name of martyrdom as a Shi'a religious belief was predictable given the unstable standing of the regime in the wake of the revolution and the war, as well as in the light of intensified clashes between opposition groups both inside and outside the country. Apart from a lack of arms and allies, the Islamic republic was also embroiled in a persistent power struggle with its domestic opponents when war broke out.²²⁰ The first round of executions against a Kurdish militant opposition took place shortly after the

²¹⁹ Ralph King, *The United Nations and the Iran-Iraq War* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1987), 15-17; Ray Takveh, "The Iran-Iraq War: A Reassessment," *Middle East Journal*, 64 (2010).

²²⁰ According to Abrahamian, "the revolutionary courts executed 479 political opponents as counter revolutionaries and sowers of corruption on earth in the twenty-eight months between February 1979 and June 1981." See Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 3rd edn. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 181.

revolution and when Saddam Hussein launched the invasion of Iran on 22 September 1980.²²¹

Saddam soon made his mission clear to the Iranian government, attesting that he would not cease the war “until every inch of usurped land was under Arab control.”²²² His first and main target was the southwest oil-rich region of Khuzistan and his final goal the occupation of the capital city of Tehran. Although Saddam soon decided to end the conflict with a ceasefire after having begun the war, under the guidance of Ruhollah Khomeini the Iranian state deployed a rhetoric of rejection towards any ceasefire or talk of compromise with the enemy, choosing instead to mobilise the nation in pursuit of victory. From 1982 onwards, the war continued to make Khomeini’s expansionist dream a prospective reality, the core of which was the export of his revolution to the rest of the world. Other regional conflicts soon became part of the war with neighbouring Iraq. Khomeini’s famous slogan “The road to Jerusalem goes through Karbalā,”²²³ which refers to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the role that Iran played in it, strongly demonstrates the fact that the Islamic republic’s goal in the Iran-Iraq War went far beyond that of a simple victory in a conflict between two countries. For the reasons outlined above then, an all-encompassing ideology of warfare formed a key aspect of this plan.

The ideology of warfare promulgated by the regime comprised five fundamental components. The first and most important of these was the paradigm of Karbalā and

²²¹ To read more about the roots of this conflict, see Dilip Hiro, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq Military Conflict* (United States of America: Routledge; Chapman and Hall. Inc., 1991), 7-40.

²²² Ralph King, *The United Nations and the Iran-Iraq War* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1987), 15-17; Ray Takveh, “The Iran-Iraq War: A Reassessment,” *Middle East Journal*, 64 (2010): 366.

²²³ In Persian: “Rāh-e Qods az Karbalā migozarad”.

Āshurā, which stands out as one of the main pillars of Shi'ite history, ideology and belief to date.²²⁴ In its Shi'ite ideological propaganda, the Islamic republic presented the war as the continuation of the Battle of Karbalā, in which Imam Hosein and his companions had been murdered on the plain of Karbalā. The geographical location of Karbalā during the Iran-Iraq War within the territory of Iraq added resonance to the perception of the war as a holy crusade against various sources of corruption and impiety in the eyes of the Islamic republic. One of the most famous recurring war slogans, borrowed from leading revolutionary ideologue Ali Shari'ati, stated that "Every day is Āshurā, every month is Muharram and every place is Karbalā,"²²⁵ drawing the conflict between the Shi'ite clerical state and the Sunni Ba'athist government of Iraq into a holy lineage of strife stretching back to the seventh century.

War soon became an opportunity for faithful Shi'ites to confirm their faith and pursue Hosein's unfulfilled cause for justice through self-flagellation as an act of martyrdom. Although the Shi'ite mourning tradition had been practiced since the tenth century²²⁶, it was disproportionately promoted within public spaces in the wake of the 1979 Revolution and during the rise of the clerical establishment. Similar to the role played by the Buyids,

²²⁴ Āshurā is the tenth day of the month of Muharram in the Islamic Calendar and denotes the day when the third Shi'ite Imam was murdered along with his family members and companions in the plain of Karbalā at the hands of the Umayyad caliph, Yazid, due to a protracted power struggle. It is arguably the most important mourning ceremony of the Shi'ite community across the world. Similar to Christians who believe that Jesus was crucified to bear the sins of his people, Shi'ite people also believe that Hosein was killed in order to redeem his community.

²²⁵ Ali Shari'ati, *Hosein vāres-e ādam* (Tehran: Qalam, 1981), 348-349.

²²⁶ As Yuhannan Friedmann notes, commemorating the death of Hosein, Mohammad's grandson and his friends and family members in Karbala was practiced during the reign of Buyids after significant developments that occurred in the Twelver Shi'ism under their reign. "Shi'ite luminaries such as Ibn Babuya (d.991), Mufid (d.1022), Murrada (d.1044) and Muhammad al-Tusi (d.1067) flourished the Buyid period." For further details, see Yuhannan Friedmann, "Minorities", *Islamic Political Thought: An Introduction*, Gerhard Bowering (ed.) (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015), 131.

Safavids and Qajars in the popularisation of Āshurā ceremonies, the Islamic republic also reinforced Āshurā mourning and lamentation ceremonies by making *Rawzehkhāni* (eulogies for Shi'ite Imams) a political act. Participation in such ceremonies thus became an indicator of loyalty and commitment to the Islamic ideology of the state. Later during the war, these eulogies were shifted towards a comparative narrative through which the martyrs of Āshurā and those of the Iran-Iraq War were compared and equally venerated. A cursory look at the Islamic republican poetry produced by the official poets of the state during the war reveals the degree to which the paradigm of Karbalā permeated different aspects of Islamic republican ideology. The Āshurā paradigm thus gave the Islamic state immediate impetus and continuing support for the extension of the war to one that ultimately endured for nearly a decade, all of which came with the hope of consolidating power and expanding Iran's territorial might.

Apart from the Karbalā paradigm, in order to sanctify this professed act of defence the regime also employed the Sufi discourse of gnostic love, promoting it as a deep-seated element of Persian culture. In his exhaustive analysis of the status of martyrdom in Iranian history and politics, Manochehr Dorraj demonstrates how martyrdom as a recurring phenomenon throughout the history of Iran is linked to the idea of gnostic love and self-effacement in the Sufi tradition. With its deep-seated roots in Christian unworldliness, Hindu stoicism and Zoroastrian asceticism, both self-castration and self-negation have come to rest at the core of the pervasive celebration of martyrdom as a form of ascetic life

in Iran.²²⁷

Dorraj traces these thoughts in the poetry of the prominent Sufi poet, Rumi (1207-73) and the philosophy of Al-Ghazali (d.1111), both of whom exerted an enormous impact on the Sufi idea of the complete negation of a mundane world ('the killing of *nafs*'). By way of detailed scrutiny of their works, it becomes apparent that "Sufi dervishes, like Buddhist monks and Franciscan Christians, believe that spiritual fulfilment is possible only through the negation of worldly pleasures and material pursuits."²²⁸ Such influences are clear in the works of official war poets, as shown in detail below.

Within the ideology of the Islamic republic, martyrdom is also deeply influenced by Ali Shari'ati's Sufi-oriented, revolutionary lectures and writings. In her ground-breaking anthropological study of youth culture and martyrdom in post-revolution Iran, Roxanne Varzi details the mystical element of the regime's ideology of warfare and the way in which this has partially been shaped by Shari'ati's revolutionary ideas.²²⁹ As Varzi asserts, Sufi terms such as self-construction (*khodsāzi*), self-awareness (*khodshenāsi*) and self-annihilation (*bikhodi*), all of which are borrowed from the works of pioneering mystic poets such as Attar (c.1145-c.1221), Rumi (1207-73) and Sanai (1080-1131), became key words within the state's ideology. The government, however, borrowed such concepts from the works of Ali Shari'ati, one of the pioneering ideologues of the Islamic Revolution

²²⁷ Manocher Dorraj, "Symbolic and Utilitarian Political Value of a Tradition: Martyrdom in the Iranian Political Culture," *The Review of Politics*, 59 (1997): 491. Also to read more on the notion of sacrifice in Zoroastrianism, see William W. Malandra, "Sacrifice in Zoroastrianism," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Last updated 15 March 2010, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sacrifice-i>.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 499.

²²⁹ Roxanne Varzi, *Warring Souls*, 5-10.

in the pre-revolutionary period, who founded his revolutionary thinking on the idea of self-return (*bāzgasht beh khishtan*) as part of the “back-to-roots” movement.²³⁰

Shari‘ati’s works contain one dominant theme, namely “that the true essence of Shi‘ism is revolution against all forms of oppression, especially against feudalism, capitalism, and imperialism.”²³¹ According to Shari‘ati, Hosein’s rebellion against Yazid and his death in Karbalā “was not just because of predestined fate but because of the burning desire to keep alive the content of Islam.”²³² Accordingly, the Karbalā paradigm was made into a moral Sufi paradigm on the basis of which the idea of revolutionary self-sacrifice became venerated. As part of this ideology, in order to reach human perfection one has to complete the phases of self-construction and self-annihilation; only then will socio-political awareness be gained and the devout be able to reach the level of human perfection known as martyrdom, as named by revolutionary ideologues such as Khomeini and Shari‘ati. Through a mixture of Sufi thinking and Shi‘ite accounts, Shari‘ati managed to formulate his radical revolutionary ideology, which later became Shi‘ite Iran’s distinctive contribution in the emergence of what is known in the West as political or radical Islam.

Besides the Shi‘ite paradigm of Karbalā and the Sufi-oriented outlook, another important component of the ideology of warfare was the manner in which it made use of the Qur’an. The Islamic holy text of the Qur’an defines martyrdom not as death but as eternal life in the presence of the Almighty: “And never think of those who are killed in the cause of Allah as dead,” the Qur’an states, “rather see that they are alive with their Lord, receiving

²³⁰ Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, xviii.

²³¹ Ibid., 144.

²³² Ibid.,

provision.”²³³ It continues, “they receive good tidings of favour from Allah and bounty from the fact that Allah does not allow the reward of believers to be lost.”²³⁴ This line became a famous and oft-repeated war slogan for Khomeini, who borrowed the final section of the former quotation above in the original Arabic and merged it with his own mystical jargon: “In their drunken laughter and the happiness of their reunion, the martyrs are alive and receive provision from their Lord.”²³⁵ This sentence became one of the most recurrent statements throughout the Iran-Iraq War, appearing in war graffiti and often accompanied by portraits of martyrs both during and even after the war.

The fifth and final component of the state’s ideology of warfare comprised patriotic elements used to attract those with strong reservations about the regime into joining the rally behind the government and the fight against Iraq. The revolutionary state succeeded in manipulating every possible cultural and religious aspect of common life for the mobilisation of an increasing number of forces against its enemy. To this end, after the rejection of Ferdowsi’s *Shāhnāmeḥ* (*Book of Kings*) as the Iranian national epic, principally due to its secular and patriotic interpretations throughout the Pahlavi era, the Islamic republic evoked certain themes and symbols from this iconic work of literature as a tool by which to reach a wider audience that was not necessarily religious or committed to the Islamic ideology of the state. Precisely how Islamic republican poets benefited from *Shāhnāmeḥ* in the formation of the official literary discourse of war is elucidated in the course of this chapter.

²³³ Surah 2, *Ayah* 169.

²³⁴ Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, 170-171.

²³⁵ “Shohadā dar qahqaḥeh-ye mastānehshān va dar shādi-ye vosuleshān enda rabbehem yorzaqunand.”

The abovementioned ideology of warfare does not seem to have lost its relevance or power to this day. Indeed, as shown in the following chapter, today state-sponsored institutions such as the Howzeh and the Foundation for the Preservation and Publication of War Values (FPW) continue the war commemoration project in the form of a seven-day annual anniversary of the war under the title of ‘The week of sacred defence’ (*Haftah-ye defā ‘-e moqaddas*).²³⁶ As Narguess Farzad notes, “as the years go by the occasion seems to be less of a remembrance of the loss of life” and “more of an assertion of implacable military supremacy.”²³⁷

3. Islamic Republican War Poetry

During the war, poetry functioned as more than simply a form of literary expression in the eyes of the state; it was also a powerful ideological tool that possessed the power to mobilise the people, have them rally behind Khomeini and step up to fight against Iraq. A dedicated follower of mystic poetry, Khomeini had written poems in ghazal form both before and after the revolution²³⁸ and was well aware of the enduring impact of poetry on the Iranian psyche. The memory of the Ten Poetry Nights in the Goethe Institute of Tehran in the years preceding the Islamic Revolution, which had acted as one of the principal triggers for the revolutionary insurgency, was still vivid in Khomeini’s mind. However, those poets who rallied behind the revolutionary cause were soon disheartened by its aftermath, which saw the imprisonment, execution and prosecution of the secular

²³⁶ See chapter 5 for more details.

²³⁷ Narguess Farzad, “Qaysar Aminpur and the Persian Poetry of Sacred Defence,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 30 (2007): 351-74.

²³⁸ For more details on this topic, see Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, “Martyrdom as Piety: Mysticism and National Identity in Iran-Iraq War Poetry,” *Der Islam* 87 (2010): 248-273.

intelligentsia. Most of the members of the Iranian Writers' Association either left Iran or were prosecuted and marginalised in the wake of the revolution. As part of the Islamisation strategy (1980-83) the regime reached out to a new generation of religious literati, hoping to train an alternative group of poets and writers who had spurned the secular mind set of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia and dedicated their verse to the ideals of the revolutionary state.

The work of the new literati engaged in a continual dialogue with two specific groups, that is, the seat of power and the imagined revolutionary community (*ommat-e enghelābi*); the latter of these was a concept created by Khomeini for the promotion of an ideologically exclusive approach towards opposition groups with secular leanings. From 1980 to 1988, official war poetry was heavily subsidised, produced and broadcast by the state as a tactic aimed at reaching its target audience, seen as the potential warriors and defenders of the state's ideology. A number of these poets paid visits to the warzone to offer spiritual support to these warriors by holding poetry sessions. In the photos that survive of these visits, the poets are seen dressed in militant garb and acting as soldier poets.²³⁹

Most of these poets had been among the founders and members of Howzeh and were involved with the Headquarters of War Propaganda (HWP) – a governmental organisation in charge of pro-war propaganda – on a massive scale. Some even met each other for the first time in the warzone. Sa'ed Baqeri recalls his initial encounter with another influential poet of the Islamic republic, Hasan Hoseini:

²³⁹ For example, see photos of Islamic republican war poets in the warzone:
<http://files.wikipg.com//images/kc2/context/files/86%286%29.jpg>;
http://www.tabnak.ir/files/fa/news/1390/2/2/90946_749.jpg.

I saw Hoseini in the Army Headquarters when I was a soldier and a member of the soldiers' singing group. A commander entered the room, greeted me and asked, "whose poems are you singing?" I answered with pride: my own poems sir! At that point I did not recognise the young, charming commander. Later I learned that he was Hasan Hoseini, the famous revolutionary poet.²⁴⁰

Qaysar Aminpur also details occasional visits to the warzone with fellow poets:

In the early phase of the war, I often travelled to the conflict zones along with other revolutionary poets, such as Hasan Hoseini, Salman Harati, Nasrollah Mardani, Sepideh Kashani, Hamid Sabzevari, Hosein Esrafil, Moshfeq Kashani, Sa'ed Baqeri and Soheil Mahmudi, to encourage the soldiers of the war and recite poems for them. We used to read rhymed poetry only, such as quatrains and epic *ghazals* (*ghazal-e hemāsi*).²⁴¹

The poets who tackled the topic of war from a position more or less close to or from within the establishment shared common features in their poetics of warfare, thus participating in a continuing dialogue with the fundamental components of the ideology of warfare propagated by the regime. In the pages that follow the key images, paradigms and forms that characterise the official poetry of war are highlighted. The poems placed under scrutiny in this section have all been taken from poem collections, literary journals and the poetry columns of newspapers written by Islamic republican poets from September 1980 to August 1988, when the ceasefire ended the war.

4. The Paradigm of Āshurā and Karbalā

Following the quest for the revival of the Āshurā tradition, Islamic republican poets identified an incredible potential in the revolutionary rhetoric in terms of formulating a poetics of war. A peculiarly famous verse written by Khoshdel-Tehrani, a zealous

²⁴⁰ Mohaddesi-Khorasani, "Seyyed-va Qaysar dar tangnā budand," *She'r* 67 (Tehran: 2009): 1-10. Both Baqeri and Hoseini became key founding members of the Islamic republican poetry circle in the Centre for the Islamic Art and Thoughts.

²⁴¹ Interview with Qaysar Aminpur, *Rasm-e shaqāyeq* (Tehran: Soroush, 2007), 287.

revolutionary poet, garnered widespread popularity during the early stages of the war was developed around the Āshurā paradigm:

*“Bozorg falsafeh-ye qatl-e shāh-e din in ast
Keh marge sorkh beh az zendegi-ye nangin ast.”*

The great philosophy of our slain Shi‘ite king is that
A red death is better than a shameful life.²⁴²

Part of the discourse proliferated by Islamic republican poets, the Red Death indicated a conceptual shift from a normal and pathetic death, made entirely in vain, to a sacred and glorified self-annihilation under the guise of martyrdom. By late 1980, a large body of *quatrains* and *ghazals*, known as Ashurāian *quatrains* and *ghazals*, appeared in the literary journal of the Howzeh, as well as in state-sponsored poem collections that spoke in praise of a Red Death (*marg-e sorkh*). Initially formulated by Ali Shari‘ati, the concept of the Red Death appears in his revolutionary lectures and does so in reference to the tale of Karbalā. His famous statement, “those who die perform a Hosein-like act and those who live should do as Zeinab, or else they would be akin to Yazid,” gained momentum via the works of Islamic republican poets.²⁴³ Ali Mo‘allem, Hasan Hoseini, Mohamadreza Sohrabinejad, Alireza Qazveh and Sa‘ed Baqeri were among the leading Islamic republican poets who extensively employed Āshurā imagery in their poetry:

*“Hosh dār keh yār-e nāomidi nashavi
Zenhār keh gharhq-e dar palidi nashavi
Raftand hosseiniān-o golgunkafānān
Hosh dār dar in ‘arseh yazidi nashavi.”*

²⁴² Quoted in Mohamadreza Sangari, *Naqd-va barrasi-ye ababiyāt-e defā‘-e moqaddas*, vol. 2 (Tehran: Palizān, 2000), 13.

²⁴³ Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999), 369. The reference to the Zeinab-like life is rooted in the Shi‘ite tradition and implies a life with patience in the face of trouble and hardship. Zeinab was Imam Hosein’s sister and is a sacred figure among Shi‘ites as the role model of morality and patience.

Beware! Not to lose your hope
 Beware! Not to be drown in evil
 Those who were like Hosein are gone in their rose-hued shrouds
 Beware not to become like Yazid in this battle.²⁴⁴

“*‘Ālam hamēh khāk-e Karbalā bāyademān*
Peyvasteh beh lab khodā khodā bāyademān
Tā pāk shavad zamīn zeh abnā’-e Yazid
Hamvāreh Hosein moqtadā bāyademān.”

For us the whole universe must be the dust of Karbalā
 We should constantly whisper the name of God
 Our constant guide must be Hosein until a day comes
 When the earth is purified of the descendants of Yazid.²⁴⁵

As Dorraj notes, “the martyrdom of Imam Hosein is perceived as a cosmic event to restore truth against falsehood and justice against oppression and to heal and redeem the community.”²⁴⁶ According to these poems, in the battle against the *Yazidi* enemy death is the only path by which to reach full human perfection and the ultimate truth that had once been achieved by Imam Hosein and his companions.

For many of the families of the soldiers involved in the war, the idea of their child sacrificing himself, or indeed the thought of them giving their benediction for their child to undergo the revered Red Death, involved taking a courageous and bold decision towards the painful, yet necessary route to martyrdom. The state’s ideological apparatus had to either completely conceal the reality of death or at least sanctify the loss and wounds caused by the war in order to sustain its ideological and thus political power. It chose the latter of these two options since any compromise taken in the course of the war was

²⁴⁴ Alireza Qazveh, *Qatār-e andimeshk* (Tehran: Lowh-e zarrin, 2004), 140. All of these quatrains date back to 1983.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 112.

²⁴⁶ Manochehr Dorraj, “Symbolic and Utilitarian Political Value of a Tradition: Martyrdom in Iranian Political Culture,” *The Review of Politics*, 59 (1997): 495.

considered to indicate the failure of both the revolution and the newly established government. A tremendous effort was made by the state to depict the fathers and mothers of martyrs as heroic figures, calling for them to be praised by society for their sacrifice. They were publicly congratulated for the loss of their children and afforded financial aid by the government. Special governmental institutions, such as The Foundation of Martyrs (Bonyād-e Shahid) or The Foundation of the Disinherited and Disabled (Bonyād-e Mostaz‘afān va Jānbāzān), were established by the state to provide for the financial and spiritual needs of the families of martyrs and disabled war veterans.

Various war poems that were later developed into or heralded as war eulogies used the Karbalā paradigm to persuade the families of martyrs that their sacrifice carried more weight than the lives of their sons. The following ghazal by Hasan Hoseini, written during the early stages of the war (1981), provides an example of a work that echoes this ideological agenda. It is written in the form of a dialogue between a warrior and his mother, with the former trying to persuade his mother about the virtues of joining the battle:²⁴⁷

*“Miravam mādar keh inak Karbalā mikhānadam
 Āz diār-e dur, yār-e āshenā mikhādanam
 Miravam ānjā keh moshtaqāneh bā holqum-e khun
 Jāvdān tārikhsāz-e Karbalā mikhānadam.”*

Oh mother! I am leaving as Karbalā is calling me
 That distant plain, that familiar companion is calling me
 I am going to Karbalā eagerly and with a bloodied throat,
 Where that man who made history is calling me

²⁴⁷ A famous war eulogist who made many of these poems into war eulogies is Sadeq Ahangaran. He is believed to have been one of the main provocative voices during the war that raised the excitement of the youth for joining the battle.

With his bloodied throat he is eagerly calling.²⁴⁸

*“Az Karbalā miāyand, bi-sar vali sarafrāz
Dar maktab-e Hoseini, sarhā talāyehdārand.”*

They are returning from Karbalā, headless but with their heads up
In the order of Hosein, the heads are the vanguards.²⁴⁹

It is essential here that the good and evil spirits of the tale of Karbalā are linked to the contemporaneous figures of the on-going battle, thus Khomeini is portrayed as Hosein and Saddam as Yazid. Under the power of such ideologically charged religious imagery, the idealised and state-sanctioned image of a sectarian war was complete as the innocent Imam of a Shi‘ite nation faced the vicious Sunni and Iraqi ruler, Saddam. In the verse of the war poets working at the time, Hosein’s cry for help was heard from deep in Khomeini’s own throat, from his private mosque and house, known as Jamārān, in the north of Tehran:

*“Bāng-e ‘hal-men-nāser’ az kuy-e jamārān miresad
Dar tariq-e āsheqi ruh-e khodā mikhānadām.”*

Hosein’s cry for help is coming from Jamārān
God’s spirit is calling me to the path of love.²⁵⁰

*“Emruz peikār-e yazidi-o hoseinist
Dar Karbalā-ye mā Hosein-e mā khomeinist.”*

Today the battle is again between Yazid-like and Hosein-like people
In our Karbalā, our Hosein is Khomeini.²⁵¹

Altogether, Iranian troops launched ninety-two operations over the course of eight years of

²⁴⁸ Hasan Hoseini, *Hamsedā bā halq-e Isma‘il* (Tehran: Sureh-mehr, 2005), 31. The poem was first published in the *Sureh Journal* in 1981.

²⁴⁹ Parviz Beygi-habibabadi, “Az Karbalā miāyand,” *Gozideh-ye she‘r-e jang va defā‘-e moqaddas*, (ed.) Hasan Hoseini, (Tehran: Sureh-mehr, 2007), 178.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. The verse makes reference to the famous saying by Hosein-ibn Abi-Taleb in Karbalā when he called for the help of his companions during the last moments of his life. “The Spirit of God” is the literal translation of Khomeini’s forename, Ruhollah.

²⁵¹ Ali Musavi-Garmarudi, *She‘r-e jang* (Tehran: Vezārat-e ershād-e eslāmi, 1983), 198.

war, ten of which were named after either the month of Moharram or Karbalā.²⁵² A number of battalions and divisions, or secret code names for operations, carried the title of Āshurā or Karbalā. Moreover, these battalions and operations were frequently employed as rhyming words in war poems. The following poem by Hosein Esrafilī refers to the famous Operation Karbalā on advance towards Basra, which took place between the 24 and 26 December 1986:

*“Khāb didam dashti az yās asto man
Bāz bu-ye ‘dasht-e Abbas’ asto man
Khāb didam, rowshano ā’inehvār
Khab-e mardān, khāb-e tip-e Zolfaqār²⁵³
Khāb-e gordāni ke dar isār bud
Gharq-e khun dar ‘Karbalā-ye Chār’ bud.”*

I dreamed there was a plain full of jasmine and I
I dreamed there was the ‘fragrant field full of Abbas’²⁵⁴ and I
I dreamed, a bright dream like a mirror
I dreamed of the warriors of *Zolfaqār* brigade
I dreamed of heroes full of devotion
Drowning in with blood in the ‘Karbalā 4 operation’.²⁵⁵

Another Islamic story just as frequently addressed in the works of the official war poets is that of Abraham and (in the Quranic version) the beheading of his son, Isma‘il. Used to reference the sacrosanct act of sacrifice in the course of war, in war poetry the families that had sacrificed their children were reminiscent of Abraham, while those who had lost their lives represented Ismail. Yet this time a sheep was not sent down from heaven to save their lives, instead these soldiers were killed in the war as holy Ismails:

²⁵² Mohammadreza Sangari, *Naqd-va barrasi-ye ababiyāt-e defā‘-e moqaddas*, vol. 2 (Tehran: Palizān, 2000), 13.

²⁵³ *Zolfaqār* is the name of the double-edged, sharp sword of Ali-ibn-Abi-Talib, which is a famous symbol of courage and brevity in the Shi‘ite tradition.

²⁵⁴ The young companion and cousin of Hosein who died in the battle of Āshurā and is a heroic Shi‘ite figure in Iran.

²⁵⁵ Hosein Esrafilī, “Bāl-e takhayyol,” *Gozideh-ye she‘r-e jang*, (ed.) Hasan Hoseini, 234. See also Ahmad Azizi, “Niāyesh-e sahgāh,” *Jomjuri-ye eslāmi newspaper* (Tehran: 1980); Ahmad Azizi, *Keyhān newspaper* (Tehran: 1980) quoted in Mohammadreza Sangari, *Naqd-va barrasi-ye ababiyāt-e defā‘-e moqaddas*, 46.

*“Inān keh beh kholq-o khuy Ismailand
 Dar hādeseh āberu-ye Ismailand
 “Dar goftan-e labayk beh peighambar-e tigh
 Bi-tābtar az gelu-ye Ismailand.”*

In their manners they resemble Ismail
 On the day of the action, they make Ismail honoured
 In their submission to the prophet of the blade
 They are more eager than the throat of Ismail.²⁵⁶

This precise imagery of Ismail came to be more widespread than the Āshurā metaphor among poets of all trends. In his epic and celebrated poem ‘*Ismail*’ (1987), Reza Barahani, a prominent poet and member of the Iranian Writers’ Association, addresses his fellow poet and close friend Ismail Shahrudi (1924-80). In doing so he recalls the above Quranic story by drawing a connection with the actual name of his friend and the slaughters of Iranian youths in the war. This poem represents an exception to the general rule that such religious imagery is rarely found in unofficial war poems and that such poems are often written in the form of free verse:

*“Jang ast Ismail, jang ast
 Va Islma ‘ilha beh rāsti zebh mishavand.”*

There is war, Ismail, there is war
 And Ismails are really being decapitated.²⁵⁷

5. Creating a Generation Fit for War (*nasl-e jang*)

In order to consolidate its power and the culture of martyrdom, the Islamic state had to shape the minds of its younger generations. Moulding the teenager-as-martyr role model

²⁵⁶ Hasan Hoseini, *Hamseda ba halq-e Ismail*, 139.

²⁵⁷ Reza Barahani, *Ismail* (1987), accessed 14 November, 2012, <http://ketabnak.com/comment.php?dlid=16612>.

proved one of the main aims on the cultural agenda and was chiefly accomplished through the works of Islamic republican writers and poets. To cite one particular example, Mohammad-Hosein Fahmideh (1967-80), a thirteen-year-old boy from the city of Qom, left his home without the permission of his parents to join the war in the southern region of Khuzistan in 1980. He was decreed a national hero after he jumped underneath an Iraqi tank to disable it and paid with his life. In his lectures, Khomeini declared Fahmideh a national hero and the actual leader of the revolution.²⁵⁸ This clearly represented an official declaration in support of a nationwide mobilisation of the country's youth, prompting them to rush to the frontline. Indeed, Fahmideh soon became a role model for Iranian teenagers in their school textbooks. A poem by Mohammadreza Abdolmalekian, written in the aftermath of Fahmideh's death, fully captures the way in which the death of Fahmideh and his teenager fellow veterans is depicted as a flight towards eternal life:

*"Az zir-e charkh-e tānk
Parvāz kard o yek setāreh-ye donbāleh-dār shod
Didam keh mortezā
Dar khalvat-e khodā
Khorshidvār raft
Man bā dow chashm-e khish didam
Keh didehbān-e jebhehhā,
bā dow bāl parvāz kard-o raft
Tā bikarān-e 'eshq, tā khalvat-e khodā."*

From the bottom of the tank
He flew away and turned into a blazing star
I saw that Morteza
Was like a sun, moving towards the divine solitude
I saw with my own eyes
That the watcher of the battlefields
Flew with two open wings
To the endlessness of love, to God's solitude.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸ In his commemoration, Khomeini made a statement that was also included in school textbooks: "Our leader is that thirteen-year-old boy who carries a grenade and jumps underneath the Iraqi tank." *Sāzmān-e Tablighāt-e Eslāmi's Official Website*, accessed 16 November 2013, <http://old.ido.ir/a.aspx?a=1387080801>.

²⁵⁹ Mohammadreza Abdolmalekian, *Risheh dar abr* (Tehran: Barg, 1987), 97

Other good examples related to this subject are ‘*The Tenth Day at Noon*’ (*Zohr-e ruz-e dahom*, 1987) and ‘*We Are All Akbar Leylazed*’ (*Mā hameh Akbr-e Leylazedim*, 1987), both written by Qaysar Aminpur. The death of a young veteran, an acquaintance of the poet, the tragic life of Hosein Fahmideh and the dreadful fate of the young companions of Hosein in Karbalā inspire the plots of these two works. ‘*The Tenth Day at Noon*’ takes a heroic youngster and martyr as its protagonist and presents a poetic narrative about war as a sacred cause that has been simplified considerably in order to make it understandable for both children and young adults. In 1986 the book won the annual book prize, thereby increasing its visibility as a significant source of inspiration for a new generation of warriors and nationalists for the Islamic republic:

“*Dāstān-e kudaki tanhā*
Keh shamshir-e bolandash Karbalā rā shokhm mizad
Khun-e u emruz dar raghā-ye gol jārist.
Khun-e u dar nabz-e bidārist.”

The story of a lonely child
 Whose long sword reaped the soil of Karbalā
 And today his blood runs through the veins of the rose
 And through the pulse of consciousness.²⁶⁰

‘*We Are All Akbar Leylazed*’ was included in primary textbooks during the 1980s and recounts the story of martyred student Akbar Leylazed through the perspective of his fellow classmates. The poem ends with a collective affirmation of martyrdom as being the fate of every young adult:

“*Bāz ham avval-e mehr āmadeh bud*
Va mo‘allem ārām
Esmhā rā mikhānd...
Akbar-e Leylazed,
Pāsokhash ra kasi az jam‘ nadād
Bār-e digar ham khānd:
Akbar-e Leylazed

²⁶⁰ Qaysar Aminpur, *Zohr-e ruz-e dahom* (Tehran: Soroush, 1986).

Pāsokhash ra kasi az jam ‘ nadād
Hameh sāket budim
Jā-ye u injā bud
Inak ammā tanhā
Yek sabad lāleh-ye sorkh
Dar kenār-e mā bud
Lahzeh ‘i ba ‘d mo ‘allem sabad-e gold rā did
Shānehhāyash larzid
Nāgahān dar del-e khod zemzemeh ‘i hes kardim
Gol-e faryād shekoft
Hameh pāsokh dādim:
hāzer!
Mā hameh Akbar-e Leylazadim. ”

It was again the first day of Mehr²⁶¹
 And the teacher was reading out the names, slowly
 Akbar Leylazad
 No response
 He asked once again
 Akbar Leylazad
 No response
 We were all silent,
 Here was Akbar’s seat
 But now it was empty
 Filled by a bouquet of tulips instead
 A little later the teacher saw the tulips
 And his shoulders began to tremble
 Suddenly we felt someone was murmuring in our hearts
 We all screamed and replied together
 Present!
 We are all Akbar Leylazad.²⁶²

At this stage, the sense of collectivity that permeated official war poetry was at its peak. This sentiment is particularly palpable in the poets’ use of plural pronouns across a broad range of works in order to create a united image, one that depicts not individuals or factions, but a whole nation at war. Echoing the collectivity furthered in the role of village members, this push to unite people reached its climax in poems about the war supported by the state, the following examples of which give force to this claim:

²⁶¹ On the first day of *Mehr* schools reopen in Iran.

²⁶² Qaysar Aminpur, “Mā hameh Akbar-e Leylazadim,” cited in Yusefali Mirshakak, “Mā va Qaysar-e naqāsh,” accessed 19 October 2014, <http://www.hawzah.net/fa/magazine/magart/6023/6765/80838>.

*“Dar zolmat-e shab cheh sālḥā mu’idim
Tā ‘atr-e tan-e sepideh rā bu’idim
Nilufar-e nurim keh ba risheh-ye khun
Az sineh-ye mordābi-e shab ru’idim.”*

In the darkness of the night, we grieved
Until we smelled the scent of dawn
We are the lightened lilies with our roots in blood
From the night’s swamp we have blossomed.²⁶³

*“Mabādā khishtan rā vā gozārim
Imām-e kufeh rā tanhā gozārim
Zeh khūn-e har shahidi lāleh ‘i rost
Mabādā ruy-e lāleh pā gozārim.”*

God forbid, if we let go of ourselves
And leave the Imam of *Kufeh* alone
From each martyr’s blood grew a tulip
God forbid if we step over the tulip.²⁶⁴

The Āshurā paradigm still remains one of the most powerful and heavily state-subsidised themes in poetry to date. As outlined in detail in the coming chapters, after the war, as part of the war-in-continuation project, a large body of state-funded poetry books were published in praise of Āshurā and martyrdom. Today, Āshurāian poetry (*she ‘r-e Āshurā ‘i*) is officially recognised by the state as a literary genre and many festivals and prizes are dedicated to young Āshurā’ian poets.²⁶⁵

6. The *Shāhnaāmeḥ* in the Service of the War

War as ‘national’ crisis provided a bridging point for all political factions and ideological trends and for a short moment in time secular nationalists converged with religious allies

²⁶³ Mohamadreza Sohrabinejad, “Atr-e Sepideh,” *Gozideh-ye she ‘r-e shā ‘erān-e emruz*, (eds.) Sa’ed Baqeri, Mohamadreza Mohamadi-Niku (Tehran: Anjoman-e Shā ‘erān-e Iran, 2009), 257.

²⁶⁴ Qaysar Aminpur, “Madādā,” *Tanaffos-e sobh*, 125. See also 61-62, 106, 117-118 and 120.

²⁶⁵ For more information on this genre, see chapter 5.

of the regime to confront patriotic concerns greater than their smaller factionalist interests.²⁶⁶ The national epic poem of Iran, the *Shānāmeḥ*, was once again called upon to rally nationalist sentiments at the peak of the war, despite it having been vehemently rejected on eve of the revolution by all groups involved as a reactionary response to the patriotic gesture of the Pahlavi dynasty. The *Shānāmeḥ* and the subject of war share a great deal of tragedy, making this classical epic markedly accessible to the republic's war poets. The bitter fate of Sohrab, the son of Rostam who was murdered by his own father, the tragic death of Siavash and other heroes, gods and demons such as Ahriman, Ahurā-mazdā and Zahhak, all appear in war poems from the period and were employed as motifs through which to recall a shared memory for the ends of mass mobilisation.

Aside from its tragic themes, the epic provided a distinctly convenient and influential literary genre through which to deal with warfare.²⁶⁷ In terms of both its metering and tone, the classical epic genre of the *Shānāmeḥ* constituted a great source of inspiration for the era's war poets, regardless of their ideological inclinations. Several scholars have indeed already noted the importance of the *Shāhnāmeḥ* in the literature of the classical world.²⁶⁸ Since Iran's national epic, the *Shānāmeḥ*, contains ancient accounts of the battles that took place between the Persians and their neighbours, as well as among familial and tribal conflicts under the rule of Persian patrons. It gives a detailed mythical and legendary history, from the country's very first kings and heroic figures to the Muslim conquest of

²⁶⁶ Mateo Mohamad Farzaneh, "Shi'ite Ideology, Secular Nationalism and the Iran-Iraq War", 86-103.

²⁶⁷ *Shānāmeḥ*'s motifs have been used throughout history for long poems about history, warfare and heroic deeds.

²⁶⁸ For example, see Mahmoud Omidzadeh, *Poetics and Politics of Iran's National Epic, The Shāhnāmeḥ* (United States: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Olga M. Davidson, "The Crown-Bestower and the Iranian Book of Kings," *Acta Iranica: Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce* 10 (1985): 61-148; *Poet and Hero in the Persian Book of Kings* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

the seventh century.²⁶⁹ Due to its national significance and the far-reaching impact that it has had on different generations and tendencies, both the unofficial and official poets of the war commonly used the characters and tales of the *Shāhnāmeḥ*.

The official war poets reemphasised the undisputed primacy of the Iranian nation against the Iraqi ‘infidels’ and did so by mixing Shi‘ite and mystic motifs with the epic myths of the *Shānāmeḥ*. Moreover, harbouring their own reservations about the regime, unofficial and independent poets used the imagery of the *Shānāmeḥ* to reflect on the war. To provide a common example of differing uses of the same fundamental motifs between these two trends, Ahriman (Devil), the evil spirit in the dualistic doctrine of Zoroastrians, was employed by poets of all inclinations to describe the enemy during the war.²⁷⁰ A brief comparison of the use of Ahriman in official and unofficial war poetry provides a better understanding of the ways in which these two trends met with the *Shāhnāmeḥ* during the conflict. The following is an example from a famous poem by Simin Behbahani (1927-2014), a former member of the Iranian Writers’ Association and prominent contemporary poet who always remained independent and critical of the state up until her death in 2014. Unlike the majority of Islamic republican poets, who enthusiastically legitimised the war through the employment of the aforementioned imageries, Behbahani voiced her critical position vis-à-vis the ideology of warfare proffered by the regime. In this piece, Ahriman represents a reference to whoever has triggered the war and is willing to sustain it:

“*Mā nemikhāstim jango setiz*

²⁶⁹ For a more detailed account of stories in the *Shāhnāmeḥ*, see Absolqasem Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings*, Dick Davis (trans) (New York: Penguin Classics, 2007); Dick Davis, *Epic and Sedition: The Case of Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh* (Washington: Mage Publishers, 2006).

²⁷⁰ Encyclopedia Iranica, Ahriman: <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ahriman>.

*Khāst ahrimano darighā hast
Lāneh-ye ahreman nashāyad dāsh
Khāneh tā jelvehgāh-e fardā hast."*

We did not want war
It was the enemy who wanted it and alas here it is,
The enemy's house is not worth taking
As long as the homeland mirrors the future.²⁷¹

For Islamic republican poets however, Ahriman was the symbol of multiple foreign enemies: revolutionary monarch Mohamadreza Pahlavi, then president of Iraq, Saddam Hussein, the imperialist West and Israel. The following piece by Hamid Sabzevari provides an example of how Ahriman was often used in reference to Mohamadreza Pahlavi.

*"Sobh-e sādeq, qodrat-e kāzeb shekast
Reshtehhā-ye dām-e ahriman gosast."*

The earnest dawn broke the fraudulent power
And tore apart the demon's trap.²⁷²

*Farmān resid in khāneh az doshman begirid
Takht-o negin az dast-e ahriman begirid
"Bar jā-ye mā bigāneh nang ast ey barādar
Bāyad beh sineh raft az injā tā Felestin."*

The order was received: take back the home from the enemy
And the throne and the jewels from the demon.
It is a shame to let the enemy dwell in our land
We should crawl all the way from here to Palestine.²⁷³

Capturing the demon represented another recurring theme in these poems, a theme that was again clearly borrowed from the mythical White Demon (*div-e sepid*) of the

²⁷¹ Simin Behbahani, "Mā nemikhāstim ammā hast," *Majmu'eh-ye ash'ār* (Tehran: Negah, 2005), 613-619.

²⁷² Mollasadra Institute, *Ketāb-e fārsi-ye dovvom-e rāhnama'i*, accessed 19 September 2013, <http://mmts7.blogfa.com/post/6>.

²⁷³ He refers to "crawling" as a militant term. Hamid Sabzevari, "Hampā-ye jelowdār," *Howzehonline*, accessed 18 December 2014, <http://www.hawzah.net/fa/magazine/magart/130/6120/64725>. Also, to read more on the *Shānāme* motifs in official war poetry, see Mahvash Vaheddust, "Bāznmā'i-e 'anāsor-e hamāsi-ye hambastegi-ye melli dar she'r-e defā'-e moqaddas," *Faslāme-ye pajuheshi-ye motale'āt-e melli* 54 (2013): 50-72.

Shānāmeḥ. A manifestation of evil, the White Demon was ensnared and killed by Rostam, the mythical hero of the *Shāhnāmeḥ*. In the case of related war poems, along with Ahriman, Div clearly furnished yet another metaphor for the enemy:

*“Mardi beh mardī div rā dar band kardeh
Bā sarkhoshān-e āsemān peyvand kardeh.”*

He is truly a man who has courageously captured the demon
And been united with the light-hearted heaven dwellers.²⁷⁴

In ‘*A Masnavi for Martyrs*’ (*Masnavi-e shahidān*, 1980), another successful example of a war epic, Hoseini recalls the famous tale from the *Shānāmeḥ* in which hungry snakes grow out of Zahhak’s shoulders after Ahriman has kissed him.²⁷⁵ In order to satiate their hunger and stop them from feeding on himself, Zahhak was forced to feed them with human brains. Hoseini adopts this imagery in order to make reference to the enemy’s lust for killing during the war:

*“Dar bāghhā jā-ye senowbar dār mirost
Bar ketf-e zolmāt sāqehhā-ye mār mirost
Mārān sar az surākh birun mikeshidand
Maghz-e sar-e nāmāvarān rā mimakidand.”*

In the gardens, gallows were growing instead of pine trees
Snakes were growing out of the shoulders of darkness
The snakes were coming out of their holes
To feed on noble men’s brains.²⁷⁶

In some examples, an imitation of the tone, rhythm and imagery of the *Shānāmeḥ* reaches its climax. For example, in a poem by Ali Musavai-Garmarudi, one of the pioneers of religious poetry before and after the revolution, the tone, meter and lexicon come

²⁷⁴ Ali Mo‘allem-Damqani, “Rej‘at-e sorkh-e setāreh,” *Āvāzhā-ye nasl-e sorkh* (ed.) Abdoljabbar Kakai (Tehran: Oruj, 2005), 20. See also Nasrollah Mardani, *Khunnāmeḥ-ye khāk* (Tehran: *Keyhān*, 1985), 38.

²⁷⁵ Zahhak is the mythical evil character in the *Shāhnāmeḥ*.

²⁷⁶ Hasan Hoseini, “Masnavi-ye shahidān,” *Hamsedā bā halq-e Ismāil*, 32.

remarkably close to those of the *Shānāmeḥ*. The commonalities reach such a level that we might easily confuse the work with the original *Shāhāmeḥ* with the references to the Islamic faith:

*“Yeki zesht kaftār-e pir-e palid
Hami khāst tā nowghazāli darid
Konun panjeh-ye shirmardān-e shir
Geluyash bekhāhad feshordan delir[...]
Nahangān-e daryā-ye Islam-o nur
‘Oqābān-e owj-e boland-e ghorur.”*

A dreadful, old, evil hyena
Wanted to tear apart a young gazelle
Now the claws of the brave, lion-like men
Strangle the hyena’s throat
They are the whales of the ocean of Islam and light
And the eagles of the highest peak of pride.²⁷⁷

Yet Āshurā, the Qur’an and the *Shānāmeḥ* did not appear to have the capacity to sooth the sense of loss and death that had been brought about by the war. The idea of gnostic love, reunion with the Beloved and the Sufi tradition of spiritual drunkenness were thus called into action by Islamic republican poets to offer a perfect and tidy image of a cynical war, as explained below.

7. The Mystification of the Poetics of War: Death and the Path to the Beloved

As war broke out the authors of state-sponsored literary journals made it clear that to write the poetry of war with commitment resembled walking along a spiritual path (*tariqat*) that ultimately led to an encounter with the beloved. If one were to seek the truth as a writer, he or she had to be either martyred or dedicate his/her words and thoughts to the cause. In an

²⁷⁷ Ali Musavi-Garmarudi, *She ‘r-e jang*, 201.

anonymous introductory note written under the title of *On the Path of Poetry (Andar tariqat-e shā'eri*, 1982), the principles of writing poetry are detailed as follows:

And you! Muslim brothers and sisters! Read the Qur'an carefully to see how it differentiates a real poet and a disloyal one as it separates untruthful people from real believers [...] and beware that with your poetic capabilities you should only write poetry for the sake of the Almighty [...] when you pen a poem imagine yourself before Him and be aware of misleading, transient yearnings.²⁷⁸

On the eve of war, a shift towards Sufi poetry and mystical themes began to demarcate a new way of reflecting on the conflict. Looking back into the history of Persian Sufi poetry, it is fairly obvious that after the Mongol invasion both the Sufi orders and poetry became prevalent methods by which writers could dissociate themselves from the real scenes of destruction and abyss that had been left by the Mongols. Taking refuge in mystical concepts enabled poets to minimise the tragic outcomes of the era through motifs that pivoted upon various transcendental concepts. Similarly, besides the emotional and ideological attachments held by Islamic republican poets in relation to classical poetry, during the war with Iraq the idea of taking refuge in mysticism offered an opportunity to begin a process of distancing in light of the devastated scenes of everyday life.

Yet a sharp line should be drawn between these two forms of mystical poetry. As Seyed-Gohrab notes in his article on the poetry of the Iran-Iraq War, mystic motifs traditionally employed in classical literature as a way to advocate love, peace and piety, “were transformed during the Iran-Iraq War into the violent and bloody reality of war.”²⁷⁹ Most

²⁷⁸Unknown, “Andar tariqat-e shā'eri,” *Sureh* 5 (1982): 9-11.

²⁷⁹ Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, “Martyrdom as Piety: Mysticism and National Identity in Iran-Iraq War Poetry,” *Der Islam* 87 (2010): 249.

such motifs were only used to distract readers from the actual brutality of the war, replacing it instead with the pleasant experience of drinking wine, for example. References to wine (*mey*), which was used extensively by religious poets in reference to the pleasant state of martyrdom, proved particularly ironic in an era when drinking alcohol was strictly banned and those who did imbibe it were often lashed publicly during the early stages of the revolution:

*“Chenin keh rizad qadah qadah mey,
az in rahiḡ āyad ān zamāni
Keh joz shahādat barā-ye raftan,
dalil-e mohkamtari namānad.”*

The way that this wine flows glass after glass out of the jar
A time will come that no valid reason is left for leaving but martyrdom.²⁸⁰

*“Bidāri-o cheshm-e tow beh khābist shegeft
Ān nur keh khordeh ‘i sharābist shegeft
Khoffāsh magar khun-e tow binad dar khāb
Har qatreh-ye khunat āftābist shegeft.”*

You are awake but your eyes are marvellously drunk
That light you have drunk is a phenomenal wine
The bat can only dream about your blood
Every drop of your blood is a wondrous sunshine.²⁸¹

Within the mystic literary tradition, the contrast between reason (*‘aql*) and love (*‘eshq*) is a recurring theme. Najm-al-Razi, the thirteenth-century Persian Sufi, once said, “There is a contrast between reason and love. Where love lands, reason departs.”²⁸² The same approach can be found in the works of the war poets. In *‘Journey’ (Safar, 1980)* by Aminpur, a contrast is made between love and the lover and the quality of reason, thus

²⁸⁰ Abdoljabbar Kakai, “Oqāb-e heyrat,” *Shā‘erān-e emruz* (eds.) Sa‘ed Baqeri, Mohammad Mohammadi-Niku, 91.

²⁸¹ Qaysar Aminpur, “Har qatreh-ye khun,” *Tanaffos-e Sobh*, 104.

²⁸² Najm-al-din Razi, *Mersād-ol-ebād-men-al-mabda’-elal-ma‘ād*, (ed.) Mohamadamin Riahi, (Tehran: Katibeh, 2003), 59. Also, to read more on mystical motifs in official poetry of war, see Nargess Mohammadi, Enayatollah Sharif, “Barrasi-ye mazāmin-e ‘erfāni dar she‘r-e defā‘-e moqaddas,” *Ababiyāt-e pāidāri* 1 (2009): 89-112.

underlining a recurring literary reference in Sufi poetry that is repeated six times in this piece alone. Such poems were written in meters that were frequently employed in the mystic poetry of Rumi, which with its swift and thumping tone makes it apposite for conversion into war songs:

*“Khun-e gelu-ye ‘āsheqān, āb-e vozu-ye ‘āsheqān
Zānke beh ku-ye ‘āsheqān, ‘aql gozar nemikonad
Bihodeh nist ‘āsheqi, vāy keh chist ‘āsheqi
Bikhabarist ‘āsheqi, ‘eshq khabar nemikonad.”*

The blood of lovers’ throats is their ablution water
There is no way for reason in the lovers’ lane
Love is not worthless, oh what is love?
Love is oblivion, love will not warn you before it arrives.²⁸³

*“Shod beh pāyān garcheh zekr-e in shahid
Kas hadis-e ‘eshq rā pāyān nadid
Nist pāyān dāstān-e ‘eshq rā
‘Aql key dānad zabān-e ‘eshq rā.”*

Although the commemoration ceremony of this martyr is over
No one has seen the end of a love story
There is no end to a story of love
How would reason know the language of love.²⁸⁴

Flying (*paridan*), light (*nur*), dawn (*sahar*), eagerness (*showq*), endorsement (*ejābat*), sorrow (*gham*) and the day of covenant (*ruz-e alast*²⁸⁵), madness (*jonun*) to name but a few, fall among the mystical literary idioms frequently employed in such poems.²⁸⁶ The allegory of flying deserves particular attention due to the fact that it portrays the scene of one’s fall to death in a somewhat contrasting manner:

*“Delā barāy-e paridan, na yek daricheh na rowzan
Beh jā-ye halqeh beh sar zan dar-e sarā-ye shahādat.”*

²⁸³ Qaysar Aminpur, “Safar,” *Tanaffos-e sobh*, 36.

²⁸⁴ Mahmud Shahrakhi, *Tajalli-ye ‘eshq* (Tehran: Komiteh-ye enteshārāt, 1999), 40.

²⁸⁵ The day of God’s primeval covenant with man, see Qur’an 7:171.

²⁸⁶ For a detailed explanation of the mystic concepts in Persian poetry, see J. T. P. de Bruijn, *Persian Sufi Poetry: An Introduction to the Mystical Use of Classical Poems* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997).

O, heart! There is no direction to fly in
 Neither a window nor an opening
 Knock on the door of martyrdom's palace
 Not with the door knocker but with your head.²⁸⁷

*"Khun-e khorshid ast yā zakhm-e jabin-e 'āsheqān
 Mineshānad inchenin dar ātash-e suzān marā
 Gharq-e khun besyār didi 'āsheqān rā saf-beh-saf
 Hān bebin inak beh khun-e khishtan raqsān marā."*

Is this sun's blood or the wound on the forehead of the lovers?
 Which one puts me in the burning fire like this?
 You have seen so many lovers soaked in their own blood
 Now look at me! I am dancing in my own blood.²⁸⁸

In the case of the second excerpt, dancing, as it is understood as the equivalent of martyrdom, is borrowed from the tradition of *Samā'*, an important ceremonial ritual in Sufism that includes dancing, the playing of instruments and spinning in a circle (Sufi Whirling). In poetic terms this Sufi whirls in a bloodbath, for a martyr never dies but only dances in his own blood:

*"Ey khoshā zeh khod raftan, mast-e khalseh 'i khunin
 Sarkhosh az samā 'i sorkh, 'ārefāneh raqsidan."*

Privileged is the one who dies in bloodied ecstasy
 While being thrilled and engaged in a red Sufi dance.²⁸⁹

*Sarkhoshāni keh dar sama 'i sorkh
 Pāykubān-o dastafshānand.*

The drunken men who are in a red whirling dance
 [Like Sufis] stamping and clapping hands.²⁹⁰

*"Bebin khānqāh-e shahidān-e 'eshq
 Saf-e 'ārefān-e ghazalkhān-e 'eshq
 Cheh jānāneh charkh-e jonun mizanand
 Daf-e 'eshq bā dast-e khun mizanand."*

²⁸⁷ Qaysar Aminpur, "Ghazali barā-ye shahādat," *Jong-e sureh* (1982): 25. The last line is a Persian idiom about proving one's eagerness.

²⁸⁸ Zakaria, Akhlaqi, "Qasd-e daryā," *Gozideh-ye she'r-e jang*, (ed.) Hasan Hoseini, 164.

²⁸⁹ Qaysar Aminpur, "Rāz-e parvāz," *Tanaffos-e sobh*, 67.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, 40. See also Shirinali Golmoradi, *Sedāhā-ye shahidestān* (Tehran: Shāhed, 1999), 26-46.

Look at the Khaneqāh²⁹¹ of the martyrs on the path of love
 Look at the line of the mystic men who sing the song of love
 How passionately they whirl, a round of madness
 They play the tambourine of love with bloodied hands.²⁹²

Martyrs are also often characterised as transcendental saints that possess miraculous qualities, one of which is to shine their inner light on those who lead a mundane life and show them the right path by which to reach the ‘beloved’ through self-annihilation. It should also be remembered here that the origin of this light is often linked to the seat of power held by the representative of God on earth, the guardian jurist:

*“Amir-e qāfeleh-ye nur midahad farmān
 Beh ‘arsehgāh-e shahādat hamāreh bāyad raft.”*

The commander of the army of light gives the order:
 One must constantly yearn for martyrdom.²⁹³

*“Nushidan-e nur-e nāb kārīst shegeft
 In porsesh rā javāb, kārīst shegeft
 To guneh-ye yek shahīd rā busīdī?
 Busīdan-e āftāb kārīst shegeft.”*

Drinking pure light is a wonder
 Answering this question is a wonder
 Did you kiss a martyr’s cheek?
 Kissing the sun is a wonder.²⁹⁴

The ‘commander of the army of light’ is an allusion to Khomeini, who, having launched the war against Iraq in 1980 following the Iraqi offensive, was often referred to in official war poetry in mystical terms. In the quatrain ‘*Vanguard*’ (*Talāyehdār*) written between 1980 and 1984, Aminpur depicts Khomeini as a transcendental being with mystical features:

²⁹¹ This is the name of the gathering place for Whirling Dervishes.

²⁹² Hasan Hoseini, “Masnavi-ye ‘āsheqān,” *Hamsedā bā halq-e Ismail*, 41.

²⁹³ Nasrollah Mardani, “Samand-e sā‘eqeh,” *Khunnāmeḥ-ye khāk* (Tehran: *Keyhān*, 1984), 89.

²⁹⁴ Qaysar Aminpur, “Porsesh,” *Tanaffös-e sobh*, 100. This and other war quatrains by Aminpur were penned between 1979 and 1983 and were published in 1983 for the first time in *In the Lane of the Sun* (*Dar kucheḥ-ye āftāb*).

*"Mardi keh talāyehdār-e mardān-e khodāst
Az tāyefeh-ye nurnavardān-e khodāst
Qotbi ke madār-e cheshm-e u qeblehnamāst
Qalbāsh gol-e āftābgardān-e khodāst."*

A vanguard leader for the men of God
Akin to the seekers of the light of God
A direction, whose glance manifests a compass,
Whose heart is a sunflower in worship of God.²⁹⁵

It is notable that there exists almost no hint of collapse or destruction when it comes to the official poetic articulation of death during warfare. Official war poetry was clearly in denial as far as death through martyrdom was concerned, as is expressly evident in those poems written between 1981 and 1984 when martyrdom was described as a flight to the eternal world:

*"Samand-e marg beh meydān-e nisti tāzid
Ravand-e budan-e āyandeh rā beh ham bezanid."*

Ride the horse of death in the land of oblivion
And in doing so, unsettle the order of the future.²⁹⁶

*"Ruzikhorān-e sofreh-ye 'eshqand tā abad
Ey zendegān-e khāk magu 'id mordehand."*

They receive provision from the spear of love
Oh the living crowd on earth! Do not say they are dead.²⁹⁷

*"Bi-marg savārān-e shab-e hādesehhā 'id
Khorshid-e negāhid-o dar āfāq rahā 'id."*

You are the eternal horsemen of eventful nights
The eyes shine like a sun with your light, you are flying in the skies freely.²⁹⁸

It would be no exaggeration to note that without the transformation of the war into a mystical ritual, the ideology of warfare would never have endured for nearly a decade.

²⁹⁵ Qaysar Aminpur, "Porsesh," *Tanaffös-e sobh*, 89.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 6.

²⁹⁷ Hasan Hoseini, "Ānān keh halq-e teshneh beh khanjar sepordehand," *Hamsedā bā halq-e Ismail*, 16.

²⁹⁸ Salman Harati, *Dari beh khāneh-ye khorshid* (Tehran: Soroush, 1987), 89.

War itself was transformed into a journey of love (*rāh-e ‘eshq*);²⁹⁹ death was depicted via ascension and the ascension and ultimate reunion with the beloved (*me‘rājo vahdat-e bā ma ‘shuq*); martyrdom was treated equally so, and regularly compared with drunkenness;³⁰⁰ warriors were portrayed as lovers³⁰¹ and Sufi dancers³⁰² depicted as descendants of historical mystical figures such as Mansur Hallāj³⁰³ and the *sarbehdārs*.³⁰⁴

*“Shahr-e shahādat rā basi khunjāmehgānand
Kohneh-harifānand-o masti mitavānand.”*

In the city of martyrdom, they live with their bloodied garments
They are old drinking companions who can handle their drunkenness.³⁰⁵

*“Az nasl-e sorkh-e sarbehdārān-e salahshur
Nāmāvarān-e khetteh-ye dār-o tanāband.”*

They are descendants of the brave Sarbehdārs
The noble men of the district of gallows and ropes.³⁰⁶

*“Bā Zoljanāh-e nur tā me‘rāj rāndand
Tā va ‘dehgāh-e ‘eshq tā Hallāj rāndand.”*

They galloped with *Zoljanāh* to ascension³⁰⁷
And to rendezvous with love, with Hallāj.³⁰⁸

²⁹⁹ Hamid Sabsevari, *Sorud-e sepideh* (Tehran: Keyhān, 1989), 105; 423.

³⁰⁰ Alireza Qazveh, *Az nakhlestān tā khiābān* (Tehran: Hamrāh, 1989), 12; Hosein Esrafilī, *‘Obur az sa‘eqeh* (Tehran: Komiteh-ye enteshārāt, 1999), 10; Hamid Beigi-habibabadi, *Ān hamisheh sabz* (Tehran: Komiteh-ye enteshārāt, 1999), 11.

³⁰¹ Mohamadreza Abdolmalekian, *Risheh dar abr* (Tehran: Barg, 1986), 102.

³⁰² Nasrollah Mardani, *Khunnāmeḥ-ye khāk*, 10.

³⁰³ Mansur-al-Hallāj (c. 858 – 26 March 922) was a Persian mystic, rebel and writer executed for his mystic beliefs following the orders of the Abbasid caliph, Al-Moqtader. His crime was to reclaim the absolute truth and refer to himself as the manifestation of this truth. His mystic interpretation of Islam was not tolerated and he was killed after having been accused of heresy. In official war poetry he is a venerated and truth-seeking figure.

³⁰⁴ Literal meaning, “head on the gallows”; Sarbehdārs were dervishes from Western Khorasan who ruled over this district in the mid-fourteenth century during the reign of the Ilkhanid. Originally from Sabsevar of Khorasan, the sarbehdars were known for divisions in their religious beliefs. Their rulers were a mixture of Shi‘ites and Sunnis. For further information about this Sarbehdārs, see <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sarbedars>.

³⁰⁵ Hamid Sabsevari, *Sorud-e sepideh*, 103. Also, see Alireza Qazveh, *Az nakhlestān tā khiyābān*, 77; Abdoljabbar Kakai, *Āvāzhā-ye vāpasin* (Tehran: Hamrāh, 1989), 70.

³⁰⁶ Hasan Hoseini, *Hamsedā bā halq-e Ismail*, 12.

³⁰⁷ *Zoljanāh*, literal meaning, Pegasus, is the special name for Hosein’s horse on the day of Āshurā; it is considered a sacred animal in the Shi‘ite tradition.

³⁰⁸ Hasan Hoseini, *Hamsedā bā halq-e Ismail*, 28.

8. Encountering Death through Colours

The romantic face of war had to be colourful as opposed to dark and black, indeed death was to be designated a blissful event tinted with allegories based in the natural world. Accordingly, yellow, red, white and green were the most frequently used colours in this ideological construction and hence deserve much closer scrutiny. Green, white and red compose the three main colours of the Iranian national flag and thus gained added attention for their patriotic symbolism. Green as the colour of spring and life in the Persian culture of literature was styled as the principal colour of Islam, as well as that of life and the rebirth of the martyr. Red became the most frequent colour to be found in war poetry, signifying martyrdom and revolutionary revolt. One of Aminpur's early quatrains, which carries the patriotic title of 'Flag' (*Parcham*, 1981), is particularly noteworthy within this context. In the opening line of the poem, the nation's martyrs are described as the leading representatives of the nation, a portrayal of these fallen figures that was also persistently on display on the walls of the country's cities and towns, as well as in the cinemas and on the television channels that were operational during the war:

*"In parcham, khuy-e 'āsheqān rā mānad
Sabz ast va kuy-e 'āsheqān rā mānad
Espid cho ru-ye 'āsheqān pish-e khodāy
Sorkh ast vozuy-e 'āsheqān rā mānad."*

This flag mirrors the lovers' morals
It is green as the lovers' neighbourhood
It is white as the shining face of the lovers before God
It is red as if lovers rinse their hands in their blood.³⁰⁹

*"Kābus-e marg tā begorizad zeh cheshm-e khāk
Faryād-e sorkh-e hādeseh bar khāb-e 'ālamand."*

³⁰⁹ Qaysar Aminpur, "Parcham," *Jong-e sureh* 2 (1981): 43.

To make the nightmare of death flee from this soil
[Martyrs] remain a red scream in the world's dream.³¹⁰

The above reference to a Red Death also occurs when speaking of an encounter with death in terms of colours. For Shari'ati, Red Death and, in a broader sense, Red Shi'ism (*tashayyo '-e sorkh*) proved crucial concepts for the articulation of revolutionary resistance, as well as constituting an allusion to the true essence of Shi'ism. It stood in contrast to Black Shi'ism (*tashayyo '-e siāh*), the quietist and most compromising approach to religion in general, as well as the role played by quietist Shi'ite clerics vis-à-vis political power during the pre-revolutionary period. In the poetry of war, the colour red also refers to Shari'ati's idea concerning Red Shi'ism:³¹¹

*"Ānān keh beh marg-e sorkh labkhand zadand
Peimāneh-ye haq Hosein-mānand zadand."*

Those who smiled at the Red Death
Drank from the Lord's cup in a Hosein-like manner.³¹²

In his informative article about the dynamics of colours in the poetry of Aminpur, Mahmud Fotuhi identifies three colours as the three distinct voices or ideological tendencies that run through the poetry of Aminpur, who is used as an example of a revolutionary poet. Fotuhi also recognises the colour red as a dynamic and revolutionary colour in Aminpur's poetry during 1979-87 and one which, for him, proves indicative of the poet's revolutionary idealism.³¹³ Fotuhi's argument can be used as a guide through which to understand the nature of Islamic republican poetry during the course of the war,

³¹⁰ Sa'ed Baqeri, "Faryād-e hādeseh," *Jong-e sureh* 2 (1981): 175.

³¹¹ Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati*, 365.

³¹² Sa'ed Baqeri, "Sorud-e takbir," *Jong-e sureh* 2 (1981): 177.

as is evident in the following lines by Sediqeh Vasmaqi:

*“Lālehhā dar rāh-e sorkh-e entezār
Parparand az eshtiyāq-e ru-ye yār.”*

In the red path of waiting [for martyrdom],
The impatient tulips wilt
In their longing to see the face of the beloved.³¹⁴

The poem ‘*Who is this Green Red?*’ (*In sabz-e sorkh kist?*, 1980), written by Aminpur, presents another unique example of the symbolic use of colours at the point at which the work reaches its climax. In addition to their national significance, here green and red are used to signal life and death and reflect the poet’s perplexity in dealing with martyrdom as a simultaneously sublime and deathly event. Grey and neutral (*birangi*) are two other colours that represent two historical periods: 1987-1999 is the period of disillusionment and 1999-2000 is the period of isolation and individualist intuitions, respectively.³¹⁵

*“In sabz-e sorkh kist?
In sabz-e sorkh chist keh mikārid? ...
U rā chenān keh khāst
Bā ān lebās-e sabz bekārid
Tā chon hamisheh sabz bemānad
Tā chon hamisheh sabz bekhānad
U rā vaqti keh kāshtand
Ham sabz bud, ham sorkh
Angāh
Ān yār-e biqarār
Ārām dar hozur-e khodā āsud
Har chand sorkh-e sorkh beh khāk oftād
Ammā
In ebtedā-ye sabzi-ye u bud.”*

Who is this green red?
What is this green red you plant?
Plant it how it wanted to be planted
With its green attire

³¹⁴ Sediqeh Vasmaqi, “Bed‘at-e āfarinesh,” *Jong-e Sureh* 6 (1984): 217.

³¹⁵ To read more, see Mahmud Fotuhi, “Seh sedā, seh rang, seh sabk,” *Adabpajuhi* 5 (2007): 9-30.

So it will stay green forever
 So it will sing green forever
 When they planted him
 He was both green and red
 And then,
 That anxious soul
 Went to rest, peacefully, in God's presence
 He had fallen to the ground drowned in red,
 But,
 This was only the beginning of his greenness.³¹⁶

Nature has a strong presence in this poem since the martyr resembles a tree that is soon to be planted. The poet consciously avoids employing a macabre discourse that revolves around the stark imagery of death, represented by words such as blood, grave, shroud or burial. He alternatively uses colours and nature-oriented concepts and verbs: red refers to blood, green garments to a shroud and the planting of the tree symbolises the burial. There is an on-going conflict between 'red' and 'green' that operates as an allegory for the tension between life and death, reflecting the paradoxical relationship between the two. The line, "When they planted him, he was both green and red," alludes to a state of being both alive and dead at the same time, thus echoing an idea that lay at the heart of the ideology of warfare. Here blood represents a pure source for the act of ablution. In the following lines by Mohamadali Mohamadi, Dezful, a southern city located at the heart of the warzone, resembles a human being baptised in a pool filled with blood:

*"Dar howz-e sorkh-e āyenehhā, Dezful
 Ghosl-e Tolu' kard."*

In the red pool of the mirrors, in the dawn
 Dezful baptised herself.³¹⁷

³¹⁶ Qaysar Aminpur, "In sabz-e sorkh kist?," *Tanaffos-e sobh*, 25-26. See also Salman Harati, *Dari beh khāneh-ye khorshid*, 93.

³¹⁷ Mohammadali Mohammadi, "Al'azhar," *Jong-e sureh* 2 (1981): 51.

9. The Romanticisation of War Through Nature

As a trend under the sharp influence of *Sabk-e Hendi* in particular and classical literary jargon in general, Islamic republican war poetry is filled with allegories of nature. The natural motifs in the classical literary tradition were mostly used to describe the beauty of the natural setting. However, during the war most borrowings from nature were used in an abstract manner and operated within an illusory framework with no recourse to a real natural setting. In other words, depicting nature became a tool for simultaneous literary resistance and propaganda. As the war dragged on and continued to diminish the landscapes that comprised the country's warzones, official war poets began to rebuild this lost nature in their verse. An extensive use of natural allegories to describe Iran's warriors and their acts of martyrdom ultimately led to a romanticisation of the war, especially during the peak of the conflict between 1983 and 1986.

This concentrated presence of imageries drawn from nature, the constant creation and use of imageries far from reality, and high doses of literary devices such as personification, alliteration and allusion, all employed in official war poetry, should be understood in light of the revival of the Indo-Persian literary school, the name of which was coined *Sabk-e Hendi* (also known as *Sabk-e Isfahani*) by Mohamad-Taqi Bahar. Having initially emerged in sixteenth-century India and Iran under the reign of the Safavids, *Sabk-e Hendi* "was overwhelmingly associated with the Ghazal," with its highly mystical tone and abstract

poetic thought.³¹⁸ Both Khomeini and Khamenei were thoroughly engaged with this particular literary style, especially in relation to two of its founding and leading poets, Sa'eb Tabrizi and Bidel Dehlavi. Their interest in this literary school encouraged Islamic republican poets to recruit the same lexicon in order to thrill their leaders.³¹⁹ The revival of *Sabk-e Hendi* was even perceived by some poets as the main cause for the rise of the Ghazal as the leading genre of the post-revolutionary period and also for building the gap between the pre- and post-revolutionary poets.³²⁰

According to Ne'mat Mirzazadeh, who met Khamenei through his involvement in the Mashhad poetry circles, as a young cleric he knew most of Sa'eb's poems by heart and was keen on practicing similar motifs and metaphors in his own poetry.³²¹ Khomeini was also a writer of *ghazal*, an activity he occupied himself with throughout his lifetime, and

³¹⁸ A lack of interest in prosodic themes of poetry among Safavid kings, especially Shah Tahmasp, drove the majority of Persian poets working during this period to the Indian court, where patrons embraced their verse with interest. Three main features of this literary style are an extensive usage of natural imagery and highly melodramatic themes and metaphors, both of which are incorporated into the classical *ghazal* form. To read more on Sabk-e Hendi, see Paul E. Losensky, *Welcoming Fighani: Imitation and Poetic Individuality in the Safavid-Mughal Ghazal* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1998). Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, "Stranger in the City: The Poetics of Sabk-e Hendi," 2011, accessed 12 October 2014, http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealc/pritchett/00fwp/srf/sabkihindi/srf_sabk_i_hindi.pdf.

³¹⁹ The influence of *Sabk-e Hendi* on the mind set and worldview of the revolutionary leaders and poets of the Islamic republic deserves to be independently studied due to deep links between the two. However, a brief overview of the major classical literary schools will help to situate *Sabk-e Hendi* in the history of Persian literature will suffice here. Three major trends are identifiable in the history of classical Persian literature: the Khorāsāni or Torkestāni style, which was developed around the tenth century under the reign of the Samanids and later under the Qaznavids and Saljuqids. It was known for its highly ornamental wording and metaphors, and uncomplicated imagery. The Iraqi style was developed around the thirteenth century was mainly lyrical and mystical in terms of form and substance. The Indian style emerged in the sixteenth century and complicated abstract metaphors and lexicon were among its main features. Alessandro Bausani describes Indian style as follows: "deviations from the rule of harmonious use of imagery, leading to a 'baroque' extension of the stock images and metaphors allowed in poetry, the pre-dominance of mystical-philosophical themes and an extreme tendency towards allegory." As summarised by J.T.P de Bruijn in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (2), s.v. Iran, p.60. For further details on the features of the Indian style, see Ehsan Yarshater, "The Indian or Safavid Style: Progress or Decline?," *Persian Literature* (ed.) (Albany, New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 249-88.

³²⁰ Behruz Yasemi, *Sabk-e Hendi chandān komaki beh she'r-e fārsi nakardeh ast*, accessed 14 October 2014, <http://tibf.ir/news/53f1e60b1c000023052e4fdf>.

³²¹ Ne'mat Mirzazadeh, *Bipardeh darbāreh-ye Khamenei*, accessed 19 November 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWam7IkTfM>.

produced a large body of ghazal under the influence of Hafez and Sa'eb Tabrizi. His collection of poems, which includes ghazals, was published under the title *The Wine of Love* (*Bādeh-ye 'eshq*, 1990) the year after his death. In the course of the war, Khamenei paid occasional visits to the Howzeh's poetry sessions to encourage the poets in their work and share his views on the ways in which the war poets should proceed with their poetic reflections on warfare.³²²

It was under this especially strong influence, which of course originated from the core of the regime's power, that natural motifs came to constitute recurrent themes in war poetry. A number of major classical natural motifs were transformed in terms of meaning and point of reference in the war poetry, some of which deserve to be named. The dove (*kabutar*), an allegorical bird of love and innocence, or the moth (*parvāneh*), the symbol of a dedicated lover in classical poetry, is used to describe the martyrs of war. Similarly, a cypress tree (*derakht-e sarv*) and indeed all forms of flowers – used to reference the beauty of the beloved in Persian poetry – serve as allegories in praise of martyrs as manifestations of human perfection. Above all, even tulips and poppies that were seen as the international natural allegories of war and were thus extensively employed by official war poets are also traceable in classical Persian poetry. The following line by Hafez was recalled during the war in reference to the martyrs:

*"Bā sabā dar chaman-e lāleh sahar migoftam
Keh shahidān-e keh'and in hameh khuninkafanān."*

I was asking zephyr in the field of [red] tulips at dawn
Who are these bloody-shrouded martyrs?³²³

³²² Unknown, *Āshnāi bā Hamid Sabzevari*, accessed October 19 2013, <http://fakhtehamir.blogfa.com/post/30>.

³²³ Hafez Shirazi, *Divān-e Hafez*, (ed.) Jahāngir Mansur (Tehran: Dowran, 1998), 250.

Moreover, the aforementioned impulse towards an overabundance of such ultimately tedious imageries must also have come about, to a considerable extent, under the influence of the pre-revolutionary and guerrilla poetic discourse. Tulips and red roses in particular fall among the keywords present in guerrilla poetry (*she'r-e cheriki*) in the late 1950s and on into the 1960s. The poets that followed this trend, such as Sa'id Soltanpur (1916-75) and Khosrow Golsorkhi (1944-74), employed such imagery in reference to victory and courage.³²⁴ When Golsorkhi was placed on trial and subsequently executed by the Pahlavi regime, roses, tulips and poppies were banned from the guerrilla poetry of the 1970s. On the eve of the revolution and ensuing war, these motifs returned to the revolutionary discourse and were transformed by official war poets into the sacred roses of martyrdom:

*"Zeh bas fereshteh beh tashi '-e lāleh āmad-o raft
Sedā-ye mobham-e barkhord-e bāl miāyad
Mapors az del-e khod lālehhā cherā raftand?
Keh bu-ye kāfari az in so 'āl mi 'āyad."*

There is a vague sound coming from the clashing wings of angels
So many of them have attended the funeral of the tulips
Do not ask your heart why the tulips are gone
Such a question is blasphemous.³²⁵

*"Ru-ye hamchon golash shaqāyeqvār
Sobhgāhān shekofteh shod pajmord."*

His rose-like face blossomed like a poppy
And at dawn, withered.³²⁶

Nature seemed to provide yet another shelter under which poets could hide, distancing themselves from the realities of war. Such poems are noteworthy from a linguistic point of

³²⁴ Mohammad Shams-Langrudi, *Tarikh-e tahlili-ye she'r-e now*, vol. 3 (Tehran, Markaz, 1990), 511-512.

³²⁵ Qaysar Aminpur, "Sabztarin fasl-e sāl," *Jong-e Sureh* 7, (1984): 203.

³²⁶ Vahid Amiri, "Del-e ā'ineh," *Jong-e Sureh* 11 (1985): 99-100.

view since they reveal a number of military keywords from during the Iran-Iraq War, while simultaneously narrating how peaceful and romantic the war seemed through the lens of such imaginaries:

*“Tamām-e dasht por az barg-e lālehhā shodeh bud
Miyān-e bād par-e lālehhā rahā shodeh bud.”*

The plain was full of tulips’ petals
They were left in the hands of the wind.³²⁷

Such natural allegories sometimes supersede anything and everything, including the people. Mourning nature represents the pinnacle of human grief and the tragic loss of yet another war veteran for the entire nation:

*“Shaqāyeq ashkrizān, lāleh delkhun
Banāfsheh moztareb, zanbaq degargun
Be sug-e gol cheh shivan mikonad juy
Nahādeh sar beh zānu bid-e majnun.”*

The poppy is in tears; the tulip’s heart is broken
The violet is distressed, the lily is overwhelmed
Look how the river mourns for the rose
And how the willow tree has bowed to her knees.³²⁸

The use of motifs inspired by nature helped war poets to easily reach their readers’ minds, mainly because such metaphors and imageries already formed “part of the collective and social vocabulary and common cultural memories of most Iranians.”³²⁹

10. The Ideological Face of Reality

From among the official poets of war, only a few decided to adopt a semi-social realist approach in their verse for their depictions of the real lives lead by the people of Iran and

³²⁷ Parviz Beygi-Habibabadi, “Sedā-ye sug,” *Jong-e Sureh* 11, 103-105.

³²⁸ Mohammadreza Sohrabinejad, “Sug-e gol,” *Jong-e sureh* 11, 117.

³²⁹ Narguess Farzad, “Qaysar Aminpur and the Persian Poetry of Sacred Defence,” 357.

the bitter face of death. However, even these limited examples included religious patriotism and a commitment to the ruling state in their semi-realist war poems. In the following three examples, it is clear that even the anti-war gestures made by official war poets are merged with anti-imperialist and pro-Islamic revolutionary views. Thus they cannot be considered purely realist in the sense that the war poems written by independent poets are.

Mohamadreza Abdolmalekian's poem '*Hashemi Street*' (*Khiyābān-e Hāshemi*, 1987) gives a detailed account of the day-to-day living of the lower-middle-class residents of one particularly famous street in Tehran. A touch of the real, of a coupon-based and rationed way of living under the conditions of war, as well as an unusual opening line, which makes reference to the restrictions placed on life in a starkly objective manner, make for a unique and somewhat documentary piece of writing, one that caught a great deal of attention at the time of its publication:

*"Coupon-e 356, tokhom-e morgh
 Lebās mipusham
 Va az pellehā beh zir miāyam
 Az khāneh beh khiyābān
 Khiyābān-e Hāshemi
 Khiyābān-e ma'nus
 Khiyābān-e samimiyat-e salāmhā
 Khiyābān-e bār-e 'ātefi-ye kalemāt
 Khiyābān-e khānehhā-ye kuchak
 Khiyābān-e delhā-ye bozorg
 Khiyābān-e khanevārhā-ye noh sar 'ā'eleh
 Khiyābān-e khanevārhā-ye shesh nafar shahid
 Khiyābān-e sabr
 Khiyābān-e sangar
 Khiyābān-e sarbehzir*

Coupon 356 for egg
 I put on my clothes
 And climb down the stairs
 From my house to the street
 Hashemi Street
 The familiar street

The street where hearts are close to one another
 The street of emotionally loaded words
 The street of small houses
 And big, generous hearts.
 The street of families with nine children
 The street of families with six martyrs
 The street of patience
 The street reminiscent of a trench
 The street of humility.³³⁰

However, the tone of the poem soon shifts towards a familiar ideology as it moves on to speak of similarities between Hashemi Street, the Āshurā paradigm and war. The street changes, it is no longer an everyday residential area but a trench in a battlefield, filled with warriors ready to fight against both Iraq and a concomitant imperialism:

*“Khiyābān-e safhā-ye boland-e Āshurā
 Khiyābān-e mottasel beh namāz-e jom ‘eh
 Khiyābān-e mottasel beh jebheh
 Khiyābān-e sepāh-e Mohammad
 Khiyābān-e sāzeshnāpazir
 Khiyābān-e marg bar America.”*

The street of long queues of Āshurā³³¹
 The street that is linked to the Friday sermon
 The street that is linked to the battlefield
 The street of prophet Mohammad’s army
 The street of “down with America”.³³²

The poem ends with rage and anger, an ending that ultimately represents a response to the deprivation and suffering described throughout the poem and the overall resilience communicated throughout the work. Both a local resident and observer from the periphery, the poet succumbs to the anger hidden in the street, behind the resistance and ideology of its residents who are made to face the hardships of life, all of which are embodied in the

³³⁰ Mohammadreza Abdolmalekian, “Khiyābān-e Hāshemi,” *Jong-e sureh* 12 1(987): 51-52.

³³¹ During the war some of the militant groups who used to be sent off to the front were called either Karbalā or Āshurā in order to link them to Hosein’s resistance.

³³² Mohammadreza Abdolmalekian, “Khiyābān-e Hāshemi”, 52.

crumpled coupon in the protagonist's palm:

*Az pellehhā bālā miravam
 Va beh khāneh bāz migardam
 Va coupon-e 356
 Dar miān-e khashm-e sarangoshthāyam
 Mochāleh shodeh ast.*

I come up the stairs
 And return home
 And the coupon 356
 Is crumpled by the rage of my fingertips.³³³

Official war poems that adopt a socialist-Islamist approach were largely constructed using free verse. Poets seemed to have felt a need to break away from conventional poetic forms in order to describe the reality of war. However, despite this breaking away from formal norms, upon closer inspection the ideological links made with numerous themes prevalent in the ideology of warfare somehow overshadow the realism of the poem and its content; indeed it is the variety of form adopted in the structure of this piece that makes this notable.

Another famous poem of this kind, which also adopts a semi-realistic approach to the war, is 'A Poem for War' (She'ri barā-ye jang, 1980) by Aminpur. Written in the aftermath of Khorramshar's siege in 1980 and widespread despair across the nation, the poem received nationwide attention following its publication and bestowed a great deal of fame on its author, one of the country's leading war poets.³³⁴ It thus deserves closer scrutiny herein since it remains arguably the most famous poem of the war to this day, even though it was

³³³ Ibid., 57.

³³⁴ Most of the official poems of the war with a semi-realistic approach belong to this period when Khorramshar was occupied by the Iraqi forces and dozens were killed or wounded. Another famous war poem by Parviz Beygi-Habibabadi is entitled 'Qaribāneh' (1980), which brought much fame to its author and remains a famous war poem to date. It was written in the aftermath of Khorramshahr's siege and the death of a large number of soldiers and commanders, some of whom were known to the poet. Parziv Beygi-Habibabadi, "Qaribāneh," *Gozideh-ye she'r-e emruz*, 59.

mistakenly criticised by conservatives for supporting an anti-war approach. After degrading language and poetry as powerless tools, the poet officially calls upon the reader to pick a gun and join in the battle at the frontline:

*“Mikhāstam
She‘ri barā-ye jang beguyam
Didam nemishavad
Digar qalam zabān-e delam nist
Goftam:
Bāyad zamin gozāsht qalamhā rā
Digar selāh-e sard-e sokhan kārsāz nist
Bāyad selāh-e tiztari bardāsht
Bāyad barāy-e jang
Az luleh-ye tofang bekhānam
Bā vājeh-ye feshang.”*

I wanted
To write a poem for war
I realised that it would not be possible
The pen is no longer the idiom of my heart
“Pens should be put down,” I said
The cold arsenal of words is no longer effective
One must take up deadlier weapons
In my ode to war
I must recite through the barrel of a gun
With using bullets for words.³³⁵

Unlike many of his fellow poets, who did not directly experience the obstacles of life under bombardment and war, Aminpur paid occasional visits to Dezful, a city at the heart of the warzone. The vicious faces of war depicted in the poem therefore derive from the poet’s face-to-face encounters with death in the town in which he grew up. It reveals a close-up snapshot of war that is rarely echoed in any of the other war poems written during the war. For the first time in the official discourse of the war, Aminpur sets the war and its weaponry against the literary aesthetics of poetry:

“She‘ri barā-ye jang beguyam

³³⁵ Qaysar Aminpur, “She‘ri barā-ye jang,” *Tanaffos-e sobh*, 36-38.

*She'ri barā-ye shahr-e khodam –Dezful-
 Didam keh lafz-e nākhosh-e mushak rā
 Bāyad beh kār bord
 Ammā
 Mushak
 Zibā 'i-ye kalām-e marā mikāst."*

I wanted
 To write a poem for war
 A poem for my own city -Dezful-
 I realised that "missile", that distasteful word
 Would have to be used
 But "missile" would diminish the beauty of my verse.³³⁶

The poet shares his feelings of distrust about language and poetry, instead seeking a more powerful weapon. He thus uses the language of poetry to promote participation in the war and in doing so succeeds to degrade any form of poetry that is not committed to the ideology of warfare. Moreover, the use of natural imagery differs greatly from previously discussed poems. The poet shares with his reader real scenes from his hometown of Dezful, an environment at the centre of the conflict, enveloped by distress and darkness. He questions nature and all that belongs to it: the stars, the night, the moon, even the walls of the town that were supposed to protect the civilians from bullets and guns. For Aminpur, all of these features are in allegiance with the enemy and are thus unreliable. This sense of despair is tremendously perceptible in the following lines, which are delivered via a voice that resonates from the heart of the warzone:

*"Injā
 Divār ham
 Digar panāh-e posht-e kasi nist
 Kin gur-e digarist keh estādeh dar shab
 Dar entezār-e shab
 Digar setārehgān rā
 Hattā
 Hich e'temād nist.
 Shāyad setārehhā*

³³⁶ Qaysar Aminpur, "She'ri barā-ye jang," 36-38.

Shabgardhā-ye doshman-e mā bāshand
Injā hattā
Az enfejār-e māh ta ‘ajjob nemikonand
Injā
Tanhā setārehgān
Az borjhā-ye fāseleh mibinand
Keh shab cheh mowqe ‘e manfuri ast
Ammā agar setāreh zabān midāsht
Cheh she ‘rha keh az bad-e shab migoft
Guyā-tar az zabān-e man-e gong...
Injā har shām khāmoshāneh beh khod gofteh ‘īm:
Shāyad in shām, shām-e ākhar-e mā bāshad.”

Here, even the walls are no more a shelter
 They are upright graves
 Waiting for the night
 The stars even
 Are no longer reliable
 Maybe the stars
 Are night patrols of our enemy
 Over here no one is surprised by the flaring up of the moon
 Here,
 The stars alone
 Can see from distant watchtowers
 What loathsome time the night is
 But if stars had tongues to speak
 What poems would they tell, of the peril of the night
 More expressive than my tied tongue...
 Here, every night we tell ourselves,
 That tonight, is our last night.³³⁷

A certain state of mediation between official and unofficial war poetry is traceable when a touch of the real becomes more apparent.³³⁸ In the above poem for instance, Aminpur borrows parts of his imagery from the independent and leading poet Simin Behbahani, famous for having written various poems critical of the war. One of Aminpur’s famous lines in ‘*A Poem For War*’ tells us of a doll soaked in blood as the wartime massacre of children is taken from Behbahani’s own work. The two poems, presented in comparison,

³³⁷ Qaysar Aminpur, “She’ri barā-ye jang,” 31.

³³⁸ This literary mediation could certainly be developed in more than one example, as provided in this section. However, as literary scrutiny of the unofficial poetry stands beyond the scope of this study, only one example has been presented here. The unofficial poetic response on its own deserves closer attention in academic research.

read as follows:

*“Benvis: kânjâ ‘arusak, chon sâhebash gharq-e khun bud
In cheshmhâyash por az khâk, ân shishehhâyash ghobâri.”*

Write: Here the doll, like its owner was awash with blood
Her dirt-covered eyes, dusty glass.³³⁹

*“Ammâ
Man az darun-e sineh khabar dâram
Az khânehhâ-ye khunin
Az qesseh-ye ‘arusak-e khunâlud
Az enfejâr-e maghz-e sari kuchak
Bar bâleshi keh mamlo ‘-e rowyâhâst
rowyâ-ye kudakâneh-ye shirin.”*

But I have news of that there, right inside their breasts
News of blood-drenched homes
Of tales of the bloodied doll
Of the burst of the brain of a small head
On a pillow brimful of dreams –
Sweet childlike dreams.³⁴⁰

Furthermore, the use of other unique imageries, such as the ‘siren of red alert’, the ‘never-ending sleep of corpses’ and ‘blind curtains’, helps to convey a sense of the abyss and the chasm into which Dezful and the wider country had fallen, thus making these particular works unique examples of their own scarce trends. The realistic peak of the poem is accompanied by the disturbing sound of war, which flagrantly penetrates the lines of the poem:

*“Âzhir-e qermez ast keh minâlad
Tanhâ miyân-e saket-e shabhâ
Bar khâb-e nâtamâm-e jasadhâ
Khoffâshhâ-ye vahshi-ye doshman
Hattâ zeh nur-e rozaneh bizârand
Bâyad tamâm-e panjerehhâ râ
Bâ pardehhâ-ye kur bepushânim.”*

³³⁹ Simin Behbahani, "Benvis, benvis benvis," *Majmu‘eh-ye ash‘âr* (Tehran: Negâh, 2005), 618.

³⁴⁰ Qaysar Aminpur, "She‘ri barâ-ye jang", 34.

Here
 The state of high alert never wanes
 It is the siren of red alert that whimpers on
 Alone in the quiet of the night
 Over the never-ending sleep of corpses
 Enemy's savage vampires
 Seek the light that leaks through a pinhole
 We must cover the oriels
 With curtains that are blind.³⁴¹

Graphic images, such as that of the head of a child hanging from the back of his father's bicycle, or a beheaded man being carried to his grave, are quite rare among official war poems. For this reason, Aminpur's poem was subject to criticism by radical proponents of the war. Yet Aminpur dared to depict controversial scenes that were often ignored in mainstream readings of the war. The poem received remarkable attention, as well as criticism, from both the critics and proponents of war, probably because the work includes a measure of both the pros and cons of war in one piece:

*“Injā
 Gāhi sar-e borideh-ye mardī rā
 Tanhā
 Bāyad zeh bām-e dur biyārim
 Tā dar miyān-e gur bekhābānim
 Yā sang-o khāk-o āhan-e khunīn rā
 Vaqti beh chang-o nākhon-e khod mikonim
 Dar zir-e khāk-e gelshodeh mibinim:
 Zan ru-ye charkh-e khayyāti
 Khāmush māndeh ast
 Injā sopur har sobh
 Khākestar-e ‘aziz-e kasi rā
 Hamrāh mibarad [...]
 Az ān shab-e siyāh
 Ān shab keh dar ghobār
 Mardī beh ru-ye juy-e khiyābān
 Kham bud
 Bā cheshmhā-ye sorkh-o harāsān
 Donbāl-e dast-e digar-e khod migasht
 Bāvar konid
 Man bā dow cheshm-e māt-e khodam didam*

³⁴¹ Qaysar Aminpur, “She‘ri barā-ye jang”, 34-35.

*Keh kudaki zeh tars-e khatar midavid
 Ammā sari nadāsh
 Lakhti degar beh ru-ye zamin ghaltid
 Va sā'ati degar
 Mardi khamideh posht-o shetābān
 Sar rā beh tarkband-e docharkheh
 Su-ye mazār-e kudak-e khod mibord
 Chizi darun-e sineh-ye u kam bud."*

Sometimes on our own, we have to fetch
 The severed head of a man
 From a faraway roof
 To lay it to rest in a grave
 Or when we dig with our nails and claws
 Through stones and clay and bloodied metal
 Beneath the muddied earth
 To find a silent woman, rigid and leaning
 Over a small sewing machine.
 Over here, every morning
 The dustman carry away
 The embers of someone's sweetheart...
 Of that black night
 Of that night in the haze of smog
 When in the street, a man bent over the gutter
 With red and anxious eyes,
 Searching for his other hand
 Believe me,
 I saw with my own two bewildered eyes
 A child running from looming terror,
 Who had no head
 A second later,
 He slumped to the ground
 And a while later,
 A man, hunched and in a rush
 Took to the grave of his child
 The head [hanging] on the back of his bicycle;
 Something wrenched from inside his breast.³⁴²

Up to this point, the poem is reminiscent of the unofficial and independent writings about war that were published in a special issue of the Iranian Writers' Association journal. Within this publication, Nasim Khaksar's account of her journey to the warzone and Mohammad Mokhtari's poem '*Mehr Nights*' (*Shabhā-ye mehr*, 1981) assumed the same

³⁴² Qaysar Aminpur, "She'ri barā-ye jang", 35.

realist approach to war:³⁴³

*“Shabhā-ye Mehr
Shabhā-ye kār dar makhāzen-e ātash
Shabhā-ye chāhhā-ye naft va badanhā-ye tekkeh-tekkeh
Shabhā-ye seyd-e ādami
Dar ābhā-ye nafti-ye khalij.
Shabhā-ye kudakān-e Shalamcheh
Va ghorresh-e modām-e tuphā
Ke qalb-e daryā rā dar ham mishekanad.”*

*Mehr nights
The nights of working in fire mines.
The nights of the whale oil and fragmented bodies
The nights of hunting humans
In the oily waters of the gulf
The nights of the children of Shalamcheh
And the constant thundering of the bombs
Which breaks the heart of the sea.³⁴⁴*

Yet what completes Aminpur's response to the war, and leaves a huge gap between himself and poets such as Mokhtari, appears to rest in the final few lines of his poem. After the horrific scenes of war comes the revolutionary rhetoric, glorifying the leader of the Islamic republic and the martyrs of war by way of a deeply political tone. He pities himself for being alive rather than having martyred himself on the path to the Almighty. The poet clearly oscillates between two poles:

*“Ammā
In shānehhā-ye gardgerefteh
Cheh sādeh-o sabur
Vaqt-e voqu‘-e fāje‘eh milarzand
Inān
Har chand
Beshkasteh zānovān-o kamarhāshān
Estādeh‘and fāteh-o nastuh
-Bi hich khan-o-mān-
Dar gusheshān kalām-e emām ast
-Fatvā-ye esteqāmat-o isār-*

³⁴³ Mehr is a month in the Persian calendar that begins in September and ends in October.

³⁴⁴ Mohamad Mokhtari, “Shabhā-ye mehr,” *Nāmeḥ-ye Kānun-e Nevisandegān* (Tehran: Agah, 1980), 106.

Bar dūsheshān derafsh-e qiyām ast.”

But these shoulders covered in dust
 Stoic and humble they tremble
 As catastrophe unfolds
 With broken knees and broken backs
 They stand victorious and resolute
 Homeless and bereft
 The words of the Imam in their ears
 Edict of resolution and sacrifice
 On their shoulders banners of defiance
 They hoist the message of resistance...

Aminpur's pro-martyrdom ideology becomes fairly visible when he proudly writes about the necessity of making mothers the eternal mourners of their martyred children. The heart-wrenching scenes described earlier in the poem suddenly seem to serve an antagonistic role in provoking the country's youth to join in the battle:

*“Na!
 Bāyad gelu-ye mādar-e khod rā
 Az bāng-e rudārud besūzānim
 Tā bāng-e rud rud nakhoshkidast
 Bāyad selāh-e tiztari bardāshht.”*

No!
 Our mothers' throat should burn
 With cries of my *rud*³⁴⁵, my child
 But before the cries of my *rud*, die out
 One must take up potent arms:
 The cold armoury of words no longer works.³⁴⁶

The poem ends with a reemphasis of the poet's distrust in words, language and poetry when living in a state of war. This is indeed exactly what happened with official war poetry; it did not constitute poetry for the sake of poetry (*She'r beh khāter-e she'r*), but weaponry made of words, metaphors, imageries and symbols, designed to accommodate the ideology of warfare promulgated by the state.

³⁴⁵ The word *rud* in the Persian language means 'river', but in the Southern dialect it refers to one's son.

³⁴⁶ Qaysar Aminpur, "She'ri barāy-e jang", 36.

11. Ceasefire

The eight-year Iran-Iraq War ended with Iran's acceptance of a ceasefire in July 1988, by which point the Iranian government was under severe pressure due to concomitant economic, military and humanitarian crises; the country finally yielded to the UN resolution, having previously rejected a number of Iraqi and international peace offers. Ayatollah Khomeini compared his acceptance of the ceasefire resolution to drinking a cup of poison, prompting a wave of disillusionment and despair to spread among the country's literati, which, by pen or by voice, had once praised the war and its continuation and martyrdom as the path to reunion with the Almighty.

With a ceasefire in place and the trenches emptied of volunteers keen to become martyrs, the ideological façade of the Islamic republic, which had revolved around the ideas of sacred defence and martyrdom for eight years, began to show sizeable cracks. The revolutionary poets of war, who had constantly supported the on-going conflict in their poems, yielded to silence and watch-keeping as the first sparks of ideological disagreements appeared among the nation's official poets. The ceasefire, however, did not put an end to the mass production of war-related poetry. Instead, it marked the beginning of a long-lasting and nostalgic yearning for a war that no longer existed. In addition to the ceasefire and the 1986 ideological split between Islamic republican artists and officials, which had emerged from within the Howzeh some years earlier, the nascent gaps that appeared with the ending of the war only intensified with the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989. Ultimately, this led to a division in the revolutionary poetic trend that can be seen as representative of the emergence of the broader and much complicated political factionalism discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4. The Fall of Utopia: Islamic Republican Poetry in the Reconstruction Period

*The Revolution to them was not a mere theory to be realised in years to come.*³⁴⁷

*Avval ābi bud in del, ākhar ammā zard shod
Āftābi bud, abri shod, siāho zard shod
Harcheh ruzi ārmān pendāsht hermān shod hamēh
Harcheh mipendāsht darmān ast, ‘eyn-e dard shod.*

*At first this heart was blue, in the end it turned yellow
At first it was sunny, in the end it turned cloudy, black, cold
Whatever it considered an ideal became a pity
Whatever it considered a cure turned to pain.*³⁴⁸

1. Introduction

To study a revolution and its products is to study the ideological disillusionment that occurs during its aftermath. This disillusionment is usually prompted by the difference between the promise and the reality as well as the ideological void that ensues from dramatic political upheavals, such as the death of the leaders of a revolution and the massive socio-political shifts that occur as the result of conflicts between the parties and factions involved. In the cases of Russia and China, countries that resemble post-revolutionary Iran in terms of ideology and leadership, Vladimir Lenin and Mao Zedong's actions prompted the growth of antipathy among various revolutionary factions through the rise of certain political leaders to power whose leadership and political or ideological agendas failed to live up to initial revolutionary intentions.³⁴⁹ As this chapter aims to show,

³⁴⁷ Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1923), 15-16.

³⁴⁸ Qaysar Aminpur, "Hobut dar kavir," *Dastur-e zabān-e 'eshq* (Tehran: Morvarid, 2006), 49.

³⁴⁹ To read more on disillusionment in China, see His-Sheng Ch'i, *Politics of Disillusionment: The Chinese Communist Party Under Deng Xiaoping 1978-1989* (London: An East Gate Book, 1991). For more on disillusionment in the case of Russia, see Katherine Hodgson, *Voicing the Soviet Experience: The Poetry of Olga Berggolts* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Irina Rathushinskaya, *Poet Against the Lie: Irina Ratushinskaya talks of her experiences as a Russian dissident* (London: Grosvenor, 1991).

the death of Iran's charismatic and revolutionary leader Ayatollah Khomeini on 3 June 1989, as well as the ending of the war with neighbouring Iraq in August 1988, triggered events that gave rise to new political factions, incited the marginalisation of the Islamic left and stoked ideological disenchantment among once fervent revolutionary literati and activists.

The fact that the official literature and literary figures of the Russian and Chinese post-revolutionary contexts were irreversibly altered by changes in their surroundings is well documented. To cite a specific example, unable to abide by certain values and ideologies that came to the fore under Stalin, poets such as Vladimir Mayakovski and Anna Akhmatova later “combined idealistic enthusiasm and Party loyalty with feelings of doubt and disillusion which question everything the Soviet establishment purported to stand for.”³⁵⁰ Yet there is a tendency among scholars of Soviet Russia and the Islamic Republic of Iran to overlook the range of post-revolutionary literary voices present in these situations and their complex relations with the literary and political establishment.³⁵¹ Indeed, Islamic republican poets and writers experienced a similarly perplexing relationship with the ruling powers during the post-Khomeini era, just as Soviet poets had under Stalin. Accordingly, this chapter provides a historical sketch of the political events and the literary divisions evident within the official literary camp of the Islamic Republic.

This chapter discusses the disillusionment that surfaced in the Islamic republican poetry of the post-war period from 1990 up to the rise of the reform movement in 1997. In order to

³⁵⁰ Katherine Hodgson, *Voicing the Soviet Experience*, 2.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

focus on the literary aspects of this period, this chapter does not offer an exhaustive argument about the political changes and factions of the reconstruction period (these being far too complex and swift to allow for a comprehensive description in the space permitted by this monograph), nor does it go beyond the proposed timespan in order to avoid giving too much weight to the political discussion. Only the socio-political events that facilitated the disillusionment of the Islamic republican poets are discussed. The reform movement is only briefly mentioned to show that – despite the breeze of hope and change brought about by this movement – the unstable and authoritarian character of the Iranian political structure meant that the poets’ response to the change of atmosphere tended toward disillusionment rather than hope.

In addition to tackling thematic features patent in the Islamic republican poetry of the reconstruction, particular focus is given here to the ideological disenchantment evident within a certain group of Islamic republican poets. Significantly, this group comprised writers who had once been considered the leading voices of official war poetry and the revolution. As far as the analytical framework of this chapter is concerned, it aims to incorporate a combination of chronological and thematic approaches.³⁵² In other words, both a historical overview of the political upheavals of the last two decades and a thematic analysis of the poems written by official poets of this period are used herein to isolate two principal and official poetic factions in the post-Khomeini era.

³⁵² More specifically, sections 1 and 6 belong together thematically, while section 5 has some internal chronological progression, but this is not the case in sections 3 and 4.

2. Creating the Context

The death of Khomeini and end of war were two significant reasons for increasing political disagreements among revolutionary forces and the highly complex factional politics of the post-war period. The 1990s began with the liberal economic policies of Hashemi-Rafsanjani and his attempt to reconnect with Western countries, both of which stood in contrast to the anti-imperialist political views of Khomeini during the 1980s. His successor, Ayatollah Khamenei, followed Khomeini's fundamentalist ideals in promoting anti-Western, isolationist international policies to safeguard the values of the revolution. The main agenda of Hashemi-Rafsanjani's government, however, was to reconstruct the country and heal the wounds of a prolonged war through pragmatist economic and cultural plans.

As time progressed and the radical Islamist views of the Leader and his supporters in the realm of economics and politics came into opposition with the comparatively moderate views of Hashemi-Rafsanjani's government, the ideological division between the two sides deepened. By the mid-1990s, disagreements between Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Khamenei increasingly squeezed many out of positions of power, especially members of the Islamic left. Islamic leftists comprised the third group, with egalitarian views on economic policies and a revisionist stance toward the revolutionary ideology that led them towards disenchantment from both conservative fundamentalists and conservative pragmatists. The outcome of such conflicts encouraged a further descent into factionalisation and the subsequent near total elimination of the Islamic leftist from the political scene, leaving the battlefield clear for the struggle between conservative pragmatists and conservative fundamentalists, at least up until the rise of the reform

movement. In the parliamentary elections of 1992, members of the Islamic left were marginalised by the conservative faction and idealists of all sides of the political spectrum (conservative-fundamentalists and leftist-reformists) felt disillusioned by the government's emphasis on reconstruction and business-led economics. The peak of the marginalisation of the Islamic left came with Khatami's resignation from the Ministry of Culture in 1993. His resignation took place as the result of a long period of ideological disputes and conflict with conservatives.

Having this broad socio-political scene in mind allows for a better understanding of the divisions that occurred in the camp of the Islamic republican poets during the post-war period. The 1987 expulsion of poets and artists of the Howzeh (discussed in detail in the first chapter of this thesis) provides a background from which we can explore the further divisions that manifested themselves within the Islamic republican school of poets during the 1990s.

In general, two factions within the Islamic republican poets could be distinguished during the 1990s. The first of these comprises official poets who functioned as unwavering ideological allies of the establishment and tended towards the conservative faction. These poets later became outspoken opponents of the reform movement, voicing anti-imperialist and anti-Western rhetoric in favour of the expansion of Islamic values and moral standards across the nation. They promoted specific poetic genres, nostalgic poems on war, religious modern free verse, and protest poetry and legitimate poetry.³⁵³ They protested against

³⁵³ For a detailed investigation of legitimate poetry, see chapter 5.

social inequality and promoted Shi‘ism along with the idea of guardianship (*velāyat*) as a way to support the newly appointed leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, and the revolutionary legacy of Khomeini. In general, these poets have been promoted to the level of state officialdom in the past two decades and include Alireza Qazveh, Ali Moallem, Yusefali Mirshakkak, Ali Musavi-Garmarudi, Morteza Amiri-Esfandaqeh and Hamid Sabzevari. The theme of disillusionment in the works of these poets is explored later to show their opposing views against the liberal economic policies of Hashemi-Rafsanjani and their nostalgic approach towards the war.

The second of the factions comprises official poets who belonged to the Islamic leftist. At first, they tended toward an egalitarian stance and remained neutral toward the liberal economic plans of Hashemi-Rafsanjani, only to then shift towards religious intellectualism and the reform movement; leading figures included the radical Islamic leftist revolutionaries of the 1980s.³⁵⁴ The members of this group progressively distanced themselves from the conservative fundamentalists and were gradually excluded from the state’s official institutions³⁵⁵ Their growing disillusionment should be understood as part of the marginalisation of the Islamic left and the rise of the reform movement. Qaysar Aminpur, Hasan Hoseini, Boyuk Maleki, Sa‘ed Baqeri and Abdoljabbar Kaka’i, to name but a few, can be counted among the members of this group and their works form the main focus of this chapter.

³⁵⁴ See chapter 1 on the evolution of Islamic republican poets and the Islamic left within the Howzeh.

³⁵⁵ Increasing the pressure on poets and writers such as Qaysar Aminpur, Boyuk Maleki, Fereydon Amuzadeh-Khalili in the late 1990s for their criticism of censorship and oppressive cultural policies of the conservative fundamentalists forced them to leave state-sponsored cultural institutions and journals. Boyuk Maleki, Interview by Fatemeh Shams, October 2013; Boyuk Maleki, “Darbāreh-ye Qaysar Aminpur va Soroush-e nowjavān,” *Māhnāmeḥ-ye tajrobeh* 1 (2012), 31.

Most poets from the Islamic left continued to work with semi-governmental institutions and as such were never entirely excluded from the official cultural scene in the way that pre-revolutionary poets with secular leanings or members of the Iranian Writers' Association were.³⁵⁶ In essence, while the ideological leanings of these poets were at odds with those of the former faction, they still operated within the parameters set out by the establishment.³⁵⁷ Similar to the first faction, some of these poets also expressed nostalgic sentiments for the war and its martyrs although, in the main, a yearning for peace replaced any nostalgic vindication of war. They tended also to be more open than the first faction in expressing their doubts and uncertainties, and the disillusionment and confusions that inevitably arose as a consequence of major political shifts. Shifting from a revolutionary, collective approach towards a more individualistic worldview put them in a different position vis-à-vis the political establishment. Some of these poets entered into academia,³⁵⁸ while others moved on to form independent and semi-independent journals and poetry associations, the main result of which was increased ideological and financial detachment from the seat of power.

Distinguishing between these two groups allows for a better understanding of the complexities present within the spheres of culture and literature during the post-Khomeini

³⁵⁶ For further details about the exclusion of writers and poets with secular leanings from the post-revolutionary cultural scene, see Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, "Protest and Perish: A History of the Writers' Association of Iran," *Iranian Studies*, Vol. XVIII, 1-4 (1985): 189-229.

³⁵⁷ Such partial exclusions distinguish the case of disenchanted Islamic republican poets from some of the disillusioned poets of Soviet Russia who suffered extreme forms of violence, including imprisonment, torture, exile and death. For more details on this topic, see Dariusz Tolczuk, *See No Evil: Literary Cover-Ups and Discoveries of the Soviet Camp Experience* (New Haven: Yale University, 1999).

³⁵⁸ A suitable example of this kind is Qaysar Aminpur, who held the highly prestigious academic lectureship position in Persian literature at Tehran University.

era. It is also key that here the role played by such poets as independent individuals vis-à-vis the political structure is emphasised alongside the ways in which they revised the revolutionary ideology in their verse.

It is in the light of this general disillusionment that the work of Aminpur, one of the most outstanding yet dispirited poets of the post-Khomeini era, is placed under scrutiny in this chapter. Aminpur's distinguished position among the poets of the second faction (Islamic left) is discussed later in the chapter, while for now it is important to bear in mind that during the past decade Aminpur's life and poetry have been the focus of detailed inquiry by various scholars.³⁵⁹ In general, he is regarded as a unique case of a disillusioned revolutionary poet whose post-war poetic discourse mirrors a wider disenchantment with the ruling power manifest within Iranian society in general. Yet within such narratives the complex predicaments facing the establishment are taken into account in a manner that dismisses the continued application of narrowly defined categories such as 'Islamist poets', 'state-sponsored writers' and 'revolutionary poets'. Such a watchful treatment of terms and labels can be only achieved through a careful and nuanced reading of the works linked to the two groups mentioned above in relation to the evolving socio-political context of the 1990s to 2009 that comprises the chorological scope of this chapter.

3. War Nostalgia

The foremost ideological void in the realm of Islamic republican poetry appeared when the

³⁵⁹ To read more on Aminpur's disillusionment, see Mohamad Quchani, "Shahidi keh shā'er shod," *Hamzād-e 'asheqān-e jahān* (Tehran: Morvarid, 2011): 203-211. Mohammad Dehqani, "Pahlevān-e mordeh rā 'eshq ast: darbāreh-ye raftār-hā-ye dogāneh bā Qaysar," *Māhnāmeḥ-ye tajrobeh* 1 (Tehran, 2011): 76.

war came to an end and, as one poet describes it, “the door to the garden of martyrdom closed.”³⁶⁰ The previous chapter explains how war and martyrdom were used by the state as driving forces in the ideology of warfare and nation building. According to Varzi, “the emotions that surrounded the war helped foster an unbreakable bond among citizens of the Islamic Republic.”³⁶¹ Zealous poets who had once wholeheartedly committed their verse to the holy defence suddenly found themselves short of relevant content and thus nostalgic recollections of the war and venerations of a fading past became substitute literary themes in their literary output. As Hashemi-Rafsanjani writes in his memoirs, during his presidency (1989-97) the promotion of a culture of jihad and dedication (*farhang-e jahād va isār*) was listed as “the most important concern” of the government, alongside supporting the families of martyrs and wounded war veterans.³⁶² A corresponding forty-three per cent growth in the state budget dedicated to the promotion of war values and memories bears witness to this claim.³⁶³

In the realm of culture, the officials of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG) made it clear that the commemoration of war was to be treated with equal reverence as the ceremonies of Āshurā. The following quote is taken from an interview with one of the members of this ministry and demonstrates the link made between the

³⁶⁰ The poet Qader Tahmasbi wrote this well-known war eulogy, which was sung by Sadeq Ahangaran, the famous war eulogist, who played an important role in the mobilisation of the nation’s youth to the front. For more details, see Abbas Khusheh-Charkharani, “Dar tariq-e ‘āsheqān mordan nokhostin manzel ast,” *Keyhān Newspaper*, 21 September 2014 (30/06/93): 7.

³⁶¹ Roxanne Varzi, *Warring Souls: Youth, Media and Martyrdom in Post-revolution Iran* (United States: Duke University Press, 2006), 175.

³⁶² Emad Hashemi (ed.), *Kārnāmeḥ-va khāterāt-e Hashemi-Rafsanjani: Sāl-e 1370, Sāzandegi-va shokufā’i* (Tehran: Daftar-e nashr-e ma‘āref-e enqelāb, 2013), 25.

³⁶³ Ibid. In the past two decades the publication of state-sponsored war memoirs has been one of the main cultural strategies of the state. For example, *Dā* by Seyyedeḥ Zahra Hoseini (2011) has been republished seventy-eight times so far and received multiple official literary prizes. Ayatollah Khamenei has called it one of the most successful examples of a war memoir.

cultural policies of the establishment and the rise of religious and *Āshurā'i* poetry (*she'r-e ā'ini va āshurā'i*) in the post-Khomeini era:

Every day is Āshurā every ground is Karbalā. Now we have a distance from the feelings surrounding the front, but Muharram is something we can still feel every year during its time. In the war we felt that feeling every day; it was always Āshurā. A Shahid's presence takes you straight to Āshurā, it's mourning, it's the experience of Āshura. Every time a brother or friend is martyred you felt like you were in Imam Hosein's Karbalā. We were part of Imam Hosein's caravan. It's the truth of a period in Iran's life, now Āshurā is a day in history and Karbalā is a place in history, for some it is still alive, especially the kids who were chemical weapon victims, or hurt in the war; they still interpret their lives in relation to Karbalā [...] the culture of Āshurā is alive but not the truth of it; it has become an empty ceremony.³⁶⁴

A nationwide cultural campaign was shaped by state cultural bodies such as the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting and the Howzeh for the purpose of keeping the memory of the war alive. A number of official poets who joined this commemorative campaign originated from the first faction, bringing with them conservative leanings.³⁶⁵ These poets played an active role in holding state-sponsored poetry festivals and coined a new poetic genre called the Poetry of Sacred Defence, which was heavily sponsored by the state. The Sacred Defence Poetry Festival became one of the main official literary events of the post-war period. Entirely state-sponsored events, the festivals seek to encourage and train young poets who do not possess any personal experience of the war but have recreated it through their imaginative skills in the form of poetry. Financial rewards, a pilgrimage to Mecca or Karbalā, or trips to the holy cities of Mashhad and Qom are among the rewards on offer. The outcomes of these events were

³⁶⁴ Roxanne Varzi, *Warring Souls*, 102-03.

³⁶⁵ A small number of official poets who belonged to the second group, including Hoseini and Sā'edi, also wrote in the memory of war but in quantity they produced much less when compared to the war writers of the first group.

published in the form of poem collections edited by official poets.³⁶⁶ As Hoseini notes, key to this genre are recollections of war and martyrdom, accompanied by the denigration of the enemy.³⁶⁷

*“Āmadeh az rah bahār, yād-e shahidān bekheyr!
Gashteh vatan lālehzār, yād-e shahidān bekheyr!
Tā keh bovad gol beh bār, tā keh bekhānad hazār
Ta keh bovad roozegār, yād-e shahidān bekheyr!”*

Spring has arrived,
Long may martyrs be remembered!
The whole nation has turned into a terrain of tulips
Long may martyrs be remembered!
Until the rose is alive, until the nightingale sings
And until life goes on,
Long may martyrs be remembered!³⁶⁸

The expression of a sense of loss and failure is one of the recurring themes of this literary genre, with the poets describing themselves as the ill-fated survivors of a holy cause. Having survived the war, these poets see themselves as witnesses to dramatic shifts in the political scene, specifically, the transformation from a utilitarian and revolutionary framework to a liberal entity open to influence from the West.³⁶⁹ These changes are perceived as representing both the failure and decline of revolutionary values or, in other words, the fall of revolutionary utopia. Rhyming words, metaphors and imageries imply a

³⁶⁶ For example, see *Zakhm-e sib: Majmu‘eh ‘ash‘ār-e bargozideh-ye pānzdahomin kongreh-ye sarāsari-ye defā‘-e moqaddas*, (ed.) Hosein Esrafilī (Tehran: Sarir, 2006).

³⁶⁷ Hasan Hoseini, *Gozideh-ye she‘r-e jang va defā‘-e moqaddas* (Tehran: Sureh-ye mehr, 2008), 12.

³⁶⁸ Abbas Baratipur, “Fasl-e shokufā’i,” *Sorudehkhā-ye defā‘-e moqaddas* (Tehran: Sureh-ye mehr, 2010), 15. This poem was written in March 1993.

³⁶⁹ With the passing of Khomeini and the end of the war, factional politics in Iran peaked. A detailed account of these political factions and their emergence and complexities are not included here due to the word limitation. Unlike literary aspects of the Islamic Revolution, which have been overlooked by scholars, the factional politics of the post-Khomeini era have been subject to extensive investigations and analyses. See Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002); Saïd Amirarjomand, *After Khomeini: Iran Under His Successors* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Eskandar Sadeqi-Borujerdi, “Disenchanted Political Theology in Post-revolutionary Iran: Reform, Religious Intellectualism and the Death of Utopia” (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2013).

sense of continuity with the war in the memory of the poet, while a fissure grows between Iran's lost utopia and its bitter reality. Qazveh is one of the pioneering voices of this genre:

*"Dar kulehbār-e ghorbatam yek del, az ruzhā-ye vāpasin māndast
Abbāshā-ye teshnehlāb raftand, labteshneh mashki bar zamin māndast
Zānān barāy-e mā cheh mimānad? Yek kulehbār az khāterāt-e sabz
Az man vali yek cheshm-e bārāni, tanhā hamin tanhā hamin māndast."*

In the backpack filled with my melancholy,
And from the last days [of the war].
Only a heart has remained.
The thirsty Abbas-like martyrs³⁷⁰ are gone,
Only a dry goatskin remains on the ground.
What will remain of them and us?
Of them, a backpack filled with green memories
Of me, only teary eyes
Yes, only teary eyes are left of me.³⁷¹

One way to revive this lost revolutionary utopia, especially in the eyes of the cultural advocates of the conservative faction, was to create a culture of war (*farhang-e jang*). During the reconstruction period the main characteristic of this cultural drive was the revival of wartime values such as anti-imperialist and anti-Western views, while simplicity in life was praised to the highest and social equality ceaselessly promoted:

It's the same with war culture: every day the memory dies. It is not the political point of view that is losing colour but the existential character. This Āshurā as culture is not of the same ilk as a routine daily culture and therefore it is hard to keep alive in the sphere of daily life. To do so there must be both memory and repetition. The memory is there but the zekr, the repetition, is dead. Memory never leaves if repeated. Memory survives only in repetition.³⁷²

The same concerns lie at the heart of some poems that promoted the principles of martyrdom and war, and indeed did so in a manner tinted with a palpable sense of

³⁷⁰ This refers to Hosein's cousin, Abolfazl-ibn Abbās, who was murdered in Karbalā while trying to bring water to the children and companions of Hosein. In this poem the martyred fighter resembles the heroic Shi'ite character and this particular line refers to the story of his death on the ninth day of Moharram.

³⁷¹ Alireza Qazveh, "Ghazal-e khāterāt," *Shebli va ātash*, 9-10. This poem was written in 1989.

³⁷² Interview with a member of the MCIG, quoted in Roxanne Varzi, *Warring Souls*, 103.

dismissal that was used to decry the fall of the nation's revolutionary utopia:

*"Marā kosht khaāmushi-ye lālehhā
Darigh az farāmushi-ye lālehhā
Kojā raft ta'sir-e suz-e do'ā
Kojāyand mardān-e bi-edde'ā
Kojāyand shurāfarinān-e 'eshq
'Alamdār mardān-e meydān-e 'eshq
Kojāyand mastān-e jām-e alast
Dalirān-e 'āsheq, shahidān-e mast."*

The silence of tulips³⁷³ shatters me
Alas! They have been forsaken
Where are the effects of our prayers?
Where are the humble men?
Where are the passionate lovers?
Where are the pioneers in the field of love?
Where are those who were drunk from the wine of *alast*?³⁷⁴
Where are the courageous lovers, the drunken martyrs?³⁷⁵

The following poem by Ali Mo'alle-m-Damqani, who wrote a variety of folk poems that were made into songs and disseminated through state media channels, provides an example of the poetry used to disseminate the culture of war. Poets such as Mo'alle-m who had a strong background in the classical literary genre began to try new folk genres to reach a wider audience during the post-war period. Most of these poems were turned into songs and widely disseminated through the IRIB:

*"Tu-ye 'asr-e ātash-o khun
Kheiliā 'eshqo cheshidan
Ba'ziām zardo fesordeh
Mundan-o hasrat keshidan."*

In the era of fire and blood

³⁷³ Literary reference to the martyrs, as discussed in chapter 4.

³⁷⁴ This refers to a famous extract of Quranic verse frequently employed in mystic poetry to refer to the faithful servants of the Lord. "*Alastu-bi-rabbikum?*" ("Am I not your Lord?") was used to address the souls of humans before entering their mundane bodies in order to confirm their belief in the Lord. In response they would say, "Yes, you are!" *Qālu balā* (Qurān, vii. 168).

³⁷⁵ Alireza Qazveh, "Masnavi-ye sharmsāri," *Az nakhlestān tā khiyābān*, 12th ed. (Tehran: Sureh-ye mehr, 2008), 39-42. This poem was made into a war eulogy and sung by prominent official war eulogist Mohamadsadeq Ahangaran. It was also frequently used as a background song for war documentaries during the 1990s.

So many of them tasted the love
And some, shattered and weary,
Remained and pitied themselves.³⁷⁶

Holy defence poetry was seen as an important official platform through which to reconstruct Iran's revolutionary utopia. The genre was largely propagated by Islamic republican poets who later gained roles in governing cultural bodies or were appointed to strategic cultural positions. Qazveh, a leading voice of holy defence poetry, organiser of state-sponsored war poetry festivals and senior literary editor of the state-sponsored newspaper *Ettelā'āt* after the war, was appointed cultural attaché in India in 1997. Ali Mo'alleem-Damghani was appointed cultural director of the Howzeh, made a member of the Council of Poetry in the MCIG, assigned head of the music centre of the IRIB and made second president of the Academy of Art.³⁷⁷ From the first generation of writers who committed themselves to the religious genre, poets Musavi-Garmarudi and Sabsevari became close to the leader of the Islamic Republic following the death of Khomeini.

Most of these poets collaborated with official literary journals, all of which were sponsored by the state or state-dependent cultural institutions such as the Howzeh. These journals, which were distributed widely across the country with an affordable cost for the audience, played an important role in the dissemination of holy defence literature after the end of the war. Even the briefest of readings of one of the main official literary journals,

³⁷⁶ Ali Mo'alleem-Damghani, "Lāleh-ye 'āsheq," *Sharheh-sharheh dar bād* (Tehran: Sureh-ye mehr, 2009), 36-37. This poem was made into a song by the famous official pop singer, Mohammad Esfahani, and was widely broadcast on state television in the form of a video clip, as well as being played on the radio.

³⁷⁷ He was appointed to this position in the aftermath of the 2009 controversial presidential election and after the expulsion of Mirhossein Musavi as director of the academy under the order of Ayatollah Khamenei. For further details, see Unknown, "Barkenāri-e Mirhossein Mousavi," *Khabaronline*, accessed 12 October 2014, <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/32064/culture/cinema>.

the *She'r* (Poetry) journal, published by the Howzeh, shows that holy defence poetry and the world literature of resistance were unceasingly promoted in the wake of the war.³⁷⁸ Of the fifteen issues examined for this thesis, at least one poem with the theme of holy defence or world poetry of resistance appears in the poetry section.

At the same time as the events detailed above, a new translation trend began in the official literary journals of the period, specifically in the *She'r*. This movement aimed to introduce significant works from the world literature of resistance into the Persian-speaking cultural milieu. Originating from countries and regions such as Bosnia, Latin America, Spain and the Arab world, these works provided a fresh source of inspiration for Islamic republican poets, especially those with an Islamic leftist background and translators working in the post-Khomeini era.³⁷⁹ It was during this period that the idea of resistance and the commemoration of war were once again linked to the Shi'ite narrative of Āshurā, thus forming a new genre called Religious Poetry (*She'r-e Ā'ini*). This went on to become the most extensively sponsored official poetic genre in the post-Khomeini era, especially following the rise of the conservative-fundamentalist government in 2004.³⁸⁰

3. Religious Modern Free Verse (*She'r-e Now-ye Mazhabi*)

In their on-going battle with disillusioned revolutionaries of the Islamic left and isolated secular intellectuals, official poets with conservative fundamentalist leanings used poetry

³⁷⁸ *She'r* 7 (1992): 58. *She'r* 12 (1993): 60, 62, 66; *She'r* 8 (1993): 74. *She'r* 16 (1993), 66. *She'r* 16 (1993): 62, 64, 66.

³⁷⁹ Hamidreza Shekarsari, "Dar shatt-e goftemānhā: negāhi beh qālebhā-ye naw dar she'r-e fārsi," *Khorasān: Special Issue on Revolutionary Literature* 1 (2014): 34.

³⁸⁰ See chapter 5.

as a medium through which to express their ideological encounters with these two groups. To cite a number of examples, in his controversial 1991 poem against the leading disenchanted religious intellectual Abdolkarim Soroush, Ali Mo‘allem-Damghani constructs a critique of Soroush’s contrivartial ideas that shook the pillars of the fundamentalist Islamic ideology of the state; Yusefali Mirshakkak denounces modernist poets such as Shamlu and Akhavan-Sales;³⁸¹ and Alireza Qazveh penned down overtly ideological poems that critique the reformists’ and the conservative pragmatists’ liberal policies. These poets also played a crucial role in the development of free-verse religious poetry and a new official poetic trend called religious poetry, developed to replace the modernist works of independent and secular poets of the pre- and post-revolutionary period. While during the war zealot official poets had preferred classical forms to free verse, the latter of which was for them a sign of secularism, in the post-war period modern forms increased in popularity among official poets of different ideological leanings. The main themes of this genre were the promotion of Shi‘ite values and the glorification of the twelve Imams.³⁸² Such trends were sponsored by the government as a means for promoting Islamic values in a way understandable for and accessible to the outside world via translation.³⁸³ As Shekarsari, one of the critics of this trend, maintains, “the literary knowledge of most official poets during the first decade of the revolution was limited to classical literature” and thus their work was “customarily presented in classical forms.” After the war however, “the classical discourse lost its impact among the same poets of war and writings created in the new forms came into cultural demand.”³⁸⁴

³⁸¹ See Yusefali Mirshakkak, *Dar setiz bā khishtan-o jahān* (Tehran: Barg, 1990).

³⁸² See chapter 5 for further details.

³⁸³ Mohammadkazem Kazemi, *Dah shā‘er-e enqelāb* (Tehran: Sureh-ye mehr, 2011), 30-33.

³⁸⁴ Hamidreza Shekarsari, “Dar shatt-e goftemānh”, 33.

The addressing of religious themes in free verse initially appeared as an acceptable aesthetic standard in the works of Ali Musavi-Garmarudi prior to the revolution, in particular in his poem *'The Line of Blood'* (*Khatt-e khun*, 1978). Another pioneering voice of this period in religious broken verse is Tahereh Saffarzadeh, whose poetry collection *The Fifth Journey* (*Safar-e panjom*, 1978) inspired many post-revolutionary Islamic republican poets with an interest in modern forms. Among these stands Salman Harat, with his notable poem *Green Sky* (*Āsemān-e sabz*, 1984), and Hasan Hoseini, with *Sparrow and Gabriel* (*Gonjeshk va jegre'il*, 1992), both of whom eventually became prevalent choices in religious free-verse collections. Although official poets from the Islamic left, including those mentioned above, took the initiative in introducing religious themes to the modern forms, poets with more conservative-fundamentalist leanings, such as Qazveh, also began to employ modern forms in service of religious themes. Not only religious elements, but also regional and domestic political issues began to appear in the form of free verse. A recurrent theme in the religious free-verse poems of the post-war period is that of the Arab-Israeli conflict which in the past thirty-five years has been one of the core themes in the ideology of the Islamic Republic. The following poem by Qazveh is worth noting here due to its new literary motives and innovative perspective in the field of resistance poetry. Written in a free-verse format, the poem shows a unique set of literary metaphors such as a 'hand-cuffed apple tree' or a sparrow that does not know the Hebrew language. Metaphors of both nature and fables have been employed in the service of the poet's ideology, which falls in line with official Iranian pro-Palestine, and anti-Israel, propaganda:

*"Derakht-e sib rā miāvarand
 Ba dastband
 Beh jorm-e inkeh
 Sibhāyash rā
 Chon sang partāb kardeh ast!
 Derakht-e porteqāl rā miāvarand
 Be jorm-e inkeh cherā*

Mivehhā-ye emsālash khunin ast
Derakht-e zeytun rā miāvarand
Beh jorm-e inkeh cherā yek dar miān
Goluleh beh donyā āvardeh ast!
Dādgāh rasmi ast
Mottaham mowjist keh beh u ist dādand
Va na 'istād
Motahham kabutarist
Keh az qobbatossakhreh naraft.
Mottaham gonjeshkist
Keh zabān-e 'ebri nemidānad! [...]
Mottaham tamām-e sang-e qabrhāyand
Keh "besmellāh" dārand
Va tamām-e mādarān
Keh dar shekamhāshān
Farzandāni dārand
Sang dar mosht!"

They bring the apple tree
 With handcuffs
 On the charge of throwing its apples like stones!
 They bring the orange tree
 On the charge of having bloodied fruits this year
 They bring the olive tree
 On charges of giving birth to bullets once in a while!
 The court is now set
 The accused is a wave that was ordered to stop
 And it didn't
 The accused is a dove
 That did not fly away from the Dome of the Rock
 The accused is a sparrow
 That does not know Hebrew
 The accused are all gravestones
 With the name of God imprinted on them
 And all mothers who in their wombs have children
 With stones in their hands.³⁸⁵

Religious modern free verse has peaked in the recent years thanks to state sponsorship and as a result of the globalisation policy aimed at Islamic republican poetry, the main objective of Iran's official cultural institutions.³⁸⁶ "To extend the borders of its audience," Shekarsari asserts, "revolutionary poetry should pay more attention to modern forms

³⁸⁵ Alireza Qazveh, "Az dādgāh-e rasmi-ye khiyābāni," *Qatār-e andimeshk* (Tehran: Lowh-e zarrin, 2005), 135-136. This poem is dated 2000.

³⁸⁶ For more details, see Unknown, "She'r-e enqelābi rā mishavad sāder kard? estefādeh az yek servat-e melli," *Khabargozāri-ye mehr*, last modified 18 February 2015, <http://goo.gl/6dL56R>.

instead of classical forms since modern forms are better suited to translation compared to classical forms.”³⁸⁷ This push began after Khamenei voiced concern in 2010 about a lack of an internationally recognised Islamic republican literary masterpiece.³⁸⁸ However, the dissemination of Islamic republican cultural products outside of the country’s borders as a duty of the nation’s cultural representatives has represented a clear policy of the regime since it was recognised as a priority in the instructions that emerged from Khamenei’s 1993 discussions with recognised cultural attaches of the regime.³⁸⁹ Modern forms of poetry have thus been used to convey the “message of the revolution” beyond the nation’s borders. This recent ideological approach towards employing modern forms is unique in the history of Iranian poetry and follows from suggestions made by critics of the Islamic Republic.³⁹⁰

5. Protest Poetry (*She‘r-e E‘terāz*)

Another prevalent poetic genre to emerge in the post-Khomeini era that was popular within both factions of official poets (though with more admiration for it tending to be expressed by those of the conservative fundamentalist faction) is that of protest poetry. This genre largely covers issues relating to social inequality, the decline of Islamic revolutionary values and the moral degeneration of society after the war. It should be understood first and foremost as an ideological critique of the liberal economic policies

³⁸⁷ Hamidreza Shekarsari, “Dar shatt-e goftemānhā”, 35.

³⁸⁸ Ali Khamenei, “Adabiāt-e enqelāb dar kalām-e rahbar-e enqelāb,” *Khorāsān: Special Issue on Revolutionary Literature* (2014): 7.

³⁸⁹ For a full account of the important role played by translation in the international dissemination of official literature, see Ahmad Sabrian, “Zarurat-e nehzat-e tarjomeh dar ‘arseh-ye adabiyāt-e keshvar’,” *Khorāsān*, 79-81.

³⁹⁰ Shekarsari, “Dar shatt-e goftemānhā”, 35.

initiated by Hashemi-Rafsanjani at the beginning of the decade that then endured for the rest of the 1990s. Although such poems initially emerged during the war,³⁹¹ they increased in number in the years following the war and peaked during the first half of the 1990s.

As mentioned earlier, Hashemi-Rafsanjani's pragmatist views concerning the easing of tensions with the West, the encouragement of privatisation, development of the domestic economy and foreign trade appear distant from the policies of the radical Islamic leftists who continued to align to their Third-Worldist views on foreign policy and state intervention in the market.³⁹² The subsequent development of the private sector generated what Ali Ansari calls a "mercantile bourgeois republic,"³⁹³ as well as the restoration of the property-owning classes as an independent social class.³⁹⁴ For the official poets who sympathised with the libertarian policies of the 1980s, such liberal policies and the rebirth of the propertied classes constituted the predominant cause of the fall of a revolutionary utopia.³⁹⁵ In over one hundred and fifty couplets, written in the narrative form of masnawi, Hoseini's famous critical poem of 1995 reflects the major concerns and disillusionments of the Islamic left, ranging from the decline of Islamic morals and social justice to fading memories of the war and its martyrs:

³⁹¹ See previous chapter and the rise in popularity of semi-realistic approaches in war poetry.

³⁹² Not all Islamic leftists remained critical of Hashemi-Rafsanjani, as shown later in this chapter. Many revisited their ideology, especially in the realm of culture and foreign policy. Yet some remained radically critical of the moderate policies of Rafsanjani and later became fierce opponents of religious intellectuals and reformists.

³⁹³ Ali M. Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy: The Politics of Managing Change* (London: Chatham House, 2006), 52.

³⁹⁴ Homa Katouzian, *The Persians*, 357.

³⁹⁵ This was presumably the outcome of the relaxation of state ownership policies and the rise of privatisation, which allowed individuals to accumulate property. The diminishing of rhetoric against business and communication with the outside world were also important policies that reinforced these social transformations.

*“Mājarā in ast kam kam kammiyat bālā gereft
 Jā-ye arzeshhā-ye mā rā arzeh-ye kālā gereft
 Farq-e mowlā-ye ‘edālat bār-e digar chāk khord
 Khotbehhā-ye ātashin matruk mānd-o khāk khord
 Zir-e bārānhā-ye jāhel saqf-e taqvā nam keshid
 Saqfhā-ye sakht mānand-e moqavā nam keshid
 Bāghhā-ye sinehhā az sarvhā khāli shodand
 ‘Eshqhā khedmatgozār-e pul-o pushāli shodand
 Sarparast-e zarparast-o zarparast-e sarparast
 Langi-e in qāfeleh tā bāmdād-e mahshar ast
 Az hamān dast-e nokhostin kajravihā pā gereft
 Ruh-e tājerpishehgi dar kālbodhā jā gereft
 Kārgardānānān-e bāzi bāz bā mā jer zadand
 Panj nowbat rā beh nām-e kāseb-o tājer zadand
 Mājarā in ast, āri, mājarā tekrāri ast
 Zakhm-e mā kohnast ammā binahāyat kāri ast.”*

This is the story: quantity gradually became everything
 Our values were replaced by commodities.
 The top of the man of justice’s head [Ali] was yet again torn.³⁹⁶
 Those fiery, revolutionary lectures were abandoned and filled with dust
 Under oblivious rains, faith is dampened
 Strong roofs become damp like cardboard.
 All breasts are tinted with darkness
 The face in the mirror is rusted with forgetfulness
 The garden of hearts is emptied of cedar
 Love has become the servant of money and puppets
 The money-worshiper chief, the chief money-worshiper, are everywhere
 This caravan will remain lame until the Day of Judgment
 The leaders of this game have again deceived us
 And entitled everything to the sellers and the merchants
 This is the story, the story is not new
 Our wound has grown old, but it remains deep.³⁹⁷

The poem clearly reflects the poet’s sense of loss in facing the liberal policies and the belief in the return of social injustice to the society. To Hoseini and many other poets of the Islamic left any form of commercialisation or privatisation equalled the fall of the revolutionary utopia and a forsaking of the Islamic principles of the revolution. The imagery of a society falling apart due to its insensibilities and indifferences towards former revolutionary ideals forms part of the protest literary discourse and its only solution is the

³⁹⁶ Hoseini mentions Ali’s murder in reference to the rise of social injustice.

³⁹⁷ Hasan Hoseini, “Fasli az manzume-ye mordābhā va ābhā,” *Gozideh-ye she ‘r-e defā ‘-e moqaddas* (Tehran: Sureh-ye mehr, 2007), 309-16.

return to the ideals of the revolution:

*“Biā beh āyeneh, Quran, beh āb bargardim
Biyā beh asb, hamāseh, rekāb bargardim
Beh dasthā-ye por az pineh, sofrehhā-ye tohi
Be harf-e avval-e in enqelāb bargardim.”*³⁹⁸

Let's go back to the mirror, Quran and water³⁹⁹
Let's go back to the horse, epic and stirrup
Let's go back to the callused hands, empty tables
Let's go back to the first words of this revolution.

In the eyes of these poets, whoever opted for a different path following the death of Khomeini in order to put an end to revolutionary ideals was a hypocrite (*Riākār*) and a traitor. This view is perceptible in the works of official poets who tended towards the conservative, fundamentalist trend, especially the younger generation, such as Qazveh, who took a radical stance against the rise of liberalism and reformism after the war in his poetry collections. The following poem is one of Qazveh's early works and it addresses the moral decline and fall of Iran's Islamic revolutionary utopia. In making reference to early Islamic figures such as Abuzar, one of the prophet's companions, Qazveh exhibits his fundamentalist approach to the revival of Islamic values while identifying the persistence of poverty contrasted with swindlers and money-makers as proof of the fall of the Islamic utopia. In the eyes of the poet, the revolution has clearly failed to act on its stated ideals:

*“Az nakhlestān tā khiyābān
Az chārrāh-e dard gozashtam*

³⁹⁸ Mostafa Mohaddes-Khorasani, “Biā beh āyeneh, Quran, beh āb bargardim,” *Official Website*, accessed August 10, 2009, <http://mostafamohadesi.blogfa.com/post-47.aspx>. The poem was initially written in the 1990s and republished on the poet's website on the above date.

³⁹⁹ This refers to an Iranian tradition in which when someone is to leave on a journey or for war these three elements are placed on a tray; the traveller should pass underneath it three consecutive times to guarantee their safe return.

*Az chārrāh-e faqr
 Keh e 'terāz-e abuzar marā beh khod āvard
 Inān barādarān-e Ali hastand?
 Man migozashtam-o Abuzar faryād mizad:
 Cherā sharih qāzihā rosvā nemishavand?
 Man migozashtam va Abuzar
 Az kenār-e in hameh tafāvot nemigozasht."*

From the palm grove to the street
 I passed from the junction of pain
 I passed from the junction of poverty
 I became conscious of Abuzar's protesting voice
 Why are not the hypocrite judges being disgraced?
 I would compromise but Abuzar would not ignore all such inequalities and distinctions.⁴⁰⁰

*"Dasteh golhā dasteh dasteh miravand az yādhā
 Geryeh kon ey āsemān dar marge tufānzādhā
 Sakht gonnāmid ammā ey shaqāyeqsiratān
 Kiseh miduzand bā nām-e shomā shayyādhā."*

The rose bouquets⁴⁰¹ are forgotten one after another
 Oh sky! Cry on the death of the courageous men
 Oh you poppy-like, anonymous [martyrs]!
 Swindlers make money in your name.⁴⁰²

Hypocrisy is flagged as the predominant indicator of moral decline in the post-war period and is often linked to critiques of the rise of metropolitan cities, with various official poets portraying themselves as the victims of this new and unfamiliar and undesirable condition. Any shift towards a more liberal cultural or economic outlook is perceived as a threat to their utopia and is therefore to be confronted:

*"Emruz shāyad bāyad az khun-e gelu khord
 Nān-e sharaf az sofrehhā-ye ārezu khord
 Buy-e riā por kardeh zehn-e dasthā rā
 Ey kāsh mishod jor'ehei birang-o bu khord
 Shāyad tamām-e harfam in bāshad jamā'at
 Haqq-e shomā rā kākhhā-ye ru-beh-ru khord."*

Today maybe we should drink the blood of our throats

⁴⁰⁰ Alireza Qazveh, *Az nakhlestān tā khiyābān*, 71.

⁴⁰¹ Literary reference to the martyrs.

⁴⁰² Alireza Qazveh, *Az nakhlestān tā khiyābān*, 72

And only expect honour in our dreams
 Today with the scent of hypocrisy on our hands
 I wish only a sip, free from insincerity that we could drink
 Maybe all I want to say is this:
 These palaces have trampled your part.⁴⁰³

One of the key words that often appeared in Khomeini's speeches to describe the supporters of monarchical government was 'palace-dwellers' (*kākhneshtin*) versus 'shantytown dwellers' (*khukhneshtin*).⁴⁰⁴ In the poem, 'palace' is a keyword used to describe the mercantile bourgeoisie as the anti-revolutionary class that has trampled the rights of the deprived masses. The clash of the poor with the rich, a major revolutionary slogan, was once again revived in the protest poetry of the 1990s and most of these poems were written by disillusioned Islamic republican poets with conservative fundamentalist tendencies.

6. Official Poets of the Islamic Left: Doubts and Uncertainties

Such ideological clashes and factional politics were disturbing for those who had wholeheartedly supported the revolution during the 1980s and played key roles in the formation of cultural grassroots centres such as the Howzeh. For them, a fresh set of political and ideological divisions, coupled with the grasping of power by conservative pragmatists and conservative fundamentalists, did not constitute political transformation *per se*, but a form of metamorphosis in its gravest shape. In the poem '*Metamorphosis*'

⁴⁰³ Seyyed Ziaoddin Shafi'i, "Ghazal-e hasrat," *Harfi az jens-e zamān*, (ed.) Seyyed Akbar Mirja'fari (Tehran: Nashr-e qu, 1998), 68.

⁴⁰⁴ See chapter 4 for further details on these terms.

(*Estehāleh*, 1992) Aminpur captures the sense of alteration prevalent among marginalised members of the Islamic left who had been excluded from influential political positions during this period:

*“Dar sāl-e sarfehju ‘i-ye labkhand
 Parvānehhā-ye rangparideh
 Ruy-e labān-e mā
 Parpar zadand
 Labkhand-e mā beh zakhm badal shod
 Va zakhkhāyemān
 Ta ostokhān resid
 Va busehhāyemān pusid
 Mā
 Labkhand-e ostokhāni-ye khod rā
 Dar lābehlā-ye zakhm nahān kardim
 Ammā
 Dar ruzhā-ye rikht-o pāsh-e labkhand
 Qassābakān-e parvār
 Va kāsebān-e rasmi-ye parvānehdār
 Labkhandhā-ye yakhzadeh-ye khish rā
 Bar pishkhān-e khod beh tamāshā goāshtand.”*

In the year of conserving the smile
 The paled moths
 Died on our lips
 Our smiles
 Turned into wounds
 And our wounds
 Reached our bones
 And our kisses
 Rotted
 We
 Hid our bone-shaped smiles
 In the midst of the wound
 But
 In the days of lavishing smiles
 The fat butchers
 And the official licensed traders
 Have put their frozen smiles on the counter
 For exhibition.⁴⁰⁵

The paled, dying butterflies refer to the fading revolutionary cause and the culture of resistance during the wartime in the eyes of the poet. The deteriorating smiles refer to the

⁴⁰⁵ Qaysar Aminpur, “*Estehāleh*,” *Āyenehhā-ye nāgahān*, 25-26.

melancholia and depression of the pro-revolutionary generation after the war and the death of Khomeini. The ‘bone-shaped smiles’ versus the ‘frozen smiles of the fat butchers’ represents an important allegorical dichotomy. The collective ‘we’ in this poem refers to the disillusioned adherents to the revolution and stands in contrast to ‘them’, that is, the ‘fat butchers’ whose main duties are murder and oppression. In this sense, the poem also recalls one of Ahmad Shamlu’s well-known poems, *In This Deadend* (1979). A major voice of the opposition modernist literati, Shamlu wrote this poem one year after the revolution when he realised the undesirable outcomes of the Islamic Revolution. Like many other poets of the official and unofficial trends, Shamlu and Aminpur never met. In terms of their ideological stance towards the establishment they remained quite distinct from one another. However, they seem to have shared fairly similar feelings about the outcome of the revolution, with both employing the imagery of butchers as oppressors and fading smiles as a sign of a dispirited worldview:

Va inak qassābānand bar gozargāhhā mostaqar
Roozegār-e qaribist nāzanin.
Labkhand rā bar labhā tarrāhi mikonand
*Va tarāneh rā bar dahān.*⁴⁰⁶

There, butchers
 Posted in passageways
 With bloody chopping blocks and cleavers:
 Strange times, my dear.
 And they chop smiles off the mouth:
 Let’s hide love in the larder.⁴⁰⁷

Another sign of confrontation between the disillusioned ‘we’ in the poem with the oppressive ‘them’ (fat butchers) in Aminpur’s poem becomes apparent in the act of hiding

⁴⁰⁶ Ahmad Shamlou, “Dar in bonbast,” *Majmu‘eh-ye ‘ash‘ār* (Tehran: Negāh, 2013), 824.

⁴⁰⁷ Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, “From Desire to Disillusion: Three Poems by Ahmad Shamlu,” *Iranian Studies* 30: 3-4 (1997), 218.

the smiles in their wounds versus exhibiting the frozen smiles on the counters. Many disillusioned writers, poets and activities fell into silence and became politically passive as a result of ideological disillusionment during this period. Some, like Aminpur, joined the academic world and distanced themselves from official poetry circles.

After such obvious distinctions were by poets such as Aminpur between the disillusioned voices of the revolution and the oppressive forces, another remarkable shift from revolutionary collectivity to a highly individualistic approach was made possible as a result of multiplying disillusionments. Poets sincerely depicted the sense of loss and failure that derived from marginalisation and exclusion, this time not through an alternative collective 'we' discussed in relation to total isolation. It is worth noting that when compared to the poetry written as part of the holy defence genre, this poetic output was limited, in particular to poets with reformist leanings:

*"Tow aslan jā-ye man hālā begu bā man cheh mikardi?
Agar chon barg mipusid ruzi arezuhāyat."*

Tell me what you would have done if you were me
And all your dreams would have rotted like dead leaves?⁴⁰⁸

*"Dar sāyeh-ye in saqf-e tarakkhordeh neshastim
Bihooleh-o khasteh-o afsordeh neshastim
Khāmush cho fānus keh dar khish khamidast
Pichichideh beh khod bā tan-e tākhordeh neshastim
Barkhāst sedā az dar-o divār, vali mā
Bā in hameh faryād-e forukhordeh neshastim."*

In the shadow of this cracked ceiling,
We sit.
Impatient, weary, depressed,
We sit.
Dark like a light that is curled into itself,
Tied up in ourselves, with crumpled body,

⁴⁰⁸ Abdoljabbar Kakaei, *Gozideh-ye she'r-e emruz*, 84.

We sit.
 The doors and walls begin to speak,
 But with all our repressed cries
 We sit.⁴⁰⁹

Depicting disappointment through the passive act of ‘sitting’ in front of the outspoken walls and doors exposes a mind set particular to the post-war disillusionment that surfaced following Khomeini’s death. Rafsanjani attempted to fill the void left by the absence of the charismatic authority of Khomeini and the end of war by “extending tentacles of patrimonial domination and cultivating the financially important constituency of the mercantile community.”⁴¹⁰ National reconstruction via the introduction of an overwhelmingly bureaucratic system was Rafsanjani’s method for proving his credibility to an anxious Iranian public that had suffered interminably in the course of the war. The accumulation of wealth became a new value since Rafsanjani himself, a former pistachio trader, did not wince at private economic growth. This novel socio-economic environment came as a shock to many official poets with Islamic leftist leanings who became isolated from the poetry scene as they witnessed both their lives and their worldviews undergo fundamental transformations. Some such poets decided to embrace these changes tentatively, while others refused to change, instead staunchly preserving their fundamentalist values. For the latter, Rafsanjani and his liberal policies were signs of westruckedness, to use Al-e Ahmad’s terminology.⁴¹¹ Having found themselves the spectators at an exhibition of wealth and property, these poets began to criticise Rafsanjani and his government:

⁴⁰⁹ Qaysar Aminpur, “Jangal-e khāreh,” *Āyenehhā-ye nāgahān*, 87-88.

⁴¹⁰ Ansari, *Iran, Islam and Democracy*, 57.

⁴¹¹ For a detailed discussion on this book and term, see chapter 2.

“Hurā, harāj-e ‘eshq
Injā shabih-e shahr-e neonhāst
Beh pinehhā-ye dast-e khiyābān negāh kon!
Az rudkhānehhā-ye pas az in
Ābi nemigozarad
Hurā harāj-e ‘eshq
Coca Cola va Boks
Hurā beh shāmhā-ye Hilton
Keh sur-e enqelābi-ye khubān rā
Shirin kard.
Do ‘ā-ye bakhsh-e khosusi
She ‘ri dar rāstā-ye bahreh-ye eslāmi
Qasidehei dar madh-e bank-e melli-o mellat!
Bogzār bachehhā-ye hazrat-e Mowlāna
Tājer shavand.
Cheh talkh migozarad bar she ‘r
Cheh sakht migozarad bar shā ‘er
Khasteham ey she ‘r
Zakhmkhordeham ey she ‘r
Rahāyam kon ey she ‘r.”

Hurray, the love on sale
 Here looks like the city of neon lights
 Look at the calluses on the street's hands
 From these rivers, will never pass water again
 Viva the love on sale
 Coca Cola and boxing
 Viva the suppers of the Hilton Hotel
 That made the revolutionary enthusiasm even more pleasant
 A special prayer for the private sector
 A poem about the Islamic interest
 An ode in praise of the National Bank and *Mellat* Bank
 Let the children of Rumi
 Become businessmen.
 How utterly bitter it is for poetry
 How terribly difficult is it for the poet.
 Oh poetry! I am tired
 Oh poetry! I am wounded
 Oh poetry! Leave me alone!⁴¹²

The unsophisticated, rhetorical lexicon of the poem makes it accessible to the audience.

The pejorative use of popular Western brands such as Coca Cola as a sign of consumerist culture or Hilton as a sign of the bourgeoisie and capitalism, which constantly attack the

⁴¹² Alireza Qazveh, “Sedā-ye mā rā az behesht mishenavid,” *Qatār-e andimeshk*, 87-96. The poem was written in February 1994.

authentic and simple revolutionary lifestyle, is a typical literary technique of protest poetry during this period. Holding a nativist approach, the poet rejects anything that relates to the outside world, a view that was once encouraged by Khomeini and goes against importing a Western lifestyle. Through a nativist approach the poem suggests that any form of mercantile bourgeoisie deteriorates the authentic local culture of nation. The use of the name of the prominent mystic poet 'Rumi' next to 'privatisation', 'businessmen', 'national bank', 'Hilton' and 'Coca Cola' is not accidental. These words are representative of two opposing worldviews, that of the conservative pragmatist government which was keen on reconnecting with the outside world and leading the country to globalisation, and that of the nativist fundamentalists who sought their roots in the tradition. The ending lines complete the puzzle by depicting an ideological clash between the revolutionary poet, a representative of the deprived and disillusioned revolutionaries, and the mercantile bourgeoisie and businessmen who have forsaken the ideals of the revolution and wartime. These protesting poets often directly criticised the development plans executed by Rafsanjani's government during his first round of presidency. In the final lines of the poem 'Nests Under the Construction Plan' (*Lānehhā dar tarh*, 1994), Hoseini uses the familiar imagery of the bird as martyr to refer to the fighters' empty houses that were to be bulldozed under the extensive construction plans of the reconstruction era:

*"Chelchelehhā az morakhasi bāznagashtand
Va lānehhā-ye montazereshān
Dar tarhhā-ye towse'eh virān shod."*

The swallows have not yet returned from vacation
And their waiting houses
Are ruined by development plans.⁴¹³

⁴¹³ Hasan Hoseini, "Lānehhā dar tarh," *Dar malakut-e sokut* (Tehran: Anjoman-e shā'ērān-e Iran, 2007), 23-4.

In addition to harsh criticisms of the extension of the mercantile bourgeoisie and bureaucratic structure, revolutionary hope and idealism were replaced by isolating, doubtful and individualistic approaches in the works of official poets who gradually began to detach themselves from the establishment. Their self-depiction was often accompanied by a sense of bewilderment as a result of rapid political and ideological change. Aminpur pioneered this trend by developing a hesitant approach toward the ideological certainties of the past. As part of his reformed worldview the trembling ideologies of the past were replaced by the probabilities and perplexities of the present day, as demonstrated in ‘*New Epoch*’ (*Asr-e jadid*, 1989):

“*Mā*
Dar ‘asr-e ehtemāl beh sar mibarim
Dar ‘asr-e shakk-o shāyad
Dar ‘asr-e pishbini-ye vaz‘-e havā
Az har taraf keh bād biyāyad
Dar ‘asr-e qāt‘iyat-e tardid
‘asr-e jaded
‘asri keh hich asli
joz asl-e ehtemāl yaqini nist.”⁴¹⁴

We live in the age of probability
 In the age of doubt and maybe
 In the age of weather forecasts
 Anyway the wind blows.

The age of resolute hesitation
 The modern age
 The age when no principle
 Is certain but probable.⁴¹⁵

In another poem of a similar ilk, ‘*Yellow Rain*’ (*Bārān-e zard*, 1993), Aminpur narrates the unsettling emotional condition of those who believed that in the wake of the war all had

⁴¹⁴ Qaysar Aminpur, “‘Asr-e jadid,’” *Āyenehhā-ye nāgahān*, 53-4.

⁴¹⁵ Saeed Matinpur, “Modern Age,” *Godizeh-ye ash‘ār-e Aminpur beh zabān-e engelisi* (Tehran: Anjoman-e shā‘erān-e Iran, 2010), 76.

forsaken them. He describes a scene of chemical rain in reference to the bombardments of the war and his own passive response to that same situation. The active and collective ‘us’ has turned into a passive mass, proving a marked contrast between the poet’s differing collective approaches during and after the war:

Akhhbār-e tāzeh rā nashnidi?
Goftand:
Vaz ‘-e havā kharāb ast
Goftand: āsemān-e hameh jā abrist
Goftand az saqfhā-ye kāzeb-e sorbi
Bārān-e zard
Bārān-e shimiā’i
Mibārad
Goftand:
Golhā-ye sharheh-sharheh-ye mā rā
Bā dāghhā-ye kohne-ye mādarzād
Tashrih mikonand
Goftand...
Ammā
Bā in hameh khabar
Dar ‘asr-e shab
Dar ‘asr-e khastehgi
Dar ‘asr-e bi- ‘asab
Dar ruznāmeh-ye ‘asr
Az sharh-e hāl-e mā asari nist
Dar ‘asr-e khāb-o khalseh-o khamyāzeh
Dar ‘asr-e ākharin khabar-e tāzeh
Az nām-e mā
Dar ruznāmejhā khabari nist.”⁴¹⁶

Have you heard the latest news?
 “The weather forecast is bad,” they said.
 They said the sky is overcast everywhere.
 They said that from the faux ceiling of lead
 Yellow rain,
 Chemical rain,
 Will pour.
 They said
 They will extend the coverage
 Of saved roses
 And the scars they were born with.
 They said...
 Yet despite all this news
 Just in, late in the evening,

⁴¹⁶ Qaysar Aminpur, “‘Bārān-e zard,” *Āyenehhā-ye nāgahān*, 125-126.

Evening of exhaustion,
 Evening without nerves,
 There is no coverage of our ordeal
 In the evening papers.
 In the age of indolence, spoor and yawning
 In the age of the latest flash headlines.
 There is no news in the papers.⁴¹⁷

As Farzad suggests, similar to other poets that shared his sentiments, Aminpur seemed more at ease with using modern forms of poetry and switching from abstract to more tangible themes, depicting his status through the daily news reports and weather forecasts of the period.

When it comes to revolutionary disillusionment, Aminpur's life and works stand out from those of his fellow official poets. None of the subsequently disillusioned official poets active during the 1990s took the path that Aminpur chose after the end of the war, which included a lifetime commitment to academia, detachment from the Howzeh and all political parties, the adoption of an apolitical and independent literary stance, and a humanist approach towards religion. While at times he developed a sense of nostalgia for the early days of the revolution, his works often reflect his revised views and genuine feelings over any sense of nostalgia for the past. Aminpur thus drew a definitive line in the official literary camp between himself and the rest. His poem '*I Am Normal*' (*Raftār-e man 'ādīst*, 1993) is an important work in that it offers a self-portrait of the disillusioned poet, a poet who embraced his new existence. The modernist form and imageries of the poem bear witness to a change in the way in which Aminpur began to perceive poetry as an independent literary genre. He depicts himself as an individual in a modern setting who

⁴¹⁷ Translation taken from Farzad, "Qaysar Aminpur and the Persian Poetry of Sacred Defence," 360.

is seen by others as distinctly different from the man they knew in the past. He is searching for oneness, a personal encounter with god, an internal reformation rather than an external struggle. It is possible that this change occurred as a result of the political and ideological transformations indicated in the work:

*Raftār-e man 'ādist
 Ammā nemidānam cherā
 In ruzhā
 Az dustāno āshnāyān
 Har kas marā mibinad
 Az dur miguyad
 In ruzhā engār
 Hālo havā-ye digari dāri
 Ammā
 Man mesl-e har ruzam
 Bā ān neshānihā-ye sādeh
 Va bā hamān emzā, hamān nām
 Va bā hamān raftār-e ma 'mulī
 Mesl-e hamisheh sākeo ārām
 In ruzhā tanhā
 Hes mikonam
 Gāhi kami gongam
 Gāhi kami gijam
 Az ruzhā-ye pish qadri bishtar
 In ruzhā rā dust dāram
 -Gāhi az to cheh penhān-
 Bā sanghā āvāz mikhānam
 Va qadr-e ba 'zī lahzezhā rā khub midānam.
 In ruzhā gāhi
 Az ruzo māho sālo az taqvim
 Az ruznāmeḥ bi-khabar hastam
 Hes mikonam gāhi kami kamtar
 Gāhi shadidan bishtar hastam.
 Hatta agar mishod beguyam
 In ruzhā gāhi khodā rā ham
 Yek jur-e digar miparastam."*

I behave as I always do
 But I don't know why
 These days
 Friends and acquaintances
 Whenever they see me
 They comment, knowingly:
 It's as if these days
 You are not quite yourself
 There is a different air about you!
 But I am like I have always been
 With the same simple quirks
 With the same signature, same name

Behaving the same way,
 As always, quiet and calm.
 Except these days
 I sometimes feel a bit vague
 Sometimes befuddled, a little confused.
 I feel
 That compared to previous days
 I love the present days a little more
 Sometimes –
 To tell you the truth –
 I sing with the stones
 I value some moments very much indeed.
 These days, sometimes,
 I am oblivious to days, months and years, to the calendar,
 Oblivious to the news.
 I sense that sometimes I am a little less
 And sometimes I am viscerally more.
 And if I could say it,
 These days I even worship God differently.⁴¹⁸

7. Yearning For Peace: An Anti-nostalgic Take on the War

Although a sense of disquiet at the fall of Iran's revolutionary utopia represented a common sentiment among official poets of the period, their response to it varied. Despite the on-going state-sponsored promotion of nostalgic recollections of the war, a certain number of leading official poets of the war period found the newly emerged war culture to be at odds with their newly revised ideological stance and began to seek out that very same absent revolutionary utopia via the notion of peace and dialogue, as opposed to a specific nostalgic yearning for the struggles and confrontations embodied by yesterday's war. This ideological shift became visible in the mid-1990s and grew substantially throughout the reformist tendencies that arose during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-

⁴¹⁸ Translation taken from Farzad, "Qaysar Aminpur and the Persian Poetry of Sacred Defence," 371-372. The poetry collection *Sudden Mirrors*, in which all of these poems appeared for the first time, was published in 1993, a year after the forced resignation of Mohammad Khatami, who had been the moderate Islamic leftist minister of culture since 1982.

2004). Aminpur was a particularly distinguished voice within this trend. Where once his war poems had gained him recognition as the national voice of official poetry.⁴¹⁹ He later wrote three short poems in response to his own famous war poems, introducing the theme of peace and life as opposing war and destruction in each.⁴²⁰ These new poems were published in his final collection *The Grammar of Love (Dastur-e zabān-e 'eshq*, 2006) and entitled 'A Sketch for Peace' (*Tarhi baray-e solh*, 2005). They reflect the world of a poet who no longer occupies the same ideological stance toward the glorification of war and martyrdom:

*"Kudak bā gorbehāyash dar hayāt-e khāneh bāzi mikonad
Mādar kenār-e charkh-e khayyāti
Ārām rafteh dar nakh-e suzan
'Atr-e bokhār-e chāy-e tāzeh
Dar khāneh mipichad.
Sedā-ye dar
"Shāyad pedar!"*"⁴²¹

The child plays with his kittens inside the house
The mother sits next to her sewing machine, peaceful
Engaged with her needle and thread
The scent of fresh tea fills the house
The sound of the door
"Maybe it's father!"

This return to life lies at the heart of Aminpur's revised utopia. The presence of the male heroic father figure at the centre of the poem represents the utopian dream of the reunion of the family and, in a broader sense, the reconstruction of society after a decade of grief and loss. Life versus death, war versus peace, and reconstruction versus destruction represent the revised components of this now anti-war utopia. While the official poets

⁴¹⁹ In 1994, Aminpur won the Ofoq Poetry Prize for *The Breath of the Morning*, which was conferred the title of Best War Poetry Collection.

⁴²⁰ For a detailed analysis of Aminpur's war poems, see chapter 4.

⁴²¹ Qaysar Aminpur, "Tarhi baray-e solh (1)," *Dastur-e zabān-e 'eshq* (Tehran: Morvarid, 2007), 16.

cited above yearned to revive the revolutionary context of the 1980s, with all of its anti-imperialist and Islamic militant fervour, Aminpur aimed to revisit the same ideology but in light of fresh demands and through the perspective of reconstruction and reform. Aminpur's second and third sketches of peace challenge the politics of nostalgia and the rhetoric of holy defence poetry. In both poems he questions the notions of the enemy (*doshman*), of victory (*piruzi*) and of failure (*shekast*), as well as the purposes they serve in the ideology of warfare:

*"Shahidi keh bar khāk mikhof
Chenin dar delash goft:
"Agar fath inast
Keh doshman shekast
Cherā hamchenān doshmani hast?"*⁴²²

At his burial, the martyr said:
"If victory is that the enemy has failed
Why is there still an 'enemy' that lives?"

The poet questions the core of the militant Islamist discourse that revolves around the notion of the 'enemy' or the other, which is always conceptualised as a foreign force and represents the source of the country's post-war problems. This image of the other lies at the heart of the Cultural Onslaught (*tahājom-e farhangī*) agenda implemented by the state after the war as a method for confrontation with the outside world. According to this anti-Western cultural campaign, the West is to blame for the corruption and manipulation of Islamic values and the destruction of revolutionary utopia, which it executed by means of, first, an 'imposed war' (*jang-e tahmili*) and second, cultural invasion. The Howzeh proved the most active cultural centre in the promotion of this idea, with *Sureh-ye Mehr* representing the foremost journal for the publication and promotion of the idea of cultural

⁴²² Qaysar Aminpur, "Tarhi barāy-e solh (2)," *Dastur-e zabān-e 'eshq*, 17.

invasion during this period. Poets such as Aminpur did not collaborate with this and similar journals since their disheartened approach instead fell in line with the views of more moderate supporters of the Islamic Republic who later on became known as religious reformists. The brutal war of the past was no longer sacred or mystic to them, but rather an unholy and bitter event to be spurned at all costs:

*“Shahidi keh bar khāk mikhof
Sarangosht dar khun-e khod mizad-o minevesht
Dow seh harf bar sang
«Beh omid-e piruzi-e vaqe’i
Na dar jang
Keh bar jang.”*⁴²³

At his burial, the martyr
Dipped his finger into the drops of his blood
A few letters on the stone:
I wish a real victory
Not in the war itself
But on the idea of war.

Aminpur’s later poetic discourse mirrors a remarkable change in the complex dynamics of the official poetry of the Islamic Republic. His idealist revolutionary mind set of the 1980s, which had sparked him to scale the wall of the Embassy of the United States in Tehran, write poetic odes to Khomeini and praise martyrdom as a holy cause, altered as he came to embrace a yearning for peace and stability. It was this deep sense of disenchantment and ideological transformation that made him an iconic figure of the Islamic Republican era.

The sentiments of disenchantment prevalent at the time brought new keywords such as pain (*dard*) and sorrow (*anduh*, *gham*) to the official literary jargon of the period. In three

⁴²⁸ Qaysar Aminpur, “Tarhi baray-e solh (3),” *Dastur-e zabān-e ‘eshq*, 18.

chain poems entitled ‘*Painisque Cycles*’ (*Dardvārehhā*, 1992), Aminpur articulates pain as a socio-ideological concept and uses it to reference societal deterioration in the aftermath of the war. Instead of critiquing the economic policies of the government like fundamentalist official poets, Aminpur tackles the everyday lives and struggles of the people in his poetry:

Dardhā-ye man
Jāmeḥ nistand
Tā zeh tan darāvaram
«Chāmeḥ-o Chakāmeḥ» nistand
Tā beh reshteh-ye sokhan darāvaram
Na ‘reh nistand
Tā zeh nā-ye jān darāvaram
Dardhā-ye man nagoftani
Dardhā-ye man nahoftanist.
Dardhā-ye man
Garcheh dard-e mardom-e zamāneh nist
Dard-e mardom-e zamāneh ast
Mardomi keh chin-e pustineshān
Mardomi keh rang-e ruy-e āstineshān
Mardomi keh nāmhāyeshān
Jeld-e kohnē-ye shenāsnāmeḥhāyeshān
Dard mikonad.
Man vali tamām-e ostokhān-e budanam
Lahzehhā-ye sādeh-ye sorudanam
*Dard mikonad.*⁴²⁴

My sorrows
 Are not garments
 That I can remove.
 They are not odes and lyrics
 That I can put into words.
 They are not roaring cries
 That can be played on the flute of my soul.

My sorrows are unspeakable
 My sorrows are concealed
 My sorrows,
 They are not like the sorrows of the people of my time
 They are the anguish of contemporary people.
 People, whose folds of their sheepskin coats,
 Whose collars of their sleeves,

⁴²⁴ Qaysar Aminpur, “Dardvārehhā (1),” *Āyenehhā-ye nāgahān*, 15; 16.

People whose names,
Whose old birth-certificate covers,
Are in pain.
And I: the skeleton of my being,
The simple instant of my lyricism
Is in pain.⁴²⁵

To an extent, the *Painisque Cycles* by Aminpur reminds one of Ahmad Shamlu's well-known poem *Eshq-e 'omumi* (Common/public Love, 1957) which was published in his famous collection *Havā-ye Tāzeh* (Fresh Air, 1957) when he saw himself at the heart of disillusionment with the establishment and as part of the mass's struggle for freedom and equality:

*"Ashk rāzist
Labkhand rāzist
Eshq rāzist
Ashk-e ān shab labkhand-e eshqam bud
Qesseh nistam keh bekhāni
Sedā nistam keh beshnavi
Yā chizi chonān keh bebini
Yā chizi chonān keh bedāni
Man dard-e moshtarakam
Marā faryād kon."*⁴²⁶

Tear is a mystery
Smile is a mystery
Love is a mystery
That night tears were the smile of love upon me
I am not a story you would read
I am not a song you would sing
I am not a sound you would hear
A thing to see
A thing to know
I am a shared pain
Cry me out.

⁴²⁵ Translation taken from Narguess Farzad, "Qaysar Aminpur and the Persian Poetry of Sacred Defence," 369.

⁴²⁶ Ahmad Shamlu, "Eshq-e 'omumi," *Majmu'eh āsār: Daftar-e yekom* (Tehran: Mo'asseseh-ye enteshārāt-e negāh, 2001), 213.

7. Taking Refuge in Love

Another important thematic focus in this chapter is the prevailing theme of love in the poetry of the post-Khomeini era. This reached its peak during the reform period with the publication of Aminpur's last volume of poetry, *The Grammar of Love* (2006). For the disillusioned poets of the post-Khomeini era, both prior to and after the rise of the reform movement, love was the principal non-political theme that was adopted in order to maintain a distance from politics. Whether approached via a mystic touch or a more mundane approach, love lay at the heart of the works and worldview of formerly ideological poets who had gradually distanced themselves from the establishment. Mahmudi's '*A Season for Love Sonnets*' (*Fasli az 'āsheqānehhā*, 1989) and Aminpur's *All Flowers are Sunflowers* (2002) are two exemplary collections of this genre of poetry and contain some of the most famous secular and mystic love poems of the post-Khomeini era.⁴²⁷ Abstract notions, natural imageries and human feelings fall among the prevailing themes of the love poems from this period:

“‘*Obur mikonam man az farāz-e kahkeshānhā*
Setārehhā beh zir-e pā-ye man dar āsemānhā
Man-o tow az hozur-e lahzehhā-ye garm-e tabdār
Panāh mibārim zir-e chatr-e sāyehbānhā.”

I pass across all galaxies
 All stars are behind my feet in the skies

⁴²⁷ Love and the mystic ghazals can be traced in the works of Anvari-Abivardi and Sanai-Ghanavi respectively, with these writers being the founders of these two genres of ghazal. The mystic ghazal was later developed by Mowlavi, Khaqani and Attar, while in Sa'di's work the love ghazal reached its peak. A combined version of mystic and love ghazals was later developed by Hafez in the eighth century. After the Constitutional Revolution, the ghazal became a socio-political form (see chapter 1) and after the Islamic Revolution it was revived by Islamic Republican poets, who mainly took a mystic approach to the writing of ghazals during the war. During the post-Khomeini era, love ghazals yet again became prevalent among official poets, especially those who gradually changed their path and had become disillusioned with revolutionary objectives and principles.

You and I in the presence of these feverish moments
Take refuge under the shadow of the awnings.⁴²⁸

Love is sometimes described in its most naked of forms, such as in ‘Denial’ (*Enkār*, 1990)

by Aminpur:

“*Az tamām-e ramzo rāzhā-ye ‘eshq*
Joz hamin seh harf
Joz hamin seh harf-e sādeh-ye miāntohti
Chiz-e digari saram nemishavad.
Man saram nemishavad vali...
Rāsti
Delam
Keh mishavad.”⁴²⁹

From all secrets and signs of love
Except for these three letters
Except for these three simple, curved letters⁴³⁰
I understand no more
I do not understand
But my heart does and therefore evolves

However, some official literary critics exclude these and similar love poems from the category of revolutionary poetry due to their content,⁴³¹ claiming that only love poems with a mystical touch or moral or religious themes are not worthy of being listed as Islamic republican poetry. According to Amiri-Esfandaqeh, an official poet close to the Leader, official love poems are only acceptable if they adhere to Islam and the state’s moral boundaries.⁴³² Such comments are often made in light of Khamenei’s expectations of committed poetry. In his annual address to official poets, Khamenei once stated that any love poetry they might wish to write had to keep in mind certain ethical limits in order to

⁴²⁸ Soheil Mahmudi quoted in Seyed Akbar Mirja’fari, *Harfi az jens-e zamān* (Tehran: Nashr-e Qu 1999), 30.

⁴²⁹ Qaysar Aminpur, “Enkār,” *Golhā hameh āftābgardānand*, 9. The poem is dated April 1990.

⁴³⁰ This makes reference to the alphabetical shapes of ‘eyn, Shin and qāf in Persian.

⁴³¹ Hamidreza Shekarsari, “Dar shatt-e goftemānhā,” 34.

⁴³² Mohammadreza Amiri-Esfandaqeh, “She’r-e ‘āsheqāneh bā yek shart,” *Jahānnews*, accessed 11 September 2014, <http://jahannews.com/vdcawuneu49nwi1.k5k4.html>.

remain virtuous:

Another theme in all poetry is that of the poet's personal longings and emotions. In each historical period, poets have written about their personal feelings [...]. There is nothing wrong with writing about your inner feelings. We have to consider two aspects in poetry: personal emotions and poetic wisdom ('*Hekmat-e Shāerāneh*'). Look at Sa'di, for example, who has rightfully tackled both aspects in his work [...]. When you write poems about personal feelings and emotions, you have to be aware of certain limits. You must be modest in expressing your emotions.⁴³³

8. The Peak of Disillusionment

Despite hopeful prospects and winds of change following the reform movement, especially after the appointment of Ataollah Mohajerani (arguably the most liberal minister of culture since 1979), a number of historical events indicated that reformists had perhaps been too optimistic about socio-political change. These events included the murder of numerous secular intellectuals (1998), the suppression of the student movement following the banning of the *Salām* newspaper (1999), the assassination attempt on the most influential theoretician of the reform movement, Saeid Hajjarian (2000), the long-lasting embargo on reformist newspapers (1998-2004), and the imprisonment of leading religious intellectuals. In 2009, a large majority of conservatives rallied for Mahmud Ahmadinejad, who took office after the most controversial presidential election in the post-revolution era. The immediate consequences of this election were political unrest across the country, the rise of the Green Movement and further disillusionments and divisions within the camp of the Islamic republican poets.

⁴³³ Ali Khamenei, "Bayānāt dar didār bā shā'erān," *Khamenei's Official Website*, accessed 10 August 2013, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=20753>.

Two important and recent events have contributed to the transformation of the official poetry of the Islamic Republic, especially in terms of disillusionment: the death of Aminpur in 2007 and the rise of the Green Movement in 2009. Both are critical for an understanding of the complex relations that persist between former and current official poets within the political establishment. The death of Aminpur, the most iconic figure of Islamic republican poetry, and the paradoxical encounters among different parties and groups that occurred with his passing, indicate the poet's distinct position in the official poetic canon on the one hand and the perplexities of the life and career of a disillusioned poet in the Islamic Republican era on the other.

Although Aminpur died of heart failure, it was his generally deteriorating health condition that caused his premature death. Despite his declining health, his death was unforeseen by nearly everyone, including the state officials concerned with his literary legacy, who very soon after the poet's death began to reclaim him as a national pro-state poet. Responses to the death of the young poet began with the recital of condolence messages from high-ranking state officials, including the Supreme Leader and then President Ahmadinejad, followed by the reading of memorial notes written by his friends and colleagues.

Similar to the national press coverage of Aminpur's death, the nationwide broadcast that covered the funeral ceremony highlighted the distinguished nature of his role in the eyes of the government. A comparison between the funeral given to Aminpur and the funerals provided to other prominent poets who adopted a critical stance towards the state, such as Ahmad Shamlu (1925-2000), highlights great differences in the ways in which they were treated. Unlike the state's heavy surveillance and mistreatment of Shamlu's funeral attendees, Aminpur's funeral took place relatively smoothly and remained free from

trouble for those in attendance. In 2000, the national media censored coverage of Shamlu's funeral, whereas Aminpur's death received extensive news coverage. He was portrayed as the pioneering voice of Islamic republican poetry regardless of the distance he took from the political establishment in the years prior to his death. In the eyes of the state-sponsored media, Aminpur was still an iconic figure of the poetry of the Islamic Revolution. The bitter story of Akhavan Sales' (1928-90) burial and the Leader's disagreement regarding the burial of his body in the city of Tus in Khorasan provides a similar example of the mistreatment experienced by numerous poets who held critical views of Islamic republican ideology and the clerical regime.⁴³⁴

While the deaths of Shamlu and Akhavan, and more recently Simin Behbahani, were outright ignored by the Leader, in his condolence note for Aminpur's death Ali Khamenei described the poet as "one of the first and most successful revolutionary poets, one to whom the whole revolutionary poetic trend is indebted."⁴³⁵ In a similar note, Mohammad Khatami, the reformist former president of Iran, referred to him as "a poet who had always remained loyal to the Islamic Revolution."⁴³⁶ Islamic republican poets and newspapers created dozens of memorial notes that they used to declare Aminpur's life as one spent in the role of a loyal Islamic republican poet.

Similar to his official literary fellows, throughout his lifetime Aminpur rarely interacted

⁴³⁴ Akhavan was eventually buried in Ferdowsi's mausoleum thanks to Shafi'i-Kadkani, who personally asked the Supreme Leader for his approval.

⁴³⁵ Ali Khamenei, "Payām-e tasliat-e Khāmenei dar marg-e Aminpur," accessed 10 October 2010, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=273>.

⁴³⁶ Mohammad Khatami, "Payām-e tasliat-e Khatami dar marg-e Aminpur," accessed 11 October, 2010, <http://www.hamshahrionline.ir/details/35353>.

with secular and independent poets and literary figures active during the same period. He even once declined to visit Ahmad Shamlu, citing ‘political troubles’ as his reason. However, the poet was constantly inspired by their work and even referred to the invaluable contributions that they had made to contemporary Persian literature. Nevertheless, his position as a committed revolutionary always remained a barrier to any potential interaction with secular groups such as the Iranian Writers’ Association. Yet despite this ideological and professional distance, the response of various leading secular literary figures to Aminpur’s death demonstrates the extent to which his importance spread beyond the walls of the revolutionary poets’ literary ghetto, thus presenting the true scope of his significance as a writer who extended beyond narrow literary circles to capture the attention of a much broader readership.⁴³⁷

For those who held a place in the official literary scene of Iran, in public Aminpur had always represented an ideal, that is to say, that of a devout and committed revolutionary poet with a moral character that sometimes ascended to the level of the heroic. For independent and secular literary figures, Aminpur remained a state-funded poet who never voiced his objections to the unjust deeds of the state throughout the entirety of his life. For his religious and intellectual fellows, and the young supporters who had become familiar with his more humanistic phase after the war, Aminpur was a silent and modest character venerated for what they considered to be his purely poetic character.

⁴³⁷ Simin Behbahani, prominent Iranian poet and member of the Iranian Writers’ Association, paid homage to Aminpur by referring to him as “a master of poetic opacity and an honest and faithful poet whose religious beliefs fell far from murder, suppression and hypocrisy.” She separated Aminpur from the ideological religious doctrine of the Islamic Republic that constituted the foundations upon which a large body of secular writers, poets and scholars had been purged, imprisoned or assassinated. See Simin Behbahani, “Payām-e Simin Behbahani dar marg-e Aminpur,” accessed 16 August 2011, <https://fararu.com/fa/news>.

On a personal level however, following his car accident Aminpur suffered from physical pain, emotional despair and ideological disillusionment. His constant struggles with severe kidney disease and a subsequent transplant made him increasingly weak and isolated, even sceptical in his beliefs. A considerable shift from a collective approach towards a personal, perhaps somewhat introspective focus or perspective regarding social and political matters becomes increasingly visible in his late poetic discourse. Aminpur never complained about the physical pain that he experienced but it left an indelible mark on his poetry, both consciously and subconsciously. The reliance on painkillers and smoking that he developed in order to combat the pain helped him to endure the final decade of his life. Yet a massive heart attack and premature death at the age of forty-eight was the only undisputed outcome of this battle. Aminpur's death while he was still a vastly popular literary figure played an important role in the spread of his fame. Moreover, the conflicting responses that followed in the wake of his passing generated a new meaning for the revolutionary disillusionment present among official poets.

A second event that gave way to further disillusionment and ideological divisions among official poets was that of the controversial presidential election of 2009 and the rise of the Green Movement. Although the factionalised nature of the political scene meant that a runoff was widely anticipated after the first round, the government unexpectedly announced a result that went in favour of Ahmadinejad, who, according to state media, gained twenty-four million votes in the first round of the election. A huge demonstration by opposition supporters took place on 15 June 2009, during which security forces clashed violently with the protesters. Further demonstrations, clashes and shootings occurred in the following days as a result of which more than five hundred political activists and many more

protesters were arrested, including both former and current members of the reformist parties. Some former official poets with reformist leanings went on to wholeheartedly support the people and their democratic cause, including Mahmudi, Baqeri, Kakaei, Abdolmalekian and Rake'i, and some, such as Baqeri, ceased to take part in the annual meeting of official poets with the Leader. Others such as Kaka'i and Mahmudi wrote open letters and poems in protest at the anti-democratic suppression of the movement. Parts of Kakai's letter to his son, which followed the latter's physical assault during one of the demonstrations of 2009, provides an example of how a leading official poet who had written numerous pieces in praise of war, Khomeini and the revolution quickly became disillusioned in the aftermath of the 2009 election:

For so many years I recited poems, wrote songs for war, for the weary bodies in the grey veteran cloth, for the comfort of the mothers under the attack of bombs, and for the fear of my fathers in the turmoil of death. When I returned from the war, I hung my grey veteran cloth on the wall of memories and greeted those people whose scent of identity cards I could feel. My name grew among theirs and slowly matured. I cried with their sadness and laughed when they laughed. And you [my son], you were next to me today when you were slapped innocently from someone who was wearing my grey veteran cloth [...] and at that moment I wished I had burnt my cloth after the war so that it would not be cursed by such an evil creature today.⁴³⁸

The explicit support of these poets for the Green Movement was confronted by the views of official poets who defended the Supreme Leader and his president elect, Mahmud Ahmadinejad. Qazveh, Mo'allem, Sabzevari, Tahmasbi and Amiri-Esfandagheh were among this division and their presence and recitations at the annual meeting of Khamenei and official poets – which took place just a few months after the post-election turmoil –

⁴³⁸ Abdoljabar Kakai, "Barāy-e pesaram keh emruz sili khord," *Sālhā-ye tākonun*, accessed 10 July 2009, <http://jabbarkakaei.blogfa.com/post-112.aspx>.

shows the huge ideological gap that peaked after the election.⁴³⁹ The following lines from a poem by Qazveh demonstrate how the narrative of Āshurā was used to dismiss the opposition as the enemies of Islam, Shi‘ism and the Islamic Republic:

*“Javānān-e Banihāshem biyāeid
Rāh-e pirān-e fetneh rā sad konid [...]
Hanuz tāval-e basijihā dard mikonad
Va shoma ashāb-e namak-o kurcheshmi
Cheghadr zud Harmaleh shodid.
Dow dasteh ‘azādār mibinam
Keh har yek digari rā
Yazid midānad.
Da ‘vā sar-e Hosein-e aslist
Agar Hosein-e man to ‘i, sarat ku?
Hosein-e man sar nadāsht
Hosein-e man posht-e sarash sāithā-ye sabz nadāsht.”*

O’ the youth of Banihāshem⁴⁴⁰ come!
Close the path to the leaders of sedition⁴⁴¹
The calluses of the war veterans still hurt
And you, the disloyal, blind companions!
How quickly you turned into Harmaleh!⁴⁴²
I see two groups of mourners
And everyone calls each other Yazid
The battle is over the true Hosein⁴⁴³
My Hosein was headless
My Hosein had no green website on his back to support him.⁴⁴⁴

Since 2009, a major turning point in the history of the Islamic Republic, ideological disarray and political transformation have continued to shape the political and official

⁴³⁹ For videos of the poetry readings given in the presence of the Leader in 2009, see “Gozideh’i az she’rkhāni shā’erān nazd-e maqām-e rahbari dar sāl-e 88,” accessed 25 November 2013, <http://bit.ly/1pDaANF>.

⁴⁴⁰ The name of the Arab tribe to which the prophet of Islam belonged. This is used in reference to the supporters of the Supreme Leader and the conservative-fundamentalist party.

⁴⁴¹ Sedition, or *Fetneh* in Persian, is a Quranic term used by conservative-fundamentalists to refer to the Green Movement. Seditious or *Fetnehgar* refers to opposition leaders and their supporters during and after the 2009 post-election turmoil.

⁴⁴² An evil character in the Shi’ite tradition who was reportedly one of the members of Yazid’s army and fought against Hosein, murdering a number of Hosein’s companions on the day of Āshurā, including his six-month old baby, Aliasqar.

⁴⁴³ The former name of the one of the opposition leaders was Mirhosein. Here the poet makes a reference to his and Imam Hosein’s name at the same time.

⁴⁴⁴ Alireza Qazveh, “Shām-e gharibān-e Hosein emshab ast,” *‘Eshq ‘alayhessalām*, accessed 14 December 2013, <http://ghazveh.blogfa.com/post-237.aspx>.

literary scene, while each time new advocates are recruited to a different and emergent faction. What is clear is that the fall of utopia ensued for all factions and divisions. As Katouzian also asserts, the disputed legacy of Khomeini has today given way to “not only a crisis of authority but also of legitimacy” for the ruling power.⁴⁴⁵ Furthermore, the current establishment is tirelessly working to create an alternative utopia for its supporters through the channels of literature and, in particular, poetry. A detailed illustration of the formation of this alternative utopia constructed with the help of poetry forms the subject matter of the next chapter. This will reveal how after three decades of constant ideological unsettlement the current establishment has succeeded in forming its own school of poetry and literature under the direct supervision of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic.

⁴⁴⁵ Katouzian, *The Persians*, 394.

Chapter 5. Reaching the Climax: Public Literary Ceremonial and the Politics of Nostalgia

*“Yek chand pashimān shodam az rendio masti
‘Omrīst pashimān zeh pashimāni-ye khisham
Beshkastehtar az khish nadidam beh hameh ‘omr
Afsordeh-del az khishamo zendāni-ye khisham.”*⁴⁴⁶

*For a while I repented of being a drunken droll
But for my whole life I regretted being repentant.
I have not seen anybody more wrecked than myself
I am weary of myself; I am my own prisoner.*

1. Introduction

So far, this thesis has discussed the emergence of the most heavily sponsored poetic discourse to arise after the Islamic Revolution, addressing its key features and the context within which this school of poetry and its advocates evolved. As the 1990s drew to a close, ideological stability, state formation and the restoration of a revolutionary utopian fervour were underlined as the main priorities of the government, with differing socio-cultural channels, including literature, providing the means to support this process. This chapter considers the ways in which these objectives were pursued by the state from 2000 to 2009 via ceremonial manifestations of public literary events held in the presence of the current leader of the Islamic Republic. It seeks to shed light on the ideological manifestations of this literary ceremonial in light of the past literary traditions that were reformulated and displayed in a new version at these public events.

⁴⁴⁶ Ali Khamenei, “Sorudeh’i az maqām-e rahbari,” accessed 21 May 2011, <http://www.leader-khamenei.com/poem/62-leader-poems/317-yaran-khorasani-poem.html>.

As the aftermath of the revolution and post-war ideological disquiet gave way to state consolidation, Ayatollah Khamenei began to pay increased attention to Islamic republican literature and, more specifically, poetry, as is evident in various institutional developments. As a result of the Leader's personal interest in poetry, the status of Islamic republican poetry was promoted extensively and the Supreme Leader, who publicly endorsed works of a religious and classical tone. Although various biographies of the leaders and politicians of the Islamic Republic and some contemporary poets contain accounts of relevant meetings, lectures and statements, an attempt to analyse the poetry nights with Ayatollah Khamenei is found wanting. Forms of praise and religious poetry revived under the Islamic Republic also suffer the same deficit, and both of these gaps in the research are characterised, more specifically, by the absence of any consideration of a historical perspective. For instance, nothing appears more similar to the tradition of court poetry than the ceremonial aspect of the annual poetry nights of the current leader of the Islamic Republic. While this public ceremony at times takes refuge in the tendencies and techniques of earlier epochs, when literature was largely an arena for the praise of the patron and an expression of mystical and religious sentiments, as a modern politico-literary phenomenon it also differs from certain traditions of the past by exhibiting new themes and ideological characteristics.

In order to bring the historical precedents of this literary ceremonial into the discussion and to show how its current manifestation engages in a dialogue with the past, this chapter tackles the shared aspects of today's version of the event and the traditions of medieval court poetry and early Islamic poetry. To be more precise, the repetition of a deliberate

choice of actions and poetic styles at these public literary ceremonies is shown herein to be of a “symbolic nature, which automatically implies continuity with the past,”⁴⁴⁷ a phenomenon that Eric Hobsbawm highlights in his essay on invented traditions.

This chapter concludes that memories of the Islamic Golden Age and courtly features, and indeed nostalgia for the same, are vital components of the poetical construct of the modern religious Iranian state.

2. Occasional Poetry and the Idea of Courtliness

In 1978-79, with the rise of revolutionary upheaval, a famous hemistich written by Hafez, the prominent classical poet of the fourteenth century, spread rapidly as a revolutionary motto, before later being made into a song: “When the demon departs, the angel shall arrive” (*Div cho birun ravad, fereshteh dar āyad*).⁴⁴⁸ It was the binary opposition of devil/angel in the poem as a reference to the departure of Shah Mohammadreza Pahlavi and Ayatollah Khomeini’s return to the country that revived this famous classical verse in the public memory and turned it into a powerful revolutionary motto. The revolutionary insurgency was soon preoccupied with Persian verse, largely manifested in revolutionary slogans that took classical forms.⁴⁴⁹ After a century of literary modernism, classical poetry once more became a critical social medium through which to engage in a dialogue with

⁴⁴⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” *The Invention of Tradition*, (eds.) Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

⁴⁴⁸ Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, “Revolutionary Posturing: Iranian Writers and the Iranian Revolution of 1979,” *Iranian Studies* 23, 4 (1991): 507-531.

⁴⁴⁹ Another example of this kind is the verse of the constitutional period, which was reformulated into revolutionary songs: “Az khun-e javānān-e vatan lāleh damidih” (“The tulip rises from the blood of the youth of the nation”).

power during the revolutionary insurgency. Apart from the outpouring revolutionary mottos, the pro-revolutionary poets of various trends paid tribute to Ayatollah Khomeini by writing praise poems with courtly characteristics.⁴⁵⁰ Alongside religious-minded poets, poets with secular and leftist leanings also joined the anti-monarchical campaign by writing poems in praise of Khomeini. Ne‘mat Mirzazadeh’s (b. 1939) famous panegyric *qasideh*, in which he imitates Anvari Abivardi in order to praise Ayatollah Khomeini upon the latter’s return to Iran, is an example of how a past literary heritage was revisited on the eve of revolution by one of the leftist poets of the time:

*“Beh Samarqand agar bogzari ey bād-e sahar
Nāmeḥ-ye ahl-e Khorāsān beh bar-e Khāqān bar.”*

O gentle Zephyr! If o’er Samarqand
Some dewy morning thou should’st chance to blow,
Then waft this letter to our monarch’s hand,
Wherein Khorasan tells her tale of woe.⁴⁵¹

*“Su-ye Pāris show ey peyk-e sabokbāl-e sahar
Nāmeḥ-ye mardom-e Iran su-ye ān rahbar bar.”*⁴⁵²

O light wind of the dawn! Set off toward Paris
Waft the letter of the Iranian people to that leader.

Anvari, who served as a court poet under the Saljuq reign, wrote the aforementioned *qasideh* in the twelfth century following the invasion of Khorasan by Oghuz Turks. He

⁴⁵⁰ Praise poetry was primarily a courtly tradition written in praise of the patron who would reward the poet with robes of honour or golden or silver coins known as *Seleh*. *Seleh* refers to the reward that used to be paid by patrons to poets for their poetry during the medieval period. Rudaki, under the reign of Amir Nasr Samani, ‘Onsori and Farrokhi in the service of Ghaznavid patrons, and Anvari and Mo‘ezzi at the court of the Seljuqs wrote the most famous praise poems in the history of classical Persian poetry. Praise poetry disappeared from the literary arena following the rise of constitutional revolution and the urge for literary modernism. For further details, see Nezami Aruzi, *Chahar-maqaleh*, ed. Mirza Mohammad Qazvini (Tehran: Jami, 1995), 89-90. Edward. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia From Ferdowsi to Sa’di* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1906); Julie S. Meisami, *Medieval Persian Court Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1937).

⁴⁵¹ For the full English translation, see Arthur J. Arberry, *Persian Poems: An Anthology of Verse Translation* (Tehran: Yassavoli, 2005), 101. For the Persian version, see Anvari Abivardi, *Divan*, (ed.) M. Mudarris Razavi (Tehran: Bongāh-e tarjomeh va nashr-e ketāb, 1968), 201.

⁴⁵² For the full poem, see Ne‘mat Mirzazadeh, “She‘ri barāy-e Khomeini,” 1978, accessed 12 August 2013, available at <http://iranglobal.info/node/19666>.

vividly recounted this event for Tamqaj-Khan Rukn al-Din Mahmud, his patron and the ruler of Samarqand. Eight hundred years later, Mirzazadeh recalls Anvari's qasideh through a set of fixed lexical units and idioms. For example, the wind (*bād*) constitutes the courier and the letter (*nāmeḥ*) represents a message to be sent by the wind to a nobleman, the most powerful figure of each poet's era. Through the courtliest of forms and themes Mirzazadeh's poem, as well as many more examples of this kind, managed to revive a courtly genre that would fit the realities of the revolution in the making; a perfect intertextuality is traceable between the two poems, both of which share the classical form of the panegyric qasideh in their dialogue with the seat of power. Furthermore, the stark discourse of collectivity (people) underlies the absolute legitimacy of the revolution in the eyes of the poet. Besides a shared literary discourse, Anvari and Mirzazadeh were not destined to meet the same fate. Anvari's panegyrics allowed him to enjoy the patronage of Sultan Sanjar's two successors and helped him to gain the status of a prominent classical Persian poet. In contrast, Mirzazadeh went into exile in 1981 following the extensive exclusion of secular and leftist intellectuals during the cultural revolution (1980-83).⁴⁵³ Somewhat ironically, he settled in Paris, the city near to which Ayatollah Khomeini resided for a period before his return to Iran.

When one approaches the 1979 Revolution and literary responses to it, Khomeini's charisma is arguably one of the most important triggers in the revival of revolutionary praise poetry. Prominent scholars such as Ahmad Ashraf have discussed the application of the complex notion of charisma in the case of Khomeini in great depth. As Ashraf notes,

⁴⁵³ On the extensive purge of the pre-revolutionary generation of poets and authors, see Karimi-Hakkak, "Introduction: Iran's Literature 1977-1997," 193-213.

Khomeini's pantheistic approach and "mission of the Islamic state in revolutionising the world and preparing the ground for the fulfilment of God's design in history" shaped his mystical charisma.⁴⁵⁴ In the final years of his life, Khomeini put his pantheistic views into a mystical *ghazal*, which is worth citing given its relevance to the present discussion of poetry and power:

*Fāregh az khod shodam-o kus-e 'analhaq bezadam
Hamcho Mansur kharidār-e sar-e dār shodam
Gham-e deldār fekandast beh jānam sharari
Keh beh jān āmadam-o shohreh-ye bazar shodam
Dar-e meykhāneh goshā'id beh ruyam shab-o ruz
Keh man az masjed-o az sowme'eh bizār shodam.*⁴⁵⁵

Freed of the self I claimed, "I am the truth" as mine
Just like Mansur, I bought the secret of the gallows tree
My lover's grief set fire to my soul, it drove me wild,
And I became the scandal of the marketplace
Swing wide the tavern door before me, day and night,
For I've grown weary of both mosque and madrasa.

Throughout his leadership of the revolutionary uprising from exile, Khomeini constantly projected himself and his militant mystic ideology as a form of messianic revivalism set to solve human problems. This vision corresponded with what the masses and many intellectuals of various political leanings tended to think of Khomeini: an "angelic" figure who would put an end to the oppressive monarchical system by giving "the masses a sense of personal integrity, collective identity, historical rootedness and feeling of superiority."⁴⁵⁶ The nationwide confirmation of Khomeini's leadership soon led to the

⁴⁵⁴ Ahmad Ashraf, "Theocracy and Charisma: New Men of Power in Iran," *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 4, 1 (1990), 115.

⁴⁵⁵ Ruhollah Khomeini, "Man beh khāl-e labat ey dust gereftār shodam," *Resālat newspaper* 15 June 1989, (trans.) Ahmad Ashraf, quoted in "Theocracy and Charisma: New Men of Power in Iran," 116.

⁴⁵⁶ Ashraf, "Theocracy and Charisma: New Men of Power in Iran," 114.

creation of a cult of personality in the post-revolutionary period.⁴⁵⁷ Poetry, art, painting and music were devoted to the semi-deification of Khomeini as a heroic figure. The alternative, religious-minded intelligentsia that was empowered throughout the cultural revolution played a significant role in the construction of the cult of the leader's personality. This cult was partly made through the works of Islamic republican poets who paid homage to Khomeini as a holy figure and a descendent of the prophet. In other words, perhaps nothing illustrates the historical shift towards the tradition of praise poetry in the courtly tradition more clearly than the outburst of panegyric lyrics dedicated to Khomeini that came shortly after 1979. In most of these poems, Khomeini is either portrayed as a religious figure – such as a sign of the divine, a descendant of the Prophet, the son of Ali, the light, or the beloved – or as a supernatural, patriotic character who ensures the persistence of Iran as a Muslim nation. The following verses provide a select number of examples of this phenomenon:

*“Az dam-e garm-o jānbakhsh-e tow zendeh shod peykar-e khāk
Ey Imām, ey boland-akhtar ey āyat-e āsemāni.”*⁴⁵⁸

The soil revives thanks to your warm and life-giving breath
O Imam, the grand star, the sign of the divine in the sky.

And:

*“Ey tow az dark-e golhā farātar, bā tapeshhā-ye del āshenātar
Ey shegeft, ey rahā, ey rahātar, ma ‘ni-ye vos ‘at-e bikarāneh.”*⁴⁵⁹

You are beyond the rose's consciousness, you are familiar with the heart's beatings

⁴⁵⁷ The focus on the primacy of the leader as the instigator and facilitator of profound social changes, and within this context the notion of the leader as the ender of injustice and the bringer of peace, are powerful popular myths that have also been propagated within other, supposedly secular, revolutions. The examples of Stalin and Mao are particularly pertinent in relation to the “cult of personality”, and indeed this idea of the benevolent leader-as-saviour has been equally influential in the Iranian revolutionary context. For further details on the cult of personality in the Soviet Russia, see Mark Sandle, *A Short History of the Soviet Socialism* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 1998).

⁴⁵⁸ Alireza Baratipur, “Āyat-e āsemāni,” *Jong-e sureh* 6 (1983): 179-180.

⁴⁵⁹ Alireza Givian, “Emāmiyeh,” *Jong-e sureh* 6 (1983): 196-197.

O you, the wanderer, the free, the most free, you are the meaning of everlasting glory.

These poems are directly comparable with lyrics about courtly love. In the absence of information regarding the context of these poems it is sometimes difficult to identify exactly whom they are dedicated to. ‘*Summary of All Goodness*’ (*Kholāseh-ye khubiha*, 1982) by Qaysar Aminpur provides a pertinent example of this. The full poem is worthy of note here due to its various metaphorical references, natural and religious allegories, all of which were prevalent during the 1980s and played a decisive role in the formation of the cult of personality around Khomeini:

*“Labkhand-e tow kholāseh-ye khubihāst
Lakhti bekhand, khandeh-ye gol zibāst*

*Pishāniyat tanaffos-e yek sobh ast
Sobhi keh entehā-ye shab-e yaldāst*

*Dar cheshmat az hozur-e kabutarhā
Har lahze mesl-e sahn-e haram ghowghāst*

*Ranginkamān-e ‘eshq-e ahurā’i
Az posht-e shisheh-ye del-e to peidāst*

*Faryād-e to talātom-e yek tufān
Ārāmeshat talāvat-e yek daryāst*

*Bā mā bedun-e fāseleh sohbat kon
Ey ānkeh ertefā ‘-e tow dur az mast.’”⁴⁶⁰*

Your smile is the summary of all goodness
Smile, the rose’s grin is delightful

Your forehead is a dawn’s breath
A dawn that ends the night solstice

There is uproar in the look in your eyes
Like that of a dove-filled cloister

From beyond the windows of your soul
The rainbow of divine love is visible

⁴⁶⁰ Qaysar Aminpur, “Kholāseh-ye khubihā,” *Tanaffos-e sobh*, 71.

Your roar is as volatile as a storm's
And your calm as tranquil as a sea's

Speak to us without any distance
Though your reach is far, far away from us.

Through a mixture of Quranic references⁴⁶¹ and natural motifs, Aminpur creates a divine, romantic figure and places him in a much higher position than the audience in the final line of the poem. The flawless glory and power of Khomeini is depicted through a series of natural motifs, all of which mirror an extraordinary character worthy of leadership. These and many other poems bring what Losensky describes as the revival of occasional praise poetry after the revolution in mind. According to him, although occasional poetry as a genre that marks particular events and panegyrics for patrons and noblemen, “lost much of its literary prestige in the mid-twentieth century with romantic and modernist valuations of pure poetry, the new holidays and heroes of the Islamic Republic have given fresh purpose and status to commemorative verse.”⁴⁶²

It should be also kept in mind that Khomeini's personal interest in and style of writing poetry also compels us to seek for further common ground between the past and present relationship between poetry and the seat of power. During his education at the Qom seminary, Khomeini studied mysticism, poetry and philosophy. Under the influence of the Indian and Iraqi styles, he penned lyrics that hardly suited his conservative ideology. In his decrees, Khomeini openly encouraged poets “to write in order to awaken the nation with

⁴⁶¹ *Tanaffos-e sobh* is a direct reference to the Quranic verse *va-al-sobh-i idha tanaffas* in the surah Al-Takvir.

⁴⁶² Paul E. Losensky, “Elegies for a Lost Leader: Six Poems on the Death of Khomeini,” *Iranian Studies* 30 (1997): 277.

their poetry.”⁴⁶³ He employed idioms and metaphors for wine, drunkenness and love in his lyrics, which would later be published under the title of *The Wine of Love: Mystical Poems by His Eminence Imam Khomeini* (*Bādeh-ye ‘eshq: Ash‘ar-e ‘arefaneh-ye hazrat-e Imam Khomeini*, 1989).⁴⁶⁴ Many of these poems are written in the classical style characteristic of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with direct borrowings from Hafez, the fourteenth-century Persian poet whose *ghazals* often inspired the later poets who wrote in the same style. Apart from these literary borrowings, the poems in the collection also show the impact of *Sabk-e Hendi* with classical form, abstract lexicon and erotic longings, which often openly contradict the political and ideological character of the Ayatollah. As Hanawy suggests, Khomeini “invoked a whole rhetorical tradition of casting mystical poetry in the diction of the courtly class, the very class of society that he himself shuns and condemns.”⁴⁶⁵ The following lines from his poetry collection, which concerns with drunkenness and its related motifs, reflects the revival of the courtly lexicon in Khomeini’s poetic discourse:

“Sāqi beh ru-ye man dar-e meikhāneh bāz kon
 Az dars-o bahs-o zohd-o riyā biniyāz kon
 Tāri zeh zolf-e kham-kham-e khod dar raham beneh
 Fāregh zeh ‘elm-o masjed-o dars-o namāz kon.”⁴⁶⁶

O Saqi, open the door of the wine-shop for me;
 Make me heedless of lessons, discussions, asceticism, and hypocrisy.
 Lay a strand of your curly hair in my way;
 Free me from learning, the mosque, teaching, and prayers.⁴⁶⁷

Despite his passion for poetry, during his short period of leadership, Khomeini was largely

⁴⁶³ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-ye Nur*, vol. 17 (Tehran: Mo’asseseh-ye tanzim va nashr-e āsār-e Imam Khomeini, 1996), 310.

⁴⁶⁴ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Bādeh-ye ‘eshq: ash‘ar-e ‘ārefāneh-ye Imām Khomeini* (Tehran: Mo’asseseh-ye tanzim-va nashr-e āsār-e Imām Khomeini, 1989).

⁴⁶⁵ William Hanawy, “Five Mystical Ghazals by Ayatollah Khomeini,” *Iranian Studies* 30 (1997): 277.

⁴⁶⁶ Ruhollah Khomeini, “Mey-e chāreh-sāz,” *Bādeh-ye ‘eshq*, accessed 16 December, 2014, <http://www.aviny.com/Imamkhomeini/Divan/Ghazal/133.aspx>.

⁴⁶⁷ Translation taken from William Hanawy, “Five Mystical Ghazals by Ayatollah Khomeini,” 276.

engaged with war, and unlike his successor, Ayatollah Khamenei, he failed to institutionalise poetry as an ideological tool. He also proved unsuccessful at shaping any private literary circle, even less so one that would be present at ceremonial services on a regular basis as proof of their commitment to the state. Yet a well-known anecdote about Khomeini giving his robe of honour to a cleric poet, Abdollah Hosseini, upon the recitation of a poem written in praise of martyrs is testament to his penchant for poetry.⁴⁶⁸ In light of such facts then, Khomeini's ideological rejection of the so-called two thousand and five hundred years of monarchy warrants reanalysis.

By the end of the war the mass production of war poetry had ceased, albeit temporarily, and upon the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 the official literary scene was overtaken by a wave of panegyrics. Within a year of Khomeini's death, the praise poetry peaked following the publication of a collection of nearly 300 elegies under the title *Book of Mourning for Imam Khomeini (Sugnāmeḥ-ye Imam, 1990)*.⁴⁶⁹ Although the collection includes a limited number of poems in modern forms, the classical forms such as the *ghazal*, *masnavi* and quatrain appear in a larger quantity. Most of the poets who had elegies published in the collection were among the younger generation of the Islamic republican poets whose work had come to prominence since the revolution. One such poet was Mohammadali Bahmani, a pioneering voice of committed poetry after the revolution who came to be seen as a role model for the neoclassical *ghazal* among young post-revolutionary poets. In an elegy written in the form of the *ghazal*, Bahmani perfectly depicts the disbelief at Khomeini's death that was palpable among his supporters:

⁴⁶⁸ "Shā'eri keh pirāhan-e Imām rā beh 'onvān-e seleh daryāft kard," accessed 11 December 2013, <http://bit.ly/1FIxTgc>.

⁴⁶⁹ Paul Losensky, "Elegies for a Lost Leader: Six Poems on the Death of Khomeini," 277.

*“Zendehtar az tow kasi nist cherā geryeh konim?
Margemān bād-o mabād ānkeh tow rā geryeh konim*

*Haft posht-e ‘atash az nām-e zolālat larzid
Mā keh bāshim keh dar marg-e shomā geryeh konim?*

*Raftanat āyeneh-ye āmadanat bud, bebakhsh
Ruz-e milād-e tow talkh ast keh mā geryeh konim.”⁴⁷⁰*

Why should we weep? No one is more living than you
Let us die, and let us not weep for you

Seven generations of thirst trembled at your limpid name
Who are we to weep mourning for you?

Your departure mirrored your arrival
Excuse us: it is bitter of us to weep on the night of your birth.

From among the elegiac poems that mourn Khomeini’s death another particular piece, written by Ne‘mat Mirzazadeh, also stands out. It comes thirty years after his panegyric qasideh in praise of Khomeini and its critical tone is particularly noteworthy with respect to shifting relations among the poets and those that came to power following the 1979 Revolution. Unlike the panegyric qasideh, which he wrote in his homeland, Mirzazadeh wrote the following anti-elegy poem while in exile and posted it to Khamenei’s office to voice his protest against Khomeini’s politics after his death:

*“Injā kasi ghonudeh keh bish az hezār-sāl
Ta’khir dar tavallod-e khod dāsht
U bā zamān-e khish mo‘āser nabud
Va kuzeh-ye sofāli-ye qalbash
Gonjāyesh-e paziresh-e yek khalq rā nadāst
U rā na tāb bud keh āvār-e e‘temād-e gerānsang-e khalq rā
Bar dush-e mumiyā’i-ye farhang-e khod tahammol konad
Na bakht-e sāzegār
Keh dar owj-e jelveh mahz shaved
Hamchon setāreh’i keh zeh gheyrat besukht jān-e shab-o chon shahāb raft
Taqdir-e u beh guneh-ye digar bud
Dar ashk-e showq āmad-o dar manjalāb raft.”⁴⁷¹*

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 282.

Here lies a man who had a delayed birth
 Of more than a thousand years
 He was not a man of his time
 And the earthen jar of his heart
 Could not uphold the people's love
 Nor did he have the patience to carry the burden of people's trust
 On the shoulders of his mummified belief
 Nor did he have the blessed fate
 To be annihilated while in his greatest peak
 Like a star that burns the night with its zeal
 And disappears like an asteroid.
 His fate was of another kind
 He came with tears of joy
 And left behind a swamp.

The final line of this anti-elegy poem suggests the transformation of the poet's ideology a decade after the revolution. The 'tears of joy' for Ayatollah's return is a reference to the hopes and desires of so many intellectuals, which quickly perished following the establishment of the new government, and results in a different self-positioning from that evident in the anti-elegy poem by Mirzazadeh. Although this is an occasional poem written upon the death of a political leader, it juxtaposes Mirzazadeh's panegyric qasideh for Khomeini's return in terms of both content and form. Mirzazadeh evidently breaks away from the courtly tradition of panegyrics and reconciles with the modernist style, which was perceived as an anti-revolutionary, secular trend for many years after the revolution.

3. The Post-Khomeini Era and the Poetry Ceremonial

After Khomeini's death and Ali Khamenei's assuming of the position of Supreme Leader, state poets were elevated to the status of religious elites as a result of Khamenei's public

⁴⁷¹ "Bipardeh, bita'arof with Ne'mat Mirzazadeh, Mim.Azarm," Youtube video, 29:59, posted by "lidalastpage" 19 May 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MWarn7IkTfM>.

endorsement of the religious literati as influential cultural figures. Subsequently, their official meetings with the leader of the Islamic Republic marked a new phase in the relationship between poetry and power in Iran. Like Khomeini, Khamenei's personal inclination towards poetry played a crucial role in extending the circles and numbers of the Islamic republican poets. The latter, however, was more deliberately active in purposefully manufacturing a set of literary institutions for ideological purposes. During one of his annual meetings with Islamic republican poets, Khamenei stated the following, which makes clear his particular interest in poetry:

If we were to choose between drama, the visual arts, and poetry, I think that we should choose poetry. If we promote poetry, we will be able to provide the grounds for the development of other forms of art. Poetry cannot be compared to other forms of art. At least our country, our society, and our history are such that poetry has to be taken seriously. We have a history of masterly poetry. Our ancient poetic heritage is a precious treasure, whereas we do not hold the same position in other forms of art. The Europeans and the Greeks are masters of drama. We don't have such a longstanding tradition in drama. We are behind in prose and storytelling skills as well. The novel, for instance, is a product of the Western tradition of story writing. But poetry is not the same. In terms of its roots and our skills, we enjoy the highest ranking in poetry among all nations.⁴⁷²

An admirer of Victor Hugo and Romain Gary, in his public lectures Khamenei would encourage attendant youths to discover world literature and familiarize themselves with literary masterpieces. Yet personally he chose the path of poetry and, like his predecessor, wrote short lyrics in the Indian and Araqi styles with direct borrowing from Hafez and Sa'eb Tabrizi. Khamenei's interest in poetry dates back to his youth in Mashhad, where he tried not to miss out on poetry circles alongside his religious education in the seminary. In his literary ceremonial, Khamenei often shares his memories about his close ties with the

⁴⁷² Ali Khamenei, "Bayānāt dar didār bā shā'erān," accessed 14 September 2014, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=20753>.

pre-revolutionary poets, some of which highlight his literary background and interests and are thus worthy of note:

We had a period prior to the Islamic Revolution when the poets of Mashhad were the most accomplished across the country. I knew them all very well. They were the best poets both in qasideh and in ghazal. I recall three poetry sessions in Mashhad. One of them was organised by Mr Negarandeh, which used to be held in his home. He was a tenant and once in a while he would change his house, but the sessions continued. I was based in Qom, but every time I went to Mashhad I would certainly attend those sessions. When I returned from Qom there was another association with ten to fifteen members [...] Messrs. Shafi'i Kadkani, Mirzazadeh, Qahreman and Qodsi were trained in these sessions [...]. There was also another literary association held by Mr Qahreman that I used to attend during those years.⁴⁷³

Khamenei's regular attendance at poetry circles was not simply limited to those that he would reference in public. Moreover, his friendship with prominent modernist poets of the pre-revolutionary period, such as Mehdi Akhavan Sales, and the secular intellectual circles of Mashhad during the 1950s shaped his literary formation prior to the revolution. It was through these circles that Khamenei developed his understanding of the social significance of poetry and its significant impact on the socio-political situation. He soon realised that the majority of these circles, which formed the main body of the pre-revolutionary intelligentsia, were critical of the political establishment. Despite their secular views and leftist tendencies, most of the members of these circles went on to join the revolutionary movement in 1979. Having closely observed this process of revolutionising the secular intelligentsia, Khamenei's subsequent thinking was intimately informed by his understanding of how the poets of that era had used poetry gatherings to mobilise their audiences against the monarchy.

⁴⁷³ Ali Khamenei, "Bayānāt dar didār bā shā'erān," accessed 14 September 2014, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=20753>.

Upon his first official appointment in the years following the revolution as a member of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution (SCCR), Khamenei played an active role in the Islamisation campaign of the 1980s. A major part of this function was to extensively purge the pre-revolutionary secular intelligentsia. As a result of this change, Khamenei's ties with secular intellectuals weakened and he began to attend poetry sessions held by the Howzeh,⁴⁷⁴ the main gathering place for religious-minded poets. His lifetime dream of being recognised as a leading literary figure led him towards the formation of his own poetry circle from the early years of the revolution. This process began with his regular attendance at the poetry sessions of the Howzeh during the war and providing the poets with war-related literary themes. During his presidency, Khamenei also held occasional meetings with a limited number of religious-minded poets. Since he was well informed about the nationwide fame of certain leading poets of the pre-revolutionary period, Khamenei decided to ask some secular-minded, prominent voices of modern poetry to join his private poetry sessions.

Mehdi Akhavan Sales was among those who were invited, yet he refused to attend on the grounds of his critical stance towards the new government. His famous statement "We are not with the power but against it,"⁴⁷⁵ which he made in response to Khamenei's invitation, landed Akhavan in a great deal of trouble in the final decade of his life. However, as noted in the previous chapters, the livelihoods of the poets who proved their loyalty to Khamenei were guaranteed: Ali Mo'alleem, Ali Musavi-Garmarudi, Moshfeq-Kashani, Hamid Sabzevari, and Alireza Qazveh are but a few of the poets loyal to the state.

⁴⁷⁴ See chapter 1 for a detailed account of the Howzeh.

⁴⁷⁵ "*Mā bar qodratim, na bā qodrat.*"

The occasional meetings with poets that Khamenei held during his presidency took a more formal shape from the late 1990s onwards, when they began to take place on a regular basis at his office (*Beyt-e rahbari*). These official meetings with Islamic republican poets gave way to a regeneration of quasi-court poetry both in terms of setting and literary form. The meetings were recorded and edited by a professional film crew, ready for broadcasting on television. It is worth noting that other groups of artists such as filmmakers or visual artists have never received the same level of attention and praise from the Leader, which is yet more proof of the distinct position of poetry in the state's ideological apparatus.

Because of the nationwide scope of the exposure of this annual event, the bureaucratic process used to select suitable poets and the organisation of the poetry nights have both come under the control of the Howzeh's poetry circle since 2003.⁴⁷⁶ According to the head of the poetry circle in the Howzeh, the nomination process is based on the results of state-organised annual poetry festivals, lists of recent publications by the official publishers in the field of poetry, and up-to-date records of existing literary circles. Young, prizewinning male and female poets who are consistently active in poetry associations are also likely to be chosen to present their works at the annual poetry ceremony.⁴⁷⁷ Poets from three regions, namely Khuzestan (where Arabic is spoken), Khorasan (home to the Mashhadi dialect) and Azerbaijan (characterised by the Azerbaijani language), are usually included in the guest list in order to meet the expectations of the Leader and his interest in a diverse

⁴⁷⁶ Mr. Davudi (head of the poetry circle in the Howzeh), in discussion with the author, October 2012.

⁴⁷⁷ Interview with Mr. Zamani, (head of the Howzeh in Tehran), in discussion with the author, October 2012.

range of backgrounds.⁴⁷⁸ The final guest list has to be approved by Khamenei's office. Similar to a court setting, as is apparent from the selection process of the attendees, the interests of the Leader lie at the heart of this literary ceremony. The strict selection process and identity checkpoints used at the annual poetry meeting at the entrance to the office reveal yet another aspect of the legitimisation and the highly selective and controlled nature of these poetry nights.⁴⁷⁹ The event is not open to the public and always takes place under heavy surveillance, which is put in place both inside and outside the Leader's office, where the event is held.

The Islamic republican poets elected to attend this event are not fully attached to the Leader's office, nor do they work as poets in the office in order to receive an income. The tradition of rewarding medieval court poets with gold coins by the patron has changed over time and is no longer practiced in post-revolutionary Iran. However, although the leader of the Islamic Republic does not go so far as the Timurid princes, who rewarded a poet "with the equivalent of his weight in gold or silver,"⁴⁸⁰ state-sponsored poetry festivals continue the tradition today by rewarding poets with gold coins. Between 2004 and 2013 for instance, eighteen thousand gold coins were given to young poets at state-run festivals.⁴⁸¹ The courtly tradition, therefore, is continued, at least to some extent and in an institutional format. It is their ideological attachment to the system that builds ties between these poets

⁴⁷⁸ Originally hailing from Khameneh, in the Azeri part of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei was born and raised in Mashhad. His interest focused on theology and as a graduate of the seminary school he was also passionate about Arabic language and literature. Occasionally, he would recite poems in Arabic in response to the Arab-speaking poets who attended the annual poetry ceremony.

⁴⁷⁹ Sina Alimohammadi, "A report on the annual poetry night," *Farsnews*, accessed 12 September 2014, <http://farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13930422000463#sthash.OwwJj9s.dpuf>.

⁴⁸⁰ E. Yarshater, "Safavid Literature: Progress or Decline," *Iranian Studies* 7 (1974): 219.

⁴⁸¹ "Chand sekkeh bahār-e āzādi dar dawlat-e nohom va dahom beh bargozidigān-e javāyez-e adabi ehdā shod?," *Farsnews*, accessed 17 May 2013, <http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13920307000357>.

and the seat of power. Similar to the courtly setting, they must be trusted enough to enter the inner circle of the Leader. One of the main responsibilities of the poets in the courtly tradition was to preserve the fame of the king. In post-revolutionary official meetings with the Leader, the poets are not only responsible for preserving the fame of the Leader but also that of the Islamic Republic as a whole political entity. In order to avoid criticisms of grandiosity, Khamenei has been cautious in his utilisation of such monarchical methods of self-promotion. He therefore often uses 'Islamic Republic' as a reference to himself in his public speeches.

As in the Muslim Persian courts, under the current regime the Islamic calendar is an important basis for timing: it is used as the main timetable for scheduling the annual poetry ceremony.⁴⁸² The date for this event is the fifteenth day of Ramadan, the holy month of fasting for Muslims. The ceremony usually starts with a collective prayer, which is led by the Leader, and is followed by the *iftār*.⁴⁸³ It moves from the prayer hall to the main hall of the Leader's office where the poetry ceremony takes place.

Just as wine has been replaced by tea during the sessions, the jesters, jugglers, dancers and clowns that traditionally accompanied court poets in the medieval period in order to entertain the king are no longer employed. Instead of clowns with their comic gestures and jugglers with their wondrous deeds, satirical poets are responsible for entertaining the Leader and making him laugh. The satirical poems recited in these sessions often address

⁴⁸² The primary calendar used in Iran is not the Islamic lunar calendar but the solar hejri calendar, which is based on solar transits through the zodiac. Its principles were initially borrowed from Hindu calendars, with some characteristics of the Chinese-Uighur calendar having been mixed in later.

⁴⁸³ Dinner is served after sunset to break the fast during the month of Ramadan.

current socio-political issues from a critical standpoint.⁴⁸⁴ The extent to which satirists are allowed to criticize the status quo in front of the Leader is not clear. Sometimes a work of satire deemed too transgressive has been the subject of direct critical comments by Khamenei.⁴⁸⁵ There are cases of self-censored satirists who have erased parts of their poems for recitation in the ceremony and later published the full, uncensored version on their websites. The famous lines of a controversial political satire that was once presented in front of the Leader and which raised doubts regarding the limits that a poet should bear in mind in such ceremonies is worthy of note here. It touches on the most disputed of socio-political issues, such as the nuclear issue, the compulsory hijab and freedom of speech:

*“Shokr-e izard fanāvari dārim
 San‘at-e zarrehparvari dārim
 Gasht-e ershād agar efāqeh nakard
 Sad-o dahtā kalāntari dārim
 Mā barā-ye esbāt-e asl-e hejāb
 Khatt-e toolid-e rusari dārim
 In tarāfruznāmejhā-ye ziād
 Ān tarāf dādgostari dārim.”*⁴⁸⁶

Thank God we have technology
 And nuclear industry
 If the moral police is not enough
 We also have one hundred and ten police stations
 To prove the principle of the Hijab to everyone
 We have the assembly line of the scarf
 We have so many newspapers, on one the hand,
 And the judiciary on the other.

The poetry ceremony is also subtly gendered. While during the medieval period almost all

⁴⁸⁴ The number of satirists present at these sessions in the past ten years has not exceeded three or four; they include Sa‘id Biyabanaki, Abulfazl Zaruyi-Nasrabad and Naser Feyz.

⁴⁸⁵ For a critical encounter between Khamenei and one of the satirists in his office, see “She‘rkhāni dar huzur-e rahbar,” *YouTube video*, 7:02, posted by “‘ābed zāhed”, accessed 4 August 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U0wDk9BnI8k>.

⁴⁸⁶ For example, compare with Sa‘id Biyabanaki’s poem “Shokr-e izard fanāvari dārim,” *Sangchin*, accessed 7 May 2014, <http://www.sangcheen.blogfa.com/post/111>.

court poets were male and females ordinarily appeared in the roles of minstrels and dancers, or were hidden behind the curtains of the *harem*, in the post-revolutionary period a limited number of female poets have always been present at poetry nights with the Leader, despite strict gender segregation policies. Wearing the conservative Islamic garment of the *chador* – as is prescribed by the female dress code for any formal meeting with Khamenei – female poets typically recite their poems after performances by a number of male poets. Depending on the total number of poets present, which does not usually exceed ten to fifteen, three to five female poets perform at each session. The number of male poets is often three times higher than that of female poets.

Similar to the medieval court tradition, these contemporary poetry nights also have a master of ceremonies who leads the session. In the last decade the master of ceremonies has been one of the leading figures of Islamic republican poets.⁴⁸⁷ He is normally a poet who has aspired to ingratiate himself into the political establishment from the beginning of his literary career and continued this association throughout his working life. The ceremony normally begins with a Quran recitation and a greeting for the Leader and his guests. The format then moves on to a poetry recitation. Using a selection of old and new poems, the master of ceremonies contributes to the session much like a courtier (*nadim*). By virtue of his command over poetry, the master of ceremonies is able to present himself as both a poet and a laureate.

In terms of content, the recited poems can be arranged into four main groups: (1) religious

⁴⁸⁷ Alireza Qazveh and Sa'ed Baqeri have served as the master of ceremonies for many of the annual poetry nights during the past decade.

verse, (2) poems dealing with regional and domestic socio-political issues, (3) poems on the Iran-Iraq War, and (4) poems expressing personal longings in relation to topics such as love, solitude and ethics.

Under the Islamic Republic, the re-emergence of religious verse in the form of elegies for Shi'ite Imams (*she'r-e ā'ini*) and the later development of the poetry of wailing (*nowheh-khāni*) can be compared to the Safavid tradition of elegies and religious verse. In the post-revolutionary period, religious verse arose during the war in order to sanctify war and martyrdom by drawing connections between Karbala and the Iran-Iraq War.⁴⁸⁸ After the war, and under the leadership of Ayatollah Khamenei, the birthday of the Prophet Mohammad's daughter as dictated by the Islamic calendar was selected for the night of religious verse. The main purpose of religious verse is to offer new insights into Shi'ism and to link the stories of Karbala and the Shi'ite Imams to the political ideology of the Shi'ite state. With the industry growing for *nawheh* (religious, rhythmic elegies for Shi'ite Imams) throughout the course of the war and into the post-war period, religious verse has become even more important and received further attention and investment in the past decade. Founding an academic field for training the elegy-makers and religious poets in the university is one of the most important transformations of recent years, which reflects the state's cultural policies in shaping the official literary scene.

The second leading theme of the recited poems combines domestic and regional issues. Attendants frequently use poetry to air their political views about socio-political issues

⁴⁸⁸ See chapter 3 for a detailed account of this connection.

within the country and the region at large, thus using it as a way to conform to state ideology. Controversial domestic events such as the 2009 post-election turmoil, or regional issues such as relations with Palestine, Lebanon or Afghanistan lie at the heart of this genre. Speedy socio-political transformations in the region put occasional poetry in a high demand during these poetry nights. To write an occasional poem to present to the Leader is a sign of a poet's consciousness and commitment to the Leader. The rise of occasional poetry in this period can be understood in light of Khamenei's ceremonial lecture at the annual poetry night of 2013, where he emphasised the use of poetry as a tool for raising important socio-political issues:

Our poets are also responsible for the events currently taking place in their surroundings. The Islamic Revolution's encounter with international domination (*solṭeh-ye beyn-al-melali*) and our resistance to their imposition of policies against our country – which has been under their control for two hundred years or more – is an important matter. These concerns should be manifested in the works of our poets. Today an Islamic awakening is a significant issue for us. The Palestinian crisis is also a critical topic that has to be put into verse by poets.⁴⁸⁹

Commemoration of the Iran-Iraq War is the third and most prominent theme in state-sponsored poetry from the past two decades. As discussed in chapter three, by creating a poetic genre called the Poetry of Sacred Defence, the Islamic Republic has managed to sustain its sacralisation of war as a pivotal element in overcoming the crisis of state legitimacy precipitated by the end of the war and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. Written in both classical and modern forms and bearing an epic and patriotic tone, the poetry of sacred defence draws constant connections with state ideology. Khamenei's continuing emphasis on the perpetuation of war poetry has given this theme a significant role in an on-going and nationwide cultural crusade:

⁴⁸⁹ Unknown, "Istādehgi dar barābar-e nezām-e solteh-ye beyn-al-melali bāyad dar she'r-e shā'erān zohur va boruz dāshteh bāshad," *Rajanews*, accessed 24 July 2013, <http://www.rajanews.com/news/146097>.

I have raised this concern on other occasions; the eight years of war are a crucial concern for us and have to be addressed in poetry. Moreover, for the formation of an Islamic society and the crusade for the establishment of our national authority we must always place emphasis upon them; a crusade to reform the lives of our people should be pursued in poetry.⁴⁹⁰

Individual longings constitute the fourth thematic category of works presented at annual poetry nights. Solitude, love and existential doubt are among the common themes found in the poems of this category. In contrast to the court patrons, who appreciated personal, erotic, intimate and existential themes in poetry, Khamenei stresses that this genre must observe certain ethical limits in order to remain virtuous:

When you write poems about personal feelings and emotions, you have to bear in mind certain limits. You must be modest in expressing your emotions. Be aware that poems like those written by Forugh Farrokhzad were never welcomed in the intellectual circles of her time. I was familiar with those kinds of people. The ones who would spend hours in cafes and taverns and drink alcohol excessively. Their bodies used to be taken home unconscious [...]. Even people of that kind didn't welcome the naked and bold poems of Farrokhzad [...]. My point is that the young generation of Iranian female poets should not cross the limits of modesty when it comes to expressing their feelings. One should always mind moral boundaries when writing poetry.⁴⁹¹

Effusive emotions and erotic desires, Khamenei maintains, should never replace wisdom and ethics in poetry:

Another theme in the poetry of all periods is that of the poet's personal longings and emotions. In each historical period poets have written about their personal feelings [...]. There is nothing wrong with writing about your inner feelings. We have to consider two aspects in poetry: personal emotions and poetic wisdom (*hekmat-e shā'erāneh*). Look at Sa'di, for example, who has rightfully tackled both aspects in his work.⁴⁹²

In the most recent move concerning the formulation of essential themes in Islamic republican poetry, a chart has been published on Khamenei's official website that

⁴⁹⁰ Ali Khamenei, "Bayānāt dar didār bā shā'erān," accessed 14 September 2014, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=20753>.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid.

⁴⁹² Ali Khamenei, "Bayānāt dar didār bā shā'erān," accessed 14 April 2013, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=23231>.

summarizes the Leader's current views on poetry and the responsibilities of poets. The idea of designing a chart for the ideal type of poetry on the official website of the Leader suggests the significant position of poetry in the state's ideological apparatus. It consists of a detailed list of the key themes that are to be covered by the poets of the Republic according to the Leader's viewpoint.

The rationale behind each theme is also briefly explained to make the whole chart a self-sufficient guideline for any poet who seeks to meet the expectations of the Leader in the realm of poetry. Other than a detailed account of the role and responsibilities of state poets and poetry, different sections of the chart outline the ideological concerns of the Leader in the realm of culture and politics. Issues such as the promotion of Islamic republican literature for children, the Palestine-Israel conflict, the promotion of religious patriotism and revising the ideology of warfare are all key headlines in the Islamic republic's cultural and political agenda in the past three decades, which has now become part of the literary agenda of the state. This and other similar charts show how the Shiite cleric leader of the Islamic Republic has sought to reconfigure traditional methods of ideological promotion such as lecturing in the Friday Sermons to curb the influence of Western standards in the era of globalisation.

From 2000 onwards, online representations of Iran's state ideology in varying realms has been extended, refined and even reinvented, as reflected in Khamenei's modern charts, which are constantly uploaded on his official website and brief his literary views and other socio-political debates. A close reading of the following chart and an examination of its contents shows how the current Leader and his officials have helped create a modern Shiite state by defining the limits and features of Islamic republican poetry. Through the

chart, it becomes apparent how poetry as a literary form has been altered both in terms of content and form in order to meet the Leader's expectations. The socio-ideological themes clearly outweigh the personal longings and thoughts of the poet in the Islamic republican genre. The following chart is used for training purposes as a guideline for young poets in state-sponsored poetry circles.

Apart from its significance in terms of content, the chart creates an ideal image of the Leader of the Republic, a literary expert and role model to be imitated and respected by the younger generation of the poets; an image that lacked in Khamenei's real life since the pre-revolutionary period to date.

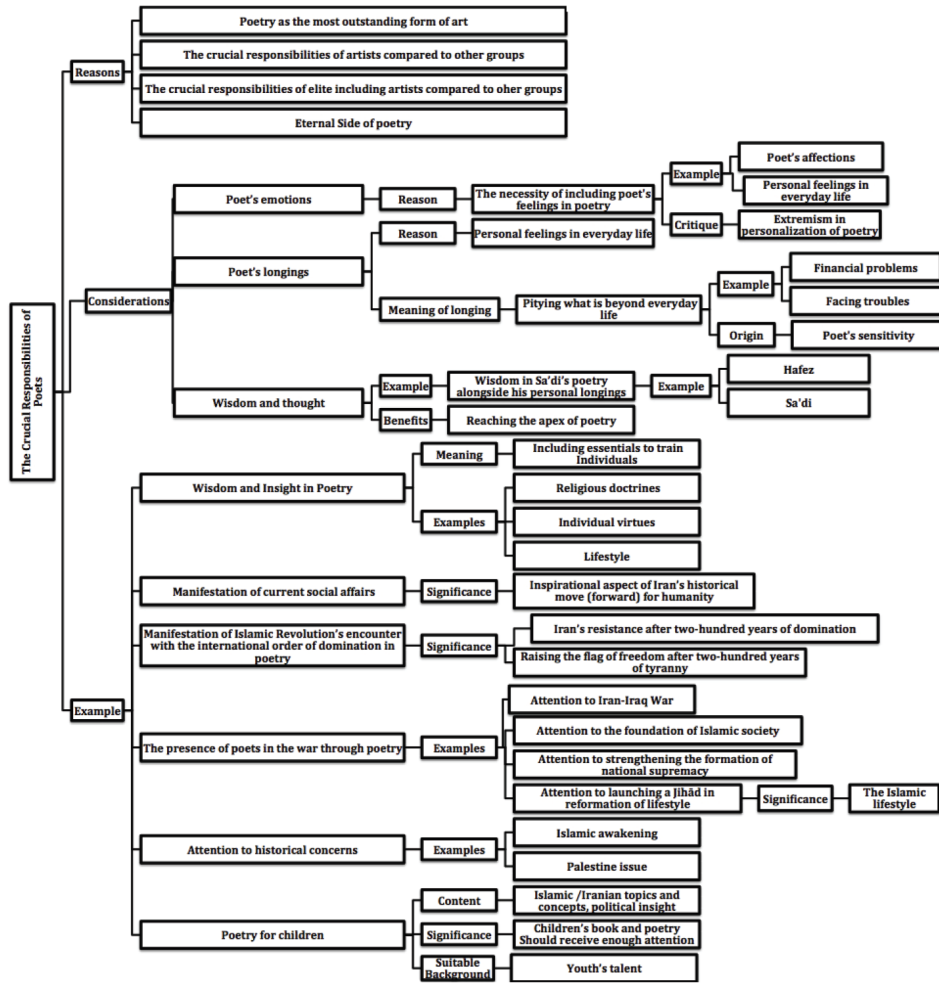


Figure 1: Chart summarising the Supreme Leader's current views on poetry and the responsibilities of poets. Source: <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/roadmap-content?id=23311>

In terms of content, the chart discloses a considerable amount of information about the ways in which poetry is used to restore the legitimacy of the Leader. Similar to the annual poetry night with Khamenei, the chart is not merely organised for the sake of entertainment in the way that medieval poetry gatherings were. It instead constitutes expressions of the Leader's most profound assumptions about his legitimate Islamic patronage.

The order and structure of this ceremonial includes strong elements of ritual and

communion, often explicitly religious, and indeed participation in such a production involves far more than simply attending a poetry gathering as an audience member or speaker. In the post-Khomeini era, Islamic republican poetry nights with the Leader have established a hierarchy that is primarily ideological and is based on the extent to which one is considered to be legitimate in the eyes of the Leader himself.

Apart from content and classical forms, the presence of poet laureates, the dress code for both male and female poets (long-sleeved shirt and preferably a beard for men and a the *chādor* for women), the Leader's extensive input into the evening plays a crucial role. He passes comments on the poems and makes final remarks about the characteristics of Islamic culture, literature and ideology, as well as reinforcing the responsibilities of the committed poets, all of which, when taken together, represents a renewal of the ideology of Islamic state patronage, with its unique relationship to poetry constituting a uniting of fidelity and piety.

When the poets are selected for this event the function of the poetry performance changes, since it is to be given in front of the Leader. Although the events are heavily broadcast through national television and radio networks, as well as being made available on state-funded websites, there is only one primary audience for the event and that is the Leader of the Islamic Republic; the poetry performance is directed explicitly at him. During these poetry nights and in the published reports and videos provided for an extended audience, it is not the poetry per se but the persona of the Leader and his ideals that form the focal point. Each poem remains an unfulfilled project until it is completed by the Leader's commentary on the piece. The legitimacy and aesthetics of the poem need to be approved by the Leader, whose commentary marks the success or failure of the selected poets. At

times, the Leader rejects a poem based on aesthetic or ideological reasons, regardless of the legitimacy and loyalty of its author.⁴⁹³ His comments include a range of aesthetic, ideological and technical issues which are often tinted with moral and religious advice. The event lasts four to five hours, starting at sunset and with the collective prayer.

In the version that is broadcast live every Ramadan via the national TV station, as well as in the photos and videos that are professionally produced for the official website of the Leader and the accompanying publication, there is only one focal point, and it is through this that the courtly illusion achieves its fullest effect. During the poetry nights the seat of the Leader, much like that of a king, and the audience around him become a living emblem of the power relations at play and the particular ideological ties that bind the poets with the core of Iran's power. The closer a poet sits to the Leader, the more reliable and privileged he is.⁴⁹⁴ The leading figures of the official literature of the Islamic Republic can usually be identified through these annual broadcastings. The seating plan is an index of ideological status and loyalty to the system, as well as indicating the degree of favour and support enjoyed by each poet. The poetry night is thus a political as well as a cultural event, and the Leader must not merely observe the poets but he must be *seen* to be observing them.⁴⁹⁵

Apart from small numbers of select seats and their owners, the rest of the poets occupy a

⁴⁹³ For example, see Gholamali Hadad-‘Adel’s performance and Khamenei’s open critique of his poem. Hadad-‘Adel served as the former chairman and also head of the parliament. His familial links with Khamenei and his loyalty to the leader have not persuaded Khamenei to soothe his criticism: “Dekhālat-e Khamenei dar she‘rkhāni-e Haddad-‘Adel,” *YouTube video*, 1.07, “Farhad Mortaz”, 17 April 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJhlZIAaJcs>.

⁴⁹⁴ In the past decade, the closest seats to the Leader have been allocated to the most loyal Islamic Republican poets, such as Alireza Qazveh, Hamid Sabzevari and Ali Mo’allem Damghani.

⁴⁹⁵ The structure of this event resembles the political role of drama during the Renaissance period. To read more on this topic, see Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theatre in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1975).

range of chairs placed carefully around the room to highlight the Leader's presence. Women are placed further away from the seat of the Leader in order to abide by Islamic values and complete the meticulously orchestrated picture of an assorted yet pure Islamic society in which the Hijab is observed, and the safety and chastity of the citizens guaranteed. The Leader carefully listens to and comments on the works of the female poets and often lectures about the importance of voicing female chastity in the works of female Islamic republican poets. In this Islamic Republican utopia no one sits with his or her back to the Leader, no one sits higher than the Leader and the distance from his turban is kept under a constant state of control. Similar to the modern charts, the nationwide broadcastings of this literary ceremonial are yet further proof of the use of modern tools to promote the Shiite clerical establishment.

4. Legitimate Poetry in the Islamic Literary Tradition

As noted, the poems that are selected also contribute to the Shia mythology of patronage. The aforementioned themes from Shia poetry comprise the leading topics that are met with in the recited poems. With the creation of a new title in 2004-5, "Religious or Ritualistic Poetry" (*she'r-e ā'ini*), and the formation of a separate poetry gathering for eulogists, Khamenei heavily invested in updating the Islamic, Shia poetry legacy. In order to better understand the roots of this specific poetic genre it is important to shed some light on the history of legitimate poetry in the Islamic literary tradition. What is clear from the limited historical sources available is that poetry represents the only Arabic literary genre that might compete with the literary capacities of the Quranic text.

No matter what differences may exist between poetry and the Quran in terms of sources of

inspiration, the identical rhythmical patterns and the extensive use of *Saj*⁴⁹⁶ bear witness to similarities between the two and the influence of the Arabic poetic tradition on the Quran. Poetry and poets were the first group of artists to be confronted in the Quran, in which poetry is regarded as equal to sorcery and soothsaying. Accordingly, poets are placed in the same position as soothsayers or those possessed by the devil.⁴⁹⁷ In the Quranic surah *Al-shu'ara* (The Poets), poets are described as people who are possessed by devil or "those whom only deviators follow."⁴⁹⁸ Several prophetic hadiths speak against the intoxicating role of anti-Islamic poetry,⁴⁹⁹ thus casting light onto the conflict between the poets and the messenger of Islam. A poet would have benefited from the prophet's support if, and only if, he or she used poetry as a tool with which to lampoon the opponents of Islam: "lampoon the pagans with your verse and Gabriel is with you," said the prophet Mohammad to his own poet, Hassan-ibn Hayyan, on the occasion of the Bani-Quraisha siege.⁵⁰⁰ What leaps out from these examples is the principle that as long as a poem was deemed legitimate and fell in line with Islamic principles it was accepted and praised by the Islamic authorities, the prophet and the caliphs.⁵⁰¹

⁴⁹⁶ *Saj* is the name for rhyming prose in Arabic literature and is one of the oldest literary forms in the Arabic literary tradition. The literal meaning of *Saj* refers to the evenness and monotony of the endings or middles of the words in the prose.

⁴⁹⁷ For instance, Surah 69, 40-42: It is the speech of a noble messenger. It is not the speech of a poet (little do you believe) not the speech of a soothsayer (little do you remember). Surah 36, 69: "We have not taught him poetry, it is not seemly for him, it is only a remembrance and a Clear Quran."

⁴⁹⁸ *Al-Shu'ara*, 224. Most of these verses belong to a period during which the poets of Medina addressed poetic insults to Mohammad after he claimed the gift of prophecy.

⁴⁹⁹ Mohammad Ibn Isma'il Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Medina: Darul-Islam, 1996), 71: "It is better for a man to fill the inside of his body with pus than to fill it with poetry."

⁵⁰⁰ *Sahih al-Bukhari*, vol. 8, 174. Also on the occasion of Quraisha's besiege: "Abuse them (with your poems), and Gabriel is with you." Ibid, vol. 5, 449.

⁵⁰¹ Mohammad's critique of 'Amru-al-Qays, the legendary pre-Islamic poet, as "the standard bearer of hell," Umar's disapproval of erotic poetry,⁵⁰¹ or 'Usman's refusal to buy a slave due to his poetic skills, since "nothing is sacred to a poet,"⁵⁰¹ all evidence the rejection of certain literary figures and themes by the religious authorities in the early Islamic era. The same occurred during the reign of the Umayyad caliphs. For example, Mu'awiya "warned the poet 'Abdurrahman b. Al-Hakam not to compose amorous poems by which he could beguile noble and chaste women, nor lampoons by which he could make himself the enemy of

As far as the history of religious Shi'a poetry is concerned, during 'Ali ibn-abi-Talib's time in power, legitimate poetry constituted any verse that promoted 'Shia ethics'. The main themes of Shia poetry can be listed as follows: the expression of love and devotion to the Shia Imams;⁵⁰² the use of rhetorical reasoning to justify the legitimacy of Ali's caliphate after the death of The Prophet;⁵⁰³ criticising the opponents of the Shia Imams;⁵⁰⁴ elegies for Imams, Ashurā and the martyrdom of the Hosein-ibn-Ali;⁵⁰⁵ and the occultation and return of the twelfth Imam (messiah). In the context of Iran, it was not until the rise of the Safavid Empire that the Twelve Shi'ite branch of Islam eventually became the religion of the state. Alongside other socio-cultural transformations, and indeed largely due to the personal inclinations of the Safavid rulers, poetry underwent a remarkable transformation in terms of content. Apart from occasional poems written in praise of The Prophet and Ali in the works of pre-Safavid Persian poets,⁵⁰⁶ Shia poetry only really became widespread after the rise of the Safavid dynasty.⁵⁰⁷

noble people or incite those of vile disposition." For further information, see S.A. Bonebakker, "Religious Prejudice against Poetry in Early Islam," *Medievalia et Humanistica: Studies in Medieval & Renaissance Culture* 7 (1976): 84.

⁵⁰² For instance, see De'bel's praise poem for Ali-Ibn-abi-Tālib, in: Abdol-hosein Ahmad Al-amini-Al-najafi, *Moasu'yat- al-ghadir fi-kitāb va-al-sunnah-va-al-adab* vol. 2 (Qom: Da'eratoma'āref-e feqh-e eslāmi, 2007), 382.

⁵⁰³ For instance see, Komayt-ibn-zayd's poem, in: Ahmad-ibn-Ibrahim-al-Qaysi, *Sharh hāshemiāt Al-Komayt-ibn-zayd-al-asadi*, (Beirut: 'Ālam-al-kotob 1406), 59-60.

⁵⁰⁴ For instance see, Komayt's poem in critique of Hisham Abd-al-malik, in: Ibid, 198-199.

⁵⁰⁵ For instance see, Seyyed Hamiri's poem in defence of Twelve Shi'ism and the legitimacy of Ali's rulership after Mohammad's death, in: Seyyed Mohsen Amin Ameli, *A 'yan-al-shi'a* vol. 3, (Beirut: Matba'at-al-ta'aruf, 1998), 427.

⁵⁰⁶ Poets such as Kasa'i-Marvzi, Ferdowsi Tusi, Naser-Khosrow Qobadiani, Abu-Sa'id Ab-ol-kheir, Attar Neyshaburi occasionally wrote verses in praise of the Prophet Mohammad and his descendants. But they cannot be listed as proponents of Shia poetry since only a few examples can be found in their work.

⁵⁰⁷ Being well versed in Shia doctrine and Sufism, both Shah Ismail and Shah Tahmasp developed a talent for mystical poetry. A large number of poems that were attributed to Shah Ismail after his death were heavily influenced by Sufi ideas and Shia Massianism, through which Ismail depicts himself as the representative of the messiah on earth and the embodiment of the spirit of Allah.

Having said this, the unprecedented number of religious odes and elegies written during the past three decades under the rule of the Islamic Republic, echoes, to a large extent, the changes that took place during the reign of the Safavid rulers – these changes are intrinsically rooted in the Islamic tradition of legitimate poetry. Placing great emphasis on the quality of the eulogies for the Shia Imams and the necessity of academic education under Khamenei's leadership bear witness to his interest in the promotion of Shia ideology by way of poetry. The establishment of the eulogy as an academic field in 2012,⁵⁰⁸ and the foundation of an annual eulogy festival,⁵⁰⁹ both within the past decade, exemplify Khamenei's commitment to poetry as a vehicle for the expression of the ideals of the Islamic Republic.

Before the concluding remarks, it is worth making a note of Khamenei's recent lecture, which took place during Ramadan 2014, when he highlighted the function of poetry as to "shape and protect national and cultural identity". To him, national and cultural identity comprise the belief of the righteousness that can be found in the 'legitimate' works of Ferdowsi, Sa'di, Nezami, Hafez and Mowlavi:

Had it not been because of our cultural identity, the Islamic Revolution would never gain triumph and someone like our Imam [Khomeini] would never come to existence. Imam [Khomeini] was a product of this cultural identity, one that is to be persevered and you [the poets] are the ones to do it. Poetry should protect this identity, which is in fact a spiritual reasoning [...]. You should be aware of this identity in your poetry and preserve the preeminent Islamic ethics, spiritual wisdom, unity and belief in God, fairness, honesty and all ethics that exist in our classical legacy.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁸ For more details see, Unknown, "Reshteh-ye maddāhi ham rāhandāzi shod," *Alef*, accessed 11 February 2013, <http://khabarfarsi.com/ext/3396812>.

⁵⁰⁹ Unknown, "Hamāyesh-e maddāhān dar Ardabil," *Farsnews*, accessed 9 November 2012, <http://khabarfarsi.com/ext/3392361>.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid.

5. Conclusion

The truth of Islamic republican poetry and its production is the truth of Iran's ideological manifestations. Power is asserted through certain metaphors, symbols and names, which affirm the state's ideological apparatus. Such forms of poetry and their accompanying events have been the subject of critique, mockery and indifference from independent and secular literati in recent decades. This is largely due to their lack of literary quality and archaic approach to power, which says much about the state's on-going ideological conflict in the consolidation of its power. Ultimately, we are left with evidence of the huge gap that exists between what the state defines as poetry and what independent poets consider poetry.

The focus placed herein on the shifting models of dialogue and engagement between poetry and power in the past and present ought to be seen as recognition of the fact that both sides undergo transformations over the course of time, and that therefore each period requires a remodelling. As was the case for Islamic poetry and court poetry, and is now so for Islamic republican poetry, sociocultural transformations and change in political structures give rise to similar yet revised models that concern the relationship between poetry and power, as well as prompting changing perspectives regarding content and form. While the highlights of one such model are presented herein, the dialogue between poetry and power must be perceived as on going.

That said, within the structure of patronage the influential role of religion as an ideology was greatly eroded and marginalised during the Pahlavi era, and its strong resurfacing after the 1979 Revolution has had a direct impact on the thematic and structural features of

poetry, as well as on the proximity of poets to the seat of power. In this regard, the ceremonial nature of Khamenei's publicly espoused relationship with poetry, as well as his general adherence to classical and mystical forms, demonstrates the nostalgia that lies at the heart of the religious revolutionary project. It can indeed be stated that it explicitly and implicitly, consciously and unconsciously alludes to modes of societal organisation and expressions of leadership that existed within Iranian culture within the premodern context. One important question, however, is whether such proclaimed parts of the premodern context ever existed in reality or whether they are simply what Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger call "invented traditions". The nostalgia utilised by Khamenei is not only powerful in a religious sense but also exerts a broad appeal across the full range of idealised and utopian thinking.

The emphasis placed on the primacy of the Leader as the instigator and facilitator of profound social changes, and within this context the notion of the Leader as the ender of injustice and the bringer of peace, has generated powerful popular myths that have also been propagated within other, supposedly secular, revolutions. The examples of Stalin and Mao are particularly pertinent in relation to the "cult of personality", and indeed this idea of the benevolent leader-as-saviour has been equally influential in the Iranian revolutionary context. Accordingly, the endorsement of certain forms of poetry and the spectacle of poetry as utilised by Khamenei constitutes attempts to secure legitimacy through appeals to notions that even shaped modernist and secular poets in the revolutionary context, as demonstrated above. This confirms the point that Khamenei and the Iranian Revolution, including its Islamists, ought to be regarded to some extent as "modernists", or at least as part and parcel of the phenomenon of "modernity".

As Khamenei himself has stated, memory and nostalgia are intensely important components of the poetical construct of the modern religious Iranian state: “The Islamic Republic will be remembered and understood in history through poetry.”⁵¹¹ Whether or not this will be the case is yet to be seen. Indeed, the above diagram published on Khamenei’s website demonstrates the paradoxes inherent in what we might term the “nostalgic state”. In attempting to conform to the modern sensibilities of technocracy by way of something as mystic and ineffable as poetry, Khamenei undermines the very sensibilities that he attempts to inculcate.

⁵¹¹ Unknown, “Hamāyesh-e maddāhān dar Ardabil,” *Farsnews*, accessed 9 November 2012, <http://khabarfarsi.com/ext/3392361>.

Epilogue

Based on the information and analyses discussed in this thesis, post-revolutionary Iran clearly offers a striking framework for the exploration of issues relating to the relationship of poetry and power. The ways in which official literature has been created and developed over the past three decades as an important part of the state ideological apparatus demonstrates the continuing salience and utility of literature as a means by which to propagate and perpetuate a shared notion of the nation state. It continues to do so as historians and cultural analysts monitor incredibly swift political and cultural transformations in Iran.

For the first decade following the revolution, the Islamic state had one particular agenda, namely to create a society filled with responsible citizens who were committed to the ideas of the revolution. This goal was partly pursued through the channels of art and literature, and poetry as a literary form was chosen in particular, making a strong impact on the Persian psyche. For the first time in English scholarship, this work offers an in-depth historical account of one of Iran's most influential state cultural bodies and the ways in which it acted as a platform through which the official literati could emerge and develop during the Iran-Iraq War. As shown in the first chapter, the pre-revolutionary period ended with striking new reconfigurations and alignments among a newly emerged religious intelligentsia, as the secular-minded pre-revolutionary intelligentsia began to fracture due to prosecution and censorship and Islamic republican cultural figures came together in newfound institutional alignments and networks. It was during the first decade after the revolution that the official discourse emerged and peaked in the realm of poetry.

It is hoped that this thesis has made it clear that themes such as the village and the accompanying critical reaction to urban living in Islamic republican poetry were parts of a pre-revolutionary anti-modernist viewpoint that merged with the Third-Worldist, Islamist rhetoric of the Islamic republican state and created a discourse that served the nativist politics of the revolutionary state. In this regard, the official poets were part of the state's ideological apparatus, which was forged during the war period and reached its apotheosis in the immediate aftermath of hostilities, as discussed in chapters two and three.

Chapter four has argued that although the official poetic trend emerged as part of the state's ideological apparatus in the wake of the 1979 Revolution, it underwent remarkable transformations over time. Documenting the apparent ideological shifts and doubts that emerge from a detailed reading of the works of distinguished official poets prepares the ground for future studies of a more nuanced and sophisticated study of post-revolutionary cultural and literary transformations.

As discussed in the fifth chapter, the political transitions of recent decades, especially from the 1990s onwards, will seem inevitable in years to come due to the transitional state of the Iranian ruling powers and society in general. The question remains as to how such contextual transformations will give way to further evolutions in the realm of official poetry. While some of the most influential Islamic republican poets have passed away, such as Hasan Hoseini, Salman Harati and Qaysar Aminpur, the remainder from both trends (disillusioned and conformist) have remained active but have not proven as influential. This void has partly been filled in the past few years as a result of state investment in training committed voices in literature, with a new wave of young poets emerging in the past decade to become members of state-sponsored literary journals,

columns, events or poetry nights with the Leader of the Islamic Republic, as detailed in the final chapter. However, the quality of their literary production is yet to be evaluated; I shall leave this to the future scholarly works.

With this in mind, the return to the pre-modern forms, themes and the ceremonial setting apparent in the Islamic republican poetic trend provides a powerful example of the fundamentalist features of the current state in power. However, it should not go unnoticed that having utilised poetry as a social medium to reach a wider audience and to make the state ideology more accessible in the form of songs, that poems and literary ceremonial are features of modern authoritarian states, all of which are somewhat nostalgic about the past and tend to revive it in newly defined formats. In this light, studying the official literary trend as a platform that manifests such complexities sheds light on the ways in which the political structure of the post-revolutionary period functions on a cultural level.

Furthermore, scrutinising the ideological divisions that became apparent in the immediate post-war period provides the foundations for further research into the unofficial and independent voices of poetry that came to light after the end of the war. Having scrutinised the official literary scene, further studies will follow in order to address the issues such as a lack of state financial support, censorship and persecution, all of which represent the obstacles faced by the unauthorised voices of the non-official trend in literature. It goes without saying that an in-depth understanding of the situation of the non-official literati in the complex post-revolutionary cultural context can be pursued in a more objective manner once the cultural policies, institutions and views of the ruling power have been identified, a goal that this thesis aims to have achieved as the first systematic study of the post-revolutionary official poetry.

From occasional poems in praise of Ayatollah Khomeini to war poetry, from post-war disillusionment to the literary ceremonial with Ayatollah Khamenei or other ceremonial formations, such as state-sponsored poetry festivals and publications, the fact remains that the cultural hegemony of the state and attempts at cultural engineering remain in place. However, this cultural hegemony has already been questioned in the 2009 election aftermath by a small group of official poets and this will continue to be the case in the coming years. At the same time, due to such socio-cultural transitions, it is not impossible to imagine some form of dialogue and ideological reconciliation between the official and unofficial voices of such literature on both sides of the literary spectrum. This has already, with some former official poets having joined the camp of a new wave of disillusioned poets, as seen in the case of Kakai and Beqeri in chapter four. Yet this is currently an on going process that should be scrutinised in the years to come once the transition is settled and the events can be studied with historical distance.

At the time of writing, there are still poets behind bars in Iran or living in exile, poets who are being punished for their literary work. Few would question the Islamic Republic's failure to tolerate literary freedom, especially during and after the cultural revolution of 1980-83. However, based on the information discussed in this work, with the increasing number of state-sponsored literary awards, festivals, publishers, publications and, most recently, literary ceremonials, as well as a growing number of official poets, it can be claimed that the crisis of literary freedom in which post-revolutionary Iran finds itself is clearly associated with the fact that poetry is a central feature of the state's political power. Any academic survey of post-revolutionary Persian literature would be incomplete without an attempt to indicate the important role played by the state in the formation of official

literature and the ways in which this trend has influenced the processes of literary production and contributed to the lack of literary freedom, creating obstacles in the development of non-official literature. Indeed the time has come for the scholars of literature and social history to take the role of literature in the state-formation in Iran more seriously. Once scholars have accepted the significant part played by literature and in particular poetry in the ideological apparatus of the ruling state in Iran, then a more comprehensive image of the literary scene and productions can be illustrated. The objective herein has not been to map such an all-encompassing image but rather to explore the formation, leading themes and transformations of the official school of poetry under the Islamic Republic in the hope of providing the grounds for further scholarly works in the future.

Appendix.

A Politico-Literary Who's Who of Post-revolutionary Iran

1. Mohammadreza Abdolmalekian (1957) A pioneering voice of Islamic republican free verse and the village theme. Born in Nahavand, a small city in the northwest of Iran, Abdolmalekian moved to Tehran in 1979 to pursue his higher education in the field of agricultural engineering. He began his career as a poet in the early 1970s and initially wrote poems in support of an authentic rural lifestyle. He later became a leading figure of Islamic republican war poetry and received great acclaim at the time for his critical and realistic tone, as well as for his modernist style. Following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, and in the company of a number of other poets, Abdolmalekian gradually distanced himself from the state's official organisations and founded the Centre for Young Poets (Daftar-e She'r-e Javān). He is currently in charge of the Centre for Young Poets and a member of both the central committee of the Association of Iranian Poets and the Supreme Council of Artists, all of which are considered semi-independent literary associations.

2. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (1956) Former radical conservative president. Born in Garmsar in Semnan Province and the son of a grocer and barber, Ahmadinejad won the controversial presidential election of 2009, which was followed by the rise of the Green Movement. Known for his populist, Third-Worldist political stance, he promised social freedom and economic growth and referred to himself as a sincere follower of Imam Khomeini, stating that he wished to revive the former leader's values and vision. The

Leader of the Islamic Republic initially supported Ahmadinejad, before his term came to an end following clashes with the conservative and traditional right-wing factions, as well as, most importantly, Aliakbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani. Literary censorship, reduced cultural production and restraints on freedom reached a climax during his presidency.

3. Mehdi Akhavan-Sales (1920-1990) Notable figure of modern Persian poetry and a leading literary critic. A native of Mashhad in the province of Khorasan, Akhavan-Sales became an iconic figure of the modernist literary movement and a close friend and follower of Nima Yushij, the founder of Persian modernist poetry. He was imprisoned after the 1953 coup d'état and the toppling of Mohamad Mosadeq's government. Akhavan-Sales joined the revolutionary uprising in 1979 but yielded to silence soon after the Revolution, instead choosing to voice a critique of the extensive purging of secular intellectuals. As a result, he lost his job, was beaten up and forced to confirm his loyalty to the revolutionary state during a televised interview. The last ten years of his life were spent in a state of disillusionment, which is palpable in his late poetry. Despite his friendship with Ali Khamenei prior to the Revolution, Akhavan-Sales never accepted a place in his poetry circle; this proved to be an objection that would trouble him right up until his death.

4. Zakaria Akhlaqi (1962) A cleric poet. Born in Shahidiyeh village in the city of Meybod of the Yazd Province, Akhalaqi pursued his religious studies at the seminary school of Yazd and later Qom, eventually going on to become a cleric. He began his career as a pro-revolutionary poet in 1981 and published his first works in Islamic republican journals and magazines such as *Jomhuri-e eslāmi* and *'Orvatolvosqā*. During his stay in Tehran, Akhlaqi joined the poetry circle of the Howzeh. Apart from teaching theology, jurisprudence and philosophy in various seminary schools, Akhlaqi was a regular

participant of Ayatollah Khamenei's annual poetry nights. Akhalaqi also played a role in the promotion of mystical war poetry during his activities at the cultural centre in Qom and Tehran.

4. Qaysar Aminpur (1959-2007) Possibly the most well known and disenchanted of Islamic republican poets. Born in the district of Gotvand, Dezful, Aminpur moved to Tehran with the start of the revolutionary uprising to continue his higher education. The outcome, however, was his involvement in the revolutionary movement against the monarchy. In 1981, Aminpur collaborated with Hoseini to form the poetry circle known as the Howzeh. After the 1987 expulsion of thirteen members of the Howzeh, Aminpur began to separate himself from official cultural institutions, choosing instead to work as an academic. His disillusioned voice in his best-known post-war collection, *Sudden Mirrors* (*Āyenehhā-ye nāgahān*, 1990), his academic position at the Faculty of Literature at Tehran University and, last but not least, his sudden death in a car accident at the age of 48 have all added to an on-going dispute about his public persona, literary legacy and ideological stance towards the state. The current state has attempted to present Aminpur as a post-revolutionary figurehead and nationally and internationally acclaimed poet.

5. Mohammadreza Amiri-Esfandaqeh (1996) One of the current poet laureates of Khamenei's annual poetry night.⁵¹² Born in Tehran and raised in Khorasan, Amiri-Esfandaqeh began his career in the field of literature as a schoolteacher and only gained fame as a poet with a special talent for writing in the archaic form of qasideh after the

⁵¹² For a detailed account of these poetry nights, see chapter 5.

death of Ayatollah Khomeini. Initially known for his love sonnets, Amiri-Esfandaqeh joined the camp of the Islamic republican poets upon his arrival to Tehran. He gained recognition after attending Ayatollah Khamenei's annual poetry nights. One of his best-known qasidehs is a condemnation of the Green Movement.⁵¹³

6. Fereydun Amuzadeh-Khalili (1960) Reformist editor of *Chelcherāgh* (2002), an independent literary journal for young adults. Born in Semnan, Amuzadeh-Khalili moved to Tehran in 1979 to continue his further education at Tehran University, where he met Aminpur for the first time. A member of key revolutionary literary journals such as *Bachehhā-ye masjid* (1980) and the *Jong-e sureh* (1980), Amuzadeh-Khalili was also one of the founders of the literary circle of the Howzeh. Following the ideological clashes that occurred in 1987 within the Howzeh,⁵¹⁴ Amuzadeh-Khalili left the centre and joined other disillusioned poets to found the *Sorush-e nowjavān* (1988). He is recognised as a leading literary figure of the Islamic reformists who wholeheartedly supported Mohammad Khatami, the reformist and liberal president who came to power in 1997. Since then, Amuzadeh-Khalili has been a leading reformist cultural figure and editor-in-chief of the liberal journal for young adults, *Chelcherāgh*.

7. Manuchehr Atashi (1931-2005) The leading pre-revolutionary leftist poet from southern Iran. Born in Dashtestan, Bushehr Province, Atashi is well known for introducing the epic tone and local southern dialect to the modernist style. He joined the Tudeh Party in 1951 and some of his early works mirror his leftist ideology. In his famous collection

⁵¹³ "She'ri az Amiri-Esfandaqeh bā mazmun-e fetneh-ye 88," accessed 12 March 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcFTg0fhczw>.

⁵¹⁴ For a detailed account of the ideological split in the Howzeh, see chapter 1.

Another Melody (*Āhangi digar*, 1959), Atashi brings together a series of poems in which the wild and violent nature of southern Iran is clearly evident. With his metaphorical skills and allegories of nature, Atashi influenced many Islamic republican poets such as Mirshakkak, who had an interest in the themes of the pastoral and rural life. Two years after the Islamic Revolution, Atashi lost all of his assignments, including the editorship of the poetry page of *Tamāshā* “on the unsubstantiated charges of involvement in state censorship before the Revolution.”⁵¹⁵ In 1995 he joined the prominent novelist Hushang Golshiri to run the literary pages of the independent literary journal *Kārnāmeḥ*. A few days prior to his death, and due to his influence on the literary discourse of a number of Islamic republican poets, Atashi was awarded the official title of ‘*chehreh-ye māndegār*’.⁵¹⁶ Having been officially recognised as a distinguished literary figure, controversy followed within various literary circles, yet Atashi did not survive long enough to respond to others’ disparagements.

8. Morteza Avini (1947-1993) A leading Islamic republican filmmaker and director of the well-known state-sponsored war documentary *Chronicle of Victory* (*Revāyat-e Fath*, 1989-92). Born to a lower-middle class family in Shahr-e Rey, Avini is known as a pre-revolutionary anarchist and post-revolutionary conformist artist. Avini entered the Faculty of Fine Arts at Tehran University in 1965 to pursue an academic career in the field of architecture. In the wake of the 1979 Revolution, Avini was greatly influenced by Ayatollah Khomeini’s revolutionary ideology. A few years after the revolution, he decided

⁵¹⁵ Encyclopaedia Iranica, accessed 26 September 2012, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/atashi-manuchehr>.

⁵¹⁶ It is an official title given to the most prominent figures of various fields to recognise their lifetime service to the country. Those who receive this title are considered national figures.

to join Islamic republican artists at the Howzeh where he dropped his academic degree in agriculture, moved to filmmaking and became one of the most famous war documentary makers to be admired and supported by the government. During the last decade of his life, Avini dedicated himself to opposing secular-minded literary figures and journalists. As the new editor of the *Sureh-ye andisheh* (1990) his main goal was to establish an Islamic republican discourse in the field of cinema and film. His death in a minefield at the age of forty-six generated a long-lasting dispute over his artistic work and ideological viewpoint that still persists today.

9. Ahmad Azizi (1958) A leading Islamic republican poet who played a significant role in the revival of Masnavi as a classical form after the Revolution. Born in Sarpol-e Zahab of Kermanshah, Azizi spent his childhood moving among nomadic villagers. He moved to Tehran following his acquaintance with revolutionary clerics and figures such as Ayatollah Motahhari and Shams Al-e ahmad. His first poems were published in the *Javān* journal prior to the revolution. After 1979, Azizi became a pioneering voice of classical forms, especially Masnavi. Inspired by Rumi, Islamic mysticism is a leading theme in his poems. Since 2007, Azizi has been in coma; Ayatollah Khamenei visited him in a hospital in Kermanshah in 2011.

10. Sa'ed Baqeri (1960) Writer of the current national anthem of the Islamic Republic. Born in Naziabad, a neighbourhood in the south of Tehran, Baqeri joined Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) as a literary presenter after the revolution and thus began his career as a young poet. During the Iran-Iraq War, Baqeri joined the literary circle of the Howzeh and paid occasional visits to the warzone along with Aminpur and Hoseini. Many of his poems that discuss love, mysticism and war were turned into songs by famous post-

revolutionary singers such as Mohammad Esfahani, Hesamoddin Seraj and Abdolhosein Mokhtabad. Prior to the 2009 presidential election, Baqeri often appeared at Khamenei's annual poetry night and acted as a laureate. However, as a supporter of Mirhosein Musavi, the reformist candidate, in the aftermath of the 2009 election he was excluded from Islamic republican circles and has not since attended an annual poetry night at the Leader's office.

11. Abbas Baratipur (1943) An Islamic republican and militant poet. Born in Tehran, Baratipur wrote his first poems in 1962 as a high-school student. Following his graduation from high school, he joined the air force and was sent to the United States to complete his education in the field of electronic engineering. In the wake of the Revolution, and following the formation of the Howzeh in 1980, Baratipur joined the said literary circle. He has served as a literary critic and poet for more than thirty-five years. During the war, Baratipur joined official poets in the promotion of the mystification of war and martyrdom. He has been in charge of poetry sessions at the Howzeh since 1988, following the expulsion of Aminpur and Hoseini, and is a frequent guest poet at Ayatollah Khamenei's annual poetry nights.

12. Reza Baraheni (1935) A self-exiled Iranian poet and literary critic. Born in Tabriz, Baraheni is a pioneering literary figure of the pre-revolutionary period who, along with Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Gholamhosein Sa'dei, initiated the first steps in the formation of the Writers' Association of Iran in 1967. Following an open confrontation with the Shah over the founding of the organisation, Baraheni was arrested and kept in solitary confinement, where he was interrogated for 104 days. The outcome of this period is his famous collection *Shadow of the Almighty* (Zellolāh 1976). Following the victory of the

1979 Revolution and the crackdown on leftist and secular intellectuals, Bareheni was imprisoned once more. Following his release he was fired on charges of collaboration with counter-revolutionary groups. His stay in Iran and further attempts at re-writing the charter of the Writers' Association of Iran brought him to the Revolutionary Tribunal. As a result of such persecutions, Baraheni left Iran and sought asylum in Canada in January 1997, where he is currently based.

13. Simin Behbahani (1927-2014) An iconic poet of modern Persian poetry, member of the Iranian intelligentsia and twice nominee for the Noble Prize in Literature. As President of the Writers' Association of Iran, Behbahani was interrogated and banned from leaving Iran in 2010. Despite her influence on younger generations of poets, some of whom happen to be from the Islamic republican group, Behbahani has never been recognised as a pioneering voice in Persian poetry by the cultural authorities and, more importantly, by Ayatollah Khamenei, largely due to her critical position against Islamic ideology. Her war poem collection *A Line of Speed and Fire* (*Khatti zeh sor'at-o ātash*, 1980) marked the beginning of a new season in Behbahani's literary career and made her one of the leading voices of anti-war poetry.

14. Parviz Beygi-Habibabadi (1954) A leading voice of Islamic republican war poetry. Born in Ardestan, Beygi-Habibabadi spent most of his childhood in the southern provinces of Isfahan, Abadan and Shahr-e Kord. He began his literary career a few months prior to the 1979 Revolution in September 1978 and immediately joined the poetry circle of the Howzeh after the Revolution. Beygi is known for his powerful war poems, which have occasionally been made into war songs. He has been one of the main guest poets of the annual poetry nights with the current leader.

15. Hasan Bonyanian (1953) Conservative head of the Socio-cultural Association in the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution (SCCR). Bonyanian was one of the zealot cultural figures to replace the former head of the Howzeh, Mohamadali Zam, in 2001. His main agenda has included “the revival of Islamic civilisation”⁵¹⁷ in the post-revolutionary era. Engineering the official cultural scene via state-funded institutions represented the principal aim of the Howzeh during his directorship.

16. Hosein Esrafilī (1951) An official voice of war poetry whose poems constantly urge martyrdom as a mystical path to the divine. Esrafilī joined the Howzeh after the Revolution and became one of the most famous voices of Islamic republican war poetry. In 1987 he was officially recognised by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG) as an influential war poet. Since 1979, Esrafilī has been in charge of a number of state-sponsored literary journals, such as *Kār-o kārgar*, *Payām-e enqelāb*. He is currently a member of the poetry sections of the MCIG and the IRIB.

17. Ja‘far Ebrahimi (1951) A known poet in the field of literature for children and young adults thanks to school textbooks. Known by his pen name, Shāhed, Ebrahimi was born in Ardabil. From 1981 to 2001 he acted as the director of the poetry council in the Association for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (AIDC). Ebrahimi’s poems have consistently formed part of the literary syllabus for school textbooks since the 1980s. One of his best-known poems discusses life in the village

⁵¹⁷ “Goftegu bā Hasan Bonyanian,” accessed 16 December 2013, <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/others-dialog?id=24747>.

versus urban life and would be memorised by students in their first year of primary school during the 1980s, when the appraisal of village life was still part of the state's ideological rhetoric.

18. Mohammadreza Hakimi (1935) One of the leading ideologues of Islamic thought and culture. Born and raised in Mashhad, Hakimi is the sole heir of Ali Shari'ati, the most influential lay ideologue of the Islamic Revolution. He was granted permission to edit Shari'ati's works after his death. A graduate of Islamic philosophy and jurisprudence from a seminary school, Hakimi's well-known work *Literature and Commitment in Islam* (*Adabiāt va ta'ahhod dar Islam*, 1979) has been significant in shaping Islamic republican literary discourse.

19. Salman Harati (1959-86) One of the main angles in the triangle of Islamic republican poetry. A native of Tonekabon in the northern province of Gilan, Harati was one of the youngest leading voices of Islamic republican poetry and promoted allegories of nature and village themes in his work. His depictions of a wild and green rural scene lend Harati's work a distinct style and they resemble the works of the leading modernist poet, Sohrab Sepehri. Along with Aminpur and Hoseini, these poets formed the main core of Islamic republican poetry and became known as the triangle of the poetry of the revolution. His premature death was followed by the publication by Aminpur of his poetry collection. A square is currently named after him in Tehran.

20. Aliakbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani (1934) Former pragmatic president of Iran and head of the Assembly of Experts (AE) from 2007 to 2011. Born into a rich agricultural family in Rafsanjan of Keram Province, he served as President of Iran from 1989 to 1997.

He was called the ‘commander of construction’ (*sardār-e sāzandegi*) for his post-war construction plans and pragmatic policies in the realms of economics and culture. Apart from his prestigious and key official posts, Rafsanjani also played an important role in the appointment of Khamenei as Khomeini’s successor. Rafsanjani provided the foundations for a more prosperous cultural scene, as well as aiding in the rise of the reformist government in 1997.

21. Hasan Hoseini (1956-2004) One of the main founders of the poetry circle the Howzeh and a leading theorist of Islamic republican war poetry. Born in Tehran, he graduated from Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. Hoseini became one of the main founders of the Howzeh, the most influential cultural centre in the wake of the revolution. He was a close friend of Aminpur and together they developed the centre as the main gathering circle of Islamic republican poets. Hoseini left the Howzeh following the clashes that occurred in 1987 and began to teach literature at the Al-Zahra and Azad Universities. He collaborated with the IRIB as a literary presenter from 1999 until his death. Hoseini also played a significant role in the development of a collection of the most influential and successful war poems to date, as well as helping to characterise the war and holy-defence genres, a primary source in this research.

22. Abdoljabbar Kakai (1964) A formerly revolutionary and currently reformist Islamic republican poet. Born and raised in the Kurdish province of Ilam, Kakai joined the Islamic republican poets upon his arrival to Tehran in 1982. As an employee of the Ministry of Education, Kakai has been working both as a poet and literary critic, as well as a radio presenter. Today he is known as a leading figure of official war poetry. Kakai also served as a member of the committee of song and music in the MCIG for nine months and

resigned in protest at the music censorship policies of the committee. Since 2009, Kakai has been one of the principal disillusioned voices of the official trend and has publicly positioned himself against the Islamic republican literati who openly fought against the Green Movement supporters through their verse.

23. Mohammadkazem Kazemi (1968) A notable Afghan poet and literary critic and a leading voice of Islamic republican poetry about migration and exile. Born in Harat, Afghanistan, Kazemi moved to Mashhad in 1984 and pursued his literary career in one of the most prosperous literary canons of Iran in Khorasan. His famous and long Masnavi, *Return* (*Bāzgasht*, 1991), represents a breakthrough in the genre of exile and migration. As a founder and editorial board member of the *Dorr-e dari* literary circle and journal, Kazemi has written extensively on Persian literature and Afghan poetry, including textbooks such as *Window* (*Rowzaneh*, 1997). He is one of the rare Afghan poets to have been consistently involved in the literary activities of the official cultural scene of Iran and has often appeared at the annual poetry nights of Ayatollah Khamenei.

24. Ali Khamenei (1939) The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic and Khomeini's sole successor. A native of Azerbaijan and the child of a minor clerical family, Khamenei grew up in Mashhad where he attended poetry circles of all kinds during his youth.⁵¹⁸ Known for his progressive appearance among the traditional community of clerics in the pre-revolutionary period, Khamenei developed an interest in poetry and formed his own circle of poets during his presidency. After his appointment to the

⁵¹⁸ For further details, see chapter 5.

leadership, he promoted poetry as a prevailing form of art unique to the Islamic Republican era. As Abrahamian notes, “he inherited Khomeini’s powers but not his charisma.”⁵¹⁹ Many literary critics believe that his annual poetry ceremony is largely an attempt to promote himself as a charismatic literary figure, poet and political leader.⁵²⁰

25. Mohammad Khatami (1944) Iran’s most charismatic political figure following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini. Born in Yazd and educated in the field of philosophy at the University of Isfahan and in Hamburg, Germany, Khatami is known for his two landslide presidential victories in 1997 and 2001, as well as for being the reformist president of the Islamic Republic. He served as the minister of culture and head of the National Library of Iran and the government’s publishing house during Hashemi-Rafsanjani’s presidency. His resignation from the MCIG in protest at the state’s censorship policies triggered a reformist movement during the 1990s. Following the 2009 post-election turmoil, Khatami has become a leading figure of the opposition movement. His name and image have since been banned from national broadcasting channels and state-sponsored cultural institutions, as well as from all programs, under the direct orders of Ayatollah Khamenei. Independent poets and literati experienced greater freedom when publishing their works during his presidency.

26. Ruhollah Khomeini (1902-89) Charismatic founder of the Islamic Republic. Educated in the seminary schools of Qom and Najaf, Khomeini became the leading opponent of the Shah after the latter approved the US Embassy’s proposal of an Enactment

⁵¹⁹ Ervand Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), xxi.

⁵²⁰ See chapter 5 for further details on the annual poetry nights with the Leader.

of Capitulation in 1962, which eventually led to his deportation to Iraq and later France. Khomeini began to mobilise the masses while living in exile. Khomeini's political character consistently superseded his interest in literature and, in particular, poetry and mysticism. His sole poetry collection was published a year after his death under the title of *The Wine of Love* (*Bādeh-ye 'eshq*, 1990).

27. Hosein Khosrowjerdi (1957) One of the disillusioned Islamic republican visual artists who designed the controversial memorial for Qaysar Aminpur after his death.⁵²¹ Khosrowjerdi graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Tehran and formed the visual arts section of the Howzeh in the wake of the Revolution. Along with Habibollah Sadeqi, Kazem Chalipa and Naser Palangi, Khosrowjerdi coordinated the famous visual arts exhibition of revolutionary paintings in Hoseiniyeh-e Ershad,⁵²² which led to the formation of the Howzeh. After the death of Qaysar Aminpur, Khosrowjerdi was appointed senior designer of his memorial in Gotvand.⁵²³ He is currently based in London, United Kingdom and continues to work as a painter and visual artist.

28. Soheil Mahmudi (1960) Outspoken and disenchanted poet of the Islamic Republic. Known by his pen name, Soheil, Hasan Sabet-Mahmudi was born in Tehran and pursued a career as a young journalist in the wake of the 1979 Revolution. He entered into the world of radio and worked as a presenter for various literary programs. He collaborated with the *Jomjuri-ye eslāmi* newspaper, which was one of the first circles for the gathering Islamic republican literati. During the war, Mahmudi became a pioneering voice of official

⁵²¹ See chapter 4 for further details.

⁵²² See chapter 1 for further details.

⁵²³ For further details about this controvertial monument, see chapter 4.

war poetry and promoted the idea of martyrdom as a path towards reunion with God. After the war, he became a leading voice in love lyrics. With the rise of the reform movement in 1997, Mahmudi became a supporter of Mohammad Khatami and acted as a reformist cultural figure and poet. In the 2009 presidential election, Mahmudi joined the campaign of the reformist artists to vote for Mirhosein Musavi. Subsequently, his blog was filtered and his collaboration with the IRIB discontinued.

29. Mohsen Makhmalbaf (1957) Leading Islamic republican filmmaker who promoted the Islamisation of filmmaking and cinema during his involvement with the Howzeh and later became one of the voices of the Green opposition movement in 2009. An influential and prolific film director, Makhmalbaf dedicated himself to the revolutionary cause during the 1980s. Along with a number of other zealous, revolutionary artists and writers, Makhmalbaf founded the first circle of Islamic republican literati in the Howzeh and during the cultural revolution played a significant role in the Islamisation of the film industry. In 1987, Makhmalbaf was one of the thirteen Islamic republican artists to leave the Howzeh. He began a new phase in his artistic career and gradually became an independent and critical voice in Iranian cinema. After the 2009 post-election turmoil he joined with the protesters and was forced to live in exile. He is currently based in France.

30. Boyuk Maleki (1960) Leading figure in literature for children and young adults after the revolution. Born in a village near Qazvin Province, Maleki was introduced to Persian poetry by his father. In the wake of the Islamic Revolution he moved to Tehran and began to work for an influential journal for young adults called *Keyhān-e bachehhā* whose members of staff were replaced by the official literati after 1979. Maleki later joined the Islamic republican artists of the Howzeh where his friendship with Aminpur

began. They became close friends and after leaving the Howzeh in 1987 they worked together as two of the main editorial members of the *Sorush-e Nowjavān*, which soon became a significant cultural platform for young adults, the main demographic of the reform movement. Maleki is known for his major literary contributions to the field of literature for children and young adults.

31. Nasrollah Mardani (1957) Born in Kazerun and died in Karbala, Mardani is considered as one of the pioneering voices of Islamic republican Masnavi. His major contribution and influence in the field of official war poetry made him one of the most widely known poets of the Islamic Revolution in 1980s. His book *The Blood-stained Letter of Soil* (*Khunnāmeḥ-ye khāk*, 1985) received the annual book prize during the war with Iraq. Mardani is also known for his religious poems for the Shi‘ite Imams. One of Mardani’s major projects prior to his death was an encyclopaedia of Persian poetry for Shi‘ite Imams, which still remains uncompleted after his death.

32. Yusefali Mirshakkak (1959) One of the pioneering Islamic republican poets and the main critic of the secular intelligentsia after the Islamic Revolution. Born in the small district of Ahvanz in Khuzestan Province, Mirshakak is widely known for his critical views that go against modernist poets such as Ahmad Shamlu and Mehdi Akhavan-Sales. A disciple of Ahmad Fardid and a close friend of Morteza Avini, Mirshakak is also famous for his distinct tone and the use of a local southern dialect in his poetry. As a native of southern Iran, Mirshakkak has shown interest in the works of the secular and leftist poet Manucher Atashi and played a major role in the official recognition of Atashi as a leading literary figure in the last days of his life. Mirshakkak is also a close friend of the current leader of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khamenei, and an influential figure among

Islamic republican poets.

33. Ali Mo‘allem-Damghani (1951) One of the main laureates of the annual poetry night with Ayatollah Khamenei and an influential literary figure in the Islamic republican school of poetry. His archaic style and interest in classical forms influenced many young and religious-minded poets after the Revolution. A native of the Khorasan Province, Mo‘allem is famous for the revival of the Masnavi and Khorasani styles of poetry. Apart from his literary career, he has also served as the head of the Academy of Art (Farhangestān-e Honar) since 2009. Mo‘allem is known for his famous war poems, some of which have been turned into popular war songs. During the 1990s, Mo‘allem publicly denounced religious intellectuals, in particular, Abdolkarim Soroush, whom he criticised for his liberal interpretation of Islam in his verse. Aside from his involvement in the Academy of Art, he also serves as the member of the poetry council at the MCIG and is the head of the music section at the IRIB.

34. Ali Musavi-Garmarudi (1941) Leading Islamic republican poet in the genre of free verse. Musavi-Garmarudi belongs to the first generation of religious-minded poets of the pre-revolutionary period and still serves as a key official cultural figure and laureate of Ayatollah Khamenei’s annual poetry night. Before the Revolution, Musavi-Garmarudi was recognised as a religious-minded poet who participated in the Ten Poetry Nights at the Goethe Institute. In the wake of the Revolution, he joined Islamic republican cultural activists in the promotion of Islamic culture and literature. His work possesses a strong religious tone and places particular focus on sacred Shi‘ite figures.

35. Alireza Qazveh (1963) The current and principal laureate of Ayatollah

Khamenei's annual poetry night, Qazveh is considered a leading voice of Islamic republican war poetry. He gained fame as an official poet during the Iran-Iraq War and worked as the editor of the literary section of state-sponsored newspapers during the 1990s. Apart from being a committed member of the annual poetry night and a key figure in official cultural organisations, in recent years Qazaveh has also served as the cultural attaché of Iran in India and Tajikistan.

36. Fatemeh Rake'i (1954) A poet-politician. Born and raised in Zanjan, Rake'i pursued her higher education in Tehran and completed her doctoral degree in the field of linguistics. In the male-dominated official literary scene, Rake'i managed to gain fame during the war with her religious and ideologically charged poems, which were largely published in official literary journals such as *Jong-e Sureh*. Following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, Rake'i joined the disillusioned poets of the Revolution and began to work closely with religious intellectuals and reformists. After 1997 she served as MP in the sixth parliament. Aside from her literary interests and involvement in the Association of Iranian Poets, Rake'i also acts as a member of the Participation Front group of reformists.

37. Hamid Sabsevari (1925) Writer of famous revolutionary songs and a favourite living poet of the Leader of the Islamic Republic. Born and educated in Khorasan, Sabsevari was an opponent of the Pahlavi regime and accused Mohammadreza Shah of neglecting the religious beliefs of Iranians. Following the 1953 coup, Sabsevari was prosecuted for acting against the security of the nation but was released immediately. During the rise of the Revolution, Sabsevari wrote some of the country's most famous revolutionary songs for Ayatollah Khomeini, as well as for other revolutionary figures and

occasions. Moreover, he played a significant role in the Islamisation campaign in the fields of poetry and literature between 1980 and 1983 by denouncing the secular intelligentsia and modern poetry as signs of secularism.

38. Tahereh Saffarzadeh (1936-2008) The well-known, religious-minded female poet of the pre-revolutionary period and a leading figure of Islamic republican poetry after the Revolution. Born in Sirjan, Kerman, Saffarzadeh began her literary career as a secular-minded poet and later shifted towards Islamic ideology, joining the Revolutionary uprising in 1979. Along with Musavi-Garmarudi, she formed the main axis of religious modern poetry before the Revolution and influenced a younger generation of Islamic republican poets who wrote using modern forms. Alongside her literary career, Saffarzadeh is also known for her translation work and scholarly research into the Quran. The unity of God and waiting for the Messiah are two of the most prevailing themes in her poetic works.

39. Sohrab Sepehri (1928-80) Notable modernist poet and painter whose poetry has been welcomed by Islamic republican official organisations and poets due to its ideologically neutral and spiritually enriching nature. Born in Mashhad-Ardehal in Kashan, Sepehri is one of five leading modernist poets (the other four being Nima Yushij, Mehdi Akhavan-Sales, Ahmad Shamlu and Foruq Farrokhzad). Although he belongs to the generation of pre-revolutionary secular intelligentsia, his enduring impact on Islamic republican poetic discourse makes him an influential literary figure of the post-revolutionary period. In particular, Sepehri has influenced Salman Harati in terms of form and content, as well as those poets who tackled the theme of nature and appraised village lifestyle during the first decade of the Revolution.

40. Ahmad Shamlu (1925-2000) Prominent modernist poet, writer and translator, and arguably the most influential poet of Modern Iran. Apart from his major contributions to the field of modern Persian poetry, Shamlu also worked on the classical literary works of Beyhaqi, Hafez, Khayyam and Mowlana in both audio and written forms. Despite his revolutionary enthusiasm and hope for change, Shamlu soon became disappointed by the oppressive policies of the revolutionary state and voiced his disappointment in his famous poem *In this Dead End* (*Dar in bonbast*, 1980). From the 1980s onwards, and as a member of the Iranian Writers' Association, Shamlu's work was subject to censorship. He never agreed to work with any official cultural organisation after the Islamic Revolution and was considered the literary voice of the opposition. His tombstone was broken by hardliners several times after his death. An annual gathering on the anniversary of his death still takes place under heavy surveillance and is often followed by a number of arrests and interrogations.

41. Mohamadreza Sohrabinejad (1953) The leading Islamic republican war poet for the quatrain form. Along with Hoseini and Aminpur, Sohrabinejad took the initiative in the revival of the classical form of quatrain during the war period. After the war, Sohrabinejad joined the war commemoration cultural campaign and wrote poems in praise of the memory of the war and its martyrs. Tackling the genre of resistance with particular reference to the case of Palestine is one of the main features of his work.

42. Mohammadali Zam (1955) Conservative cleric who served as director of the Howzeh for twenty-five years. Having initially served as the representative of the OIP in the Howzeh, Zam was later appointed director. Under his directorship the centre shifted towards business-oriented policies. The famous ideological dispute and expulsion of

thirteen Islamic republican artists occurred after his appointment as head of the Howzeh and took place in protest at his censorship policies in the realms of film and literature. Following further accusations and charges of corruption, Zam was replaced by Bonyanian and later Mo'meni-Sharif, who were both more radical in terms of implementing Islamic principles in the areas of art and literature.

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