

**POLITICS OF RESISTANCE IN MODERN IRANIAN LITERATURE:  
TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND THE LIMITS OF SUBJECTIVITIES**

by  
BERFİN ÇİÇEK

Submitted to the Graduate School of Social Sciences  
in partial fulfilment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Sabancı University  
September 2022

**POLITICS OF RESISTANCE IN MODERN IRANIAN LITERATURE:  
TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND THE LIMITS OF SUBJECTIVITIES**

Approved by:

Assoc. Prof. Hülya Adak .....  
(Thesis Supervisor)

Prof. Sibel Irzık .....

Asst. Prof. Sooyong Kim .....

Date of Approval: September 2, 2022

BERFİN ÇİÇEK 2022 ©

All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

### POLITICS OF RESISTANCE IN MODERN IRANIAN LITERATURE: TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND THE LIMITS OF SUBJECTIVITIES

BERFIN ÇIÇEK

CULTURAL STUDIES M.A. THESIS, SEPTEMBER 2022

Thesis Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Hülya Adak

Keywords: Iranian literature, modernism, resistance, political memory, politics of writing

As a creative literary technique, metaphor has found a place in modern Iranian literature as a form of expression against censorship and political oppression. This thesis aims to examine the metaphorical uses of mental restlessness, mental discomfort, illness, and metamorphoses with examples from modern Iranian literature. The main uses of metaphors in these artistic productions are subsequently explored as a reflection on a national allegory of poverty and injustice, failing modernization, and a critique of admiration for the West, which Jalal Al-i Ahmad defines as *gharbzadagi*, and finally Iranian nation's alienation, disenchantment, and disappointment as failing revolutionaries. Thanks to the creative direction of metaphors, authors experimentally tested the limits of representing the political dissident and what is unrepresentable such as fear, mental metamorphosis, and madness. The main discussions center on how these narratives develop the themes of subjectivity, the biopolitical determination of classes, and the literary articulations of resistance both to censorship and resistance to one's existential crisis. The narratives deconstruct ideas of the human question, Westernization, and the martyrdom of the Sacred Defense literature (*adabiyat-e defa'-e moqaddas*) as well as fallible ideologies resulting from failing revolutionaries who are tortured and traumatized. Most importantly, the analysis of "resistance" as a reversed ideological form for the Sacred Defense Literature puts forward the potential of modern Iranian literature as an emerging center of resistance literature.

## ÖZET

### MODERN İRAN EDEBİYATINDA DİRENİŞ POLİTİKASI: TRAVMA, BELLEK VE ÖZELLİKLERİN SINIRLARI

BERFIN ÇİÇEK

KÜLTÜREL ÇALIŞMALAR YÜKSEK LİSANS TEZİ, EYLÜL 2022

Tez Danışmanı: Doç. Dr. Hülya Adak

Anahtar Kelimeler: İran edebiyatı, modernizm, direniş, politik hafıza, yazın  
siyaseti

Yaratıcı bir edebi teknik olarak metafor, modern İran edebiyatında sansüre ve politik baskılara karşı bir ifade biçimi olarak yer bulmuştur. Bu tezin amacı zihinsel huzursuzluk, rahatsızlık, hastalık ve metamorfozun metaforik kullanımlarını modern İran edebiyatından örneklerle incelemektir. Bu sanatsal yapıtlarda metaforun temel kullanımları, sırasıyla ulusal bir yoksulluk ve adaletsizlik alegorisi, başarısız modernleşme ve Celal Al-i Ahmed'in gharbzadagi olarak tanımladığı Batı hayranlığı eleştirisi ve son olarak İran ulusunun yabancılaşması ve yanılan devrimciler olarak hayal kırıklıklarının ifade edilmesi olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Zihinsel rahatsızlık metaforu sadece sansüre karşı gelmekle kalmaz. Yaratıcı yönleri sayesinde metaforlar, yazarların politik muhalifliğin temsili ya da korku, metamorfoz ve akıl yitimi gibi temsil edilmesi zor durumları yazınsal olarak test edebilirler. Ana tartışmalar, bu anlatıların öznellik temalarını nasıl geliştirdiği, sınıfların biopolitik kategorize edilmesi ve hem sansüre hem de varoluşsal krize karşı direnişin edebi ifadeleridir. Anlatılar kimlik ve direnişe odaklanırken insan sorusu, Batılılaşma ve şehitlik gibi fikirlerin yansıma ışkençe gören ve travmatize edilen devrimcilerin yanılabilir ideolojilerini de yapıbozuma uğrattıyor. En önemlisi, Kutsal Savunma edebiyatı için amacı tam tersine çevrilmiş bir ideolojik biçim olarak "direniş"in analizi, modern İran edebiyatının direniş edebiyatında otantik bir merkezi olma potansiyelini ortaya koymaktadır.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to Asst. Prof. Sooyong Kim without whom this thesis could not have been written. I owe many thanks to his invaluable comments and suggestions for my thesis. His class "Narrating the Middle East" at Koç University was the best course I took during my undergraduate studies. In this class, I got acquainted with Iranian literature for the first time, which later became my passion in life. Our long discussions have always enlightened me. Thanks to these discussions, my thoughts on a non-Western, multi-mapped world have evolved.

I would like to thank my thesis advisor Assoc. Prof. Hülya Adak whose red fabulous glasses I adore! She has been a role model for me. Besides her contributions to my thesis, working with her at SUGender (Sabancı University Women's and Gender Studies Center of Excellence) taught me to be an independent scholar and more importantly to be a powerful woman. She has always been a support every time I felt lost and confused. Our discussions on my thesis enabled me to comprehend the theme of resistance in literature, thus making it possible to read Iranian literature through lenses of it.

Last but not least, I am grateful to Prof. Sibel Irzık who made me read ever-update readings of literature. When I was an undergraduate student, it was hard for me to imagine her being a thesis committee member of my thesis because she is the literary guru of Turkish literature. Meeting her is one of the most significant experiences in my life. I am so lucky to attend her classes and have the chance to think about all those texts inter-textually, which has enchanted me all the time to witness the power of literature to take me to other sensations. I owe this to Sibel Irzık and her unique commentaries in the classes.

*To those who resist*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>OZET</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1. Trauma and Metamorphoses.....	4
1.2. Resistance Literature .....	7
1.3. Pre-revolutionary Iranian Literature in the Early 20th Century.....	9
1.4. Post-revolutionary Literature and Multi-layers of Resistance.....	13
<b>2. RESISTANCE IN THE FORM OF MENTAL UNREST</b> .....	<b>18</b>
2.1. Literature, Articulations of Resistance, and Subjectivity .....	18
2.2. Westoxification or <i>Occidentosis</i> in Simin Daneshvar's <i>Sūvashūn</i> .....	21
2.3. Turn of Allegories in Iranian Cinema: Psychosis, Fear of the Other: the Animal.....	23
2.4. War and Trauma in <i>The Colonel</i> by Mahmoud Dowlatabadi.....	27
2.5. Can the "Bare Life" Resist?.....	33
<b>3. MEMORIES OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE</b> .....	<b>35</b>
3.1. Resignation, Ambiguity, and the Revolution: <i>Women Without Men</i> ..	35
3.2. Eco-metamorphoses in Dowlatabadi's <i>Thirst</i> .....	40
<b>4. <i>DEFA'-E MOQADDAS</i> AND THE LITERARY     CANONIZATION OF RESISTANCE IN IRAN</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>5. CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	<b>51</b>



## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to interpret some of the masterpieces of Iranian literature through the uses of metaphors and metamorphoses as representative tools for political and individual resistances to oppressive governmental regimes. At the same time, by elaborating on the Sacred Defense Literature (*adabiyat-e defa'-e moqaddas*), the study considers how a notion such as "resistance" can become an ideological tool for the propaganda of nationalistic discourses against acts of protest. But before addressing the issue of resistance, I begin with a discussion of modern Iranian literature concerning the historical and political changes that led to its emergence and transfiguration through pre and post-Islamic revolutionary periods.

In view of that this thesis works through the representations of traumatic experiences in Iranian literature. The main questions asked are what traumatic experiences the Iranian society went through, how these traumatic experiences affected the emergence of literary modernism, and most importantly what trauma is in terms of Iranian experiences. These traumatic experiences can be anything still remembered by Iranian society. For example, the Iran-Iraq war and its atrocities, the 1953 coup d'état<sup>1</sup>, the Islamic Revolution, poverty, and even the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran. At this point, it is crucial to acknowledge that the literary texts and films chosen to be analyzed deal with different ways of representing traumatic experiences. For example, while Mahmoud Dowlatabadi's novels represent memory of political oppression and torture, Simin Daneshvar's *Sūvashūn*<sup>2</sup> (*A Persian Requiem*, 1969) represents the everyday agonies resulting from the political conflicts and enmity among the society members. Moreover, the films of Dariush Mehrjui and Shirin

---

<sup>1</sup>Supported by the USA and the UK, the 1953 military coup in Iran overthrew the democratically elected prime minister Mohammad Mosaddegh. After his overthrow, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was restored to power. Thanks to its oil resources, Iran was a source of interest for Western imperialists. Mosaddegh wanted to nationalize the oil industry in Iran. After the coup, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company accelerated its practices in Iran by establishing British Petroleum Company in 1954.

<sup>2</sup>Sūvashūn means mourning for Siavash who was a figure in Ferdowsi's 11th-century masterpiece *Shahnameh*. He, the young prince, was killed by the Shah Kay Kavus because he was blamed to have an intimate relationship with the Shah's wife, but he was proven to be innocent, which later makes him a symbol of honesty and innocence in Iranian literature.

Neshat offer further rival representations of political oppression and resistance, each received quite differently. For example, Mehrjui's *Gav* was praised by the Islamic Republic revolutionaries because it is criticism of Reza Shah although it can be regarded as general criticism of all kinds of corrupt political systems. In that sense, it is interesting to see how the resistance theme in a movie becomes a credited source of justifying the resistance by the Islamic Republic revolutionaries. Shirin Neshat's *Women Without Men*, on the other hand, got attention from Iranian diaspora critics and feminists as a cultural work representing women's sexual repression in the Islamic Republic although it focuses on the 1953 coup. Therefore, the analysis of the two movies contributes to the argument that the resistance cannot be monopolized by either of the rivals. And, most importantly, both movies are literary adaptations.

Because this thesis is an analysis of the politics of representing resistance, it takes the examples from a broad range of literary texts and films. While doing so, it chooses some of the most discussed literary narratives and Iranian movies that are also globally known. For instance, Daneshvar's novel is regarded as the first novel to discuss the everyday life and the political atmosphere of the late 1960s by a woman in Iran (Esmailpour 2021, 55). Since *Sūvashūn* is a novel written for the first time by a female author in Iran, its narration of historical and political background of Iran enables the thesis to reflect on the gendered perspective to resistance. Moreover, the choice of Mehrjui's *Gav* (1969)<sup>3</sup> and Shahrnush Parsipur's *Women Without Men* (*Zanan Bedoone Mardan*, 1989) is a deliberate attempt in the sense that while the movie by Mehrjui is an adaptation of a short story, Parsipur's text also had a visual adaptation to a movie by Neshat. Along with Mehrjui's movie dating from the same period with *Sūvashūn*, thus both describing the socioeconomic conditions of the same historical period, the recognition of the movies is wider compared to the literary pieces that they were built upon. Also, an analysis of the representation of resistance through visual means is helpful to recognize that resistance as a notion is the focus of different artistic productions regardless of generic limitations. Filmmakers and authors in a sense collaborate so that the theme of resistance is accessible to wider readers and audiences. And finally, Dowlatabadi's texts are significant to evaluate because, through his writing of the Iran-Iraq War, his novels thematically and stylistically differ from Sacred Defense Literature, thanks

---

<sup>3</sup>Dariush Mehrjui's movie is an adaptation of Gholam-Hussein Sa'edi's short story of the same name *Gav*. In "Cinema Joins Forces with Literature to Form Canon: The Cinematic Afterlife of Sa'edi's 'The Cow' as World Literature", Adineh Khojastehpour writes that the adaptation of Sa'edi's short story into a movie contributes to the globalization of modern Persian literature thanks to its securing the place of the cinema in the Islamic Republic. Literary critics such as Hamid Dabashi and M.R. Ghanoonparvar define the collaboration between Mehrjui and Sa'edi as "unprecedented" or even as "the best example of this kind of partnership" (2021, 155). What is interesting is that Sa'edi's short story is a part of the education curriculum at Iranian schools because it reflects on the poverty in pre-revolutionary Iran, thus making a dissident author of the Pahlavi era a canonical author of the post-revolutionary Iran as it criticizes the Pahlavi reign (Khojastehpour, 2021, 164).

to which his novels deconstruct the sacredness of martyrdom. His texts contribute to the creation of a non-monolithic representation of wars and political turbulence (Moosavi and Bajoghli 2018, 74). Most importantly, all of the texts and visual materials discussed in this thesis revolve around the theme of resistance and the resisting subjects. While doing so, all of the texts create metaphors signifying the history of Iran. The common themes, usage of metaphors and metamorphoses as literary figures of speech, and the failing traumatized subjects all together contribute to the idea that modern Iran literature employs a diversity of means of representing resistance and inscribing it. The meaning of the trauma, resistance, and means of representing them will be discussed further after defining them properly in the following sub-chapters. However, it is also important to define the stance of these artistic productions vis-à-vis the Sacred Defense Literature because resistance as reality itself has several forms in the development of Iranian literature.

Laetitia Nanquette explains what the Sacred Defense Literature is in her book *Iranian Literature after the Islamic Revolution: Production and Circulation in Iran and the World* (2021). She writes that the Sacred Defense Literature emerged as a result of the "sacred defense" project in Iran which began a few months after Iraq's invasion of Iran (Nanquette 2021, 39). Nanquette defines Sacred Defense Literature as a heterogeneous corpus of writings including war narratives, memoirs, and any kinds of prose or poetry stressing the importance of Islamic fraternity and martyrdom (2021, 39). The publications of these pieces are state-sponsored by the Center of Islamic Arts and Thoughts (*Howzeh-ye honari-ye saze-man-e tablighat-e eslami*). Nanquette writes that the publication of these narratives is not subjected to investigation by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, and the publication process of these narratives is accelerated (Nanquette 2021, 39)

The reason for elaborating on the emergence of the Sacred Defense Literature is to examine the various forms that resistance as a phenomenon itself can take. Along with its form, the subjects of resistance can also change. Moreover, the literary narratives might contribute to the emergence of resistant movements. Although some diaspora authors and literary critics tend to refer to the Sacred Defense Literature as a propaganda project for creating an Islamo-nationalist identity, the Sacred Defense Literature is a whole canon of resistance itself and cannot be ignored because it creates a historical consciousness for Iranian society. Although the texts analyzed in this thesis do not take a position within the Sacred Defense Literature or support it, they are important examples of proving that resistance as a theme has been one of the dominant themes for literary creations. In other words, it has been a theme nurturing various forms of literary forms and ideologies. One common point that makes resistance available to reflect as a theme in literature is

through the narration of the traumatic experiences. If these literary narratives and the movie adaptations are not a part of the Sacred Defense Literature, the question arises of how one can understand these texts and the continuity of resistance in terms of the emerging forms or representations of resistance in Iran along with the political debates it engendered in history. Because the Sacred Defense Literature is a genuinely complex and wide literary formation, it is not simple to categorize it into a single or monolithic definition. For example, the feminist diaspora authors of Iran tend to analyze it as patriarchal, statist, and nationalistic, and the women poets of the Sacred Defense Literature tend to refer to it as an Islamist feminist effort to protect them from Western cultural imperialism. In that sense, the movie directed by Shirin Neshat, *Women Without Men*, fits the evaluation of the movie as a feminist resistance against the oppression of women's sexuality by the Islamic Republic. On the other hand, *Suvashun* can be celebrated by the Sacred Defense Literature authors because it is a literary representation of the Western influence and its corruption of Iranian society. Similarly, because *Gav* is a critical work of the Shah's reign and the poverty during his reign, the short story by Sa'edi is a part of the Islamic Republic's literary curriculum and the movie is appreciated by the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini, which contributed to the production of cinema in the Islamic Republic. It is evident that resistance cannot be monopolized by any kind of ideologies because it always embodies the changing power relationships, and it can be employed through different means and interpretations by rival ideologies.

### 1.1 Trauma and Metamorphoses

As this thesis aims to interpret how Iranian authors and filmmakers tend to represent traumatic experiences, it is significant to understand what trauma is in a general sense. Also, because traumatic experiences can create collective memory<sup>4</sup> of the societies, they constitute the historical consciousness of the societies. In "Endemic Pains and Pandemic Traumas: The Narrative Construction of Public Memory in Iran, Palestine, and the United States", Seyed Amir Khadem discusses the evolution of trauma discourse. He makes an argument that emerging in the late nineteenth century, trauma was a jargon of psychology to express shocking experiences. Later, in the contemporary world, it began having multiple meanings and a wider range of usages in reference to the refugee crisis or the sickness of postcolonial afterlives

---

<sup>4</sup>Collective memory emerges as a result of everyday communications of the individual memories. Each individual belongs to an "other" with whom she shares images, narratives, and personal memories, thanks to which, at the end, collective or social memory of societies occur (Assmann 1995).

(Khadem 2017).

Khadem explains that trauma was at the beginning a notion subjected to psychoanalytical evaluation which defined it as a series of events with abhorrent effects on the individuals, and they could not process and get over these events. In the 21st century, it is now an umbrella term defining any kind of negative event such as sexual abuse, war torture, or even terrorist attacks. For that reason, Khadem agrees that trauma cannot be a comprehensive study. However, it has undergone a series of different research interpretations. In his thesis, he is interested in the "narration" of the trauma through written resources. To reflect on his interest, he categorizes the employment of the trauma theory into three methods. Firstly, he points to the relevance of trauma in memory studies. The second trend of scholarship on trauma is the post-structuralist readings on trauma, which focus on language and the problem of its representation. And lastly, the interpretation of trauma discourse as a social construct by social constructionist theoreticians is the most recent comprehension of trauma discourse. According to Khadem, Cathy Caruth became the most cited figure on trauma in literary studies or cultural studies since the emergence of post-structuralist trauma discourse. He cites *Unclaimed Experience* in which Caruth writes:

"Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature -the way it was precisely *not known* in the first stance- returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Khadem 2017, 22)

She asserts that we cannot understand trauma as a simple violent event because it becomes an unspeakable haunting experience for the victim, and she always has hardships to narrate it. Therefore, narrating and expressing trauma is the main problem for the post-structuralist interpretation because the abhorrence of trauma lies under the limits of representability by its victim. That's why literature is a tool for transferring traumatic experiences and their impacts.

The most recent discourse on trauma asserts that our present is always alert to violent acts such as terrorism. Through this interpretation, trauma gains the characteristic of "collectivity" or "cultural". According to the social constructivist theory of trauma, cultural trauma changes the future identities of the groups because it marks their consciousness. The reason for calling this theory constructivist is that societies construct cultural trauma as " a communal practice of historical hermeneutics, an attempt by society's various institutions to interpret a calamitous event, redraw the history of the event through that interpretation, and consolidate its newly shaped identity via social practises that uphold certain values in the light of

that horrible memory" (Khadem 2017, 29). To assign cultural meanings to trauma, social constructivist theory asks some questions about the victims of trauma, their relationship to their audience, the nature of the pain, and the perpetrator of the pain. Because this thesis is an analysis of Iranian literary texts and films, it employs the post-structuralist theory of trauma while close reading the representation of trauma and its strategies. This study aims to figure out how literature enlarges the limits of representation primarily through the use of metaphors

There are some commonalities among the texts and films chosen. Some of them are metaphorical representations of traumatic experiences such as the failing Westernization of Iran, the 1953 coup, and the Islamic revolution's failure to guarantee justice and alleviate poverty, and the oppression of women. The other themes are madness, the resisting dissident people, and the people wishing for capturing some other subjectivities for themselves. The characters in the narratives are limited and oppressed by the everyday violence of the political and social atmospheres that they live in. Therefore, they are looking for other possibilities of existing. For example, protagonist in Dowlatabadi's *The Colonel* wishes for a peaceful Iran in which his children would not fight each other in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution. Zari, the protagonist in Daneshvar's novel longs for equality in colonized Iran. The women in Parsipur's novel as well as in the movie are in search of a garden which is a metaphor for a peaceful world in which the women can live peacefully without fear. Because the protagonists are looking for other means of existing through exceeding the limits of their subjectivities, the metaphorical narratives are representations of their quests in life. Moreover, in some of the texts such as Dowlatabadi's *Thirst* and *Women Without Men*, metamorphosis of them is an extended representation of their metaphorical quest for expanding the limits of their subjectivities such as failing revolutionaries, traumatized subjects, or tortured bodies. For example, the metamorphoses of Mahdokht in *Women Without Men* and Masht Hassan in *Gav* in the movies reflect their wish to acquire other means of living their lives. Mahdokht realizes her wish to have offsprings by turning into a tree through her branches, and Masht Hassan avoids living through the trauma of losing his cow by imagining himself turning into the cow.

If the subjects are resisting, it is crucial to elaborate on the meanings of resistance. The conceptualization of resistance in this thesis is that the strategies of novelists and filmmakers analyzed are highlighting the ways in which narratives can subvert and transform political power. There is always a relationship between resistance and power. To explain this relationship, Saeed Talajooy and Karima Laachir refer to Foucault's conceptualization of power and resistance in *The History of Sexuality* (1990)

"Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power"(Talaajooy and Laachir 2013, 5).

Foucault's conceptualization argues that power and resistance are not two separate notions that are exterior to each other, so they intermingle. Because resistance is also a question of power, it connotes political hierarchies. In light of this argument, this thesis regards resistance as a form of pushing for change, social reform, and employing the agency of the people whose subjectivities are oppressed. In a sense, resistance is a means of capturing the power.

Similarly, Laachir and Talaajooy write in *Resistance in Contemporary Middle Eastern Cultures: Literature, Cinema, and Music* that

"We use the concept of "cultural resistance" to describe the way novels, films, plays, and music are used to resist the dominant social, economic, political, and cultural discourses and structures either consciously and unconsciously" (2013, 5).

According to them, choice of plots, character development and intersectional use of language and different representations of past and future can be resistant. Their usage of cultural resistance can also be individual as in the example of *Gav* in which madness is a personal resistant act. One can also argue that literary narratives are cultural products, therefore, resistances can be cultural representations as well. As Talaajooy explains, choosing plots can be resistant literary acts. For instance, Dowlatabadi deconstructs the theme of martyrdom by reflecting on it as a controversial topic and a fragile relationship between the subjects and the governments in opposition to the Sacred Defense literature which creates a glorification ceremony for the martyrs. Taking note of the meaning of resistance as a medium of changing, transformation, and reclamation, the relationship between resistance and metamorphoses comes along. Resistance as a notion is put into words through the metamorphosis of the characters thanks to which they claim for a change and negotiate for their subjectivities. Metamorphosis, in a sense, is a representative of characters' metaphorical, allegorical, and symbolic expressions of their traumas.

## 1.2 Resistance Literature

Barbara Harlow's *Resistance Literature* (1987) initiated the first formulations of "resistance literature" by juxtaposing the struggles of liberation and postcolonial

authors' critique and reformulation of Western genres. Harlow treats resistance literature as " a particular category of literature that emerged significantly as a part of the organized national liberation struggles and resistance movements in Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East" (Harlow 1987, xvii). However, there are some limitations to her theorizing. In *Articulations of Resistance in Modern Persian Literature*, Nasrin Rahimieh and Sharareh Frouzesh argue that Harlow's theory empowers the systems that she attempts to disavow. For them, Harlow makes an analogy between resistance literature and Third World literature, which limits the success of resistance literature as they explain

"Harlow, thus, unwittingly ties the success of liberation struggles to the myth of smooth-functioning and just liberal institutions, one of the inventions upon which colonial and imperial expansion has been justified. The assumption seems to be that the good imperial institutions, such as their affiliative, and secular affiliative order, can be disentangled from the bad, which includes, among other things, the will to imperialism through which this dialectic was announced" (Rahimieh and Frouzesh 2012, 80).

Through their argument, we understand that Harlow refers resistance to be a struggle against the state apparatuses and oppressive politics in Third World countries. However, in making that case, Harlow implicitly justifies Western imperialism's intervention to these countries. And, most importantly she ignores newly emerging resistance literatures such as the Sacred Defense Literature. Although the explanation of what the Sacred Defense resists is the subject of another chapter, this section on literary resistance constructs the theoretical and literary frameworks by asserting that resistance literature is not a monolithic, homogeneous literary corpus. Therefore, this section focuses on the resistances in everyday lives of the individual traumas emerging as a result of several reasons, such as Zari's hypochondria, Masht Hassan's irrational attachment to this cow, women's anxiety with the ambiguity of their futures which they have no control over, and the soldiers' thirstiness and hallucinations. Of course, these characters suffer from the politically oppressive atmosphere over their subjectivities, however, the literary strategy to bypass the literary censors enables the authors and filmmakers to employ metaphor and expands it to metamorphosis so that the intermingled traumas can be represented. Moreover, the characters of the narratives under consideration are not only resisting an oppressive government. Rather, they resist the oppressive atmosphere of politics in general. That's why pre- and post-revolutionary literatures are analyzed together here. For example, *Women Without Men* deals with the 1953 military coup in Iran although it was written after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The movie *Gav*, as another example, depicts a gothic society suffering from poverty by



representing the shadowy Boluriha as a metaphysical being that haunts the villagers.

Rahimieh and Frouzesh argue that some novels cannot be situated at the rubric of resistance literature within Harlow's framework because she neglects the individuality of politics. By elaborating on Carol Hanisch's declaration that "The personal is political" <sup>5</sup> (Rahimieh and Frouzesh 2012), they assert that individuals are always already politically occupied. They write that

"Resistance is not limited to non-secular, filiative systems and "minorities" in the modern secular state. Resistance springs from the well of all discontent, which exceeds the order of ethnic or other assumed identities, haunted by and haunting any invocation of power" (Rahimieh and Frouzesh 2012, 81).

To support their argument, they analyze two contemporary novels from Iran. Their assertion of "the other scenes of politics" (87) is imperative to situate the resistance into the rubric of social, and not only political. They give examples from women's narratives which allow women to situate their private lives at the center of the scene of politics through literary engagement through which they transform their imagination for a better world (Rahimieh and Frouzesh 2012, 87)). One example of how the personal and the political are impossible to separate, as they argue, is that Masht Hassan's madness is a very complex condition because his extreme attachment to his cow is, on the one hand, personal, but also political, on the other hand, because the reason for his deep love and attachment for his cow is that the cow is the source of food for him as well as companionship. In a sense, his problem cannot be solved without the collaboration of the villagers, thus making his madness a political problem because his deep attachment is related to the poverty and fear of the Boluriha.

### 1.3 Pre-revolutionary Iranian Literature in the Early 20th Century

In the early 20th century and the late Qajar monarchy between 1900 and 1911, Iranian intellectuals got acquainted with the Western intellectual agenda and political philosophy as a result of the growing influence of Great Britain and Russia

---

<sup>5</sup>The essay was published in *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* in 1970. She defines politics through power relationships instead of "electoral politics". She defends the idea that personal problems are political. For personal problems, there are only collective solutions though. The idea became the slogan for the second-wave feminist movement in the 1960s and 70s. She came up with the slogan for discussing the problems that the feminists engaged in such as family values, abortion, gendered labor, sex, discrimination, racism, or even household responsibilities.

over the Iranian oil industry and Azerbaijani nationalism in the northwestern parts of the country along with the cultural reforms conducted by Mirzâ Taqi Khân Amir-Kabir. On the other hand, the economic crisis in Iran during the Qajar period led to the coup d'état staged by Colonel Reza Khan in 1921, and many intellectuals were not going to be satisfied with Reza Khan's autocratic regime.

Reza Shah's political agenda was to reawaken Iran by invoking its past glories of the Aryan history while the Qajar decadence resulted in Iran's degradedness vis-à-vis the imperialist powers. Having stated the historical context of the Iranian political modernization processes, the main argument of this presentation is to elaborate on the literary characteristics of these two reform periods. The emergence of modern poetry and prose in Iranian literature is shaped by the thematically diversifying narratives of everyday encounters of human life as well as the failing subjectivities of prominent figures such as Parvin E'tesâmi, Bozorg Alavi, and Sâdeq Hedâyât during the mid-20th century. However, the turning point for Iranian society was when in the 1960s, the state-backed *enqelâb-e sefid* (The White Revolution) created a top-down modernization over the rural parts of the country with Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's attempt to take his father's reforms to a further stage by getting rid of the "stubborn core". The growing dissidence and the Shah's censorship authorities admiring the Marxist revolutionary solutions encouraged literary figures such as Mahmoud Dowlatabadi and Hushang Gulshiri or even filmmakers such as Dariush Mehrjui to overthrow the regime in their literary and visual employment of allegory, symbol, and metaphor as figures of speech.

The development of modern Iranian prose dates back to the 19th and 20th centuries. In his article, Iraj Parsinejad writes that early modern Iranian literature benefited from the translation of Western masterpieces, and besides these translations, Iranian intellectuals such as Mirza Fath-Ali Akhundzade and Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani produced literary works influenced by the Western literature<sup>6</sup> (2021). Moreover, some authors wrote memoirs and travelogues. The emerging novel genre, however, became the most significant literary genre during the Constitutional Revolution between 1909-1921 until Reza Khan's military coup. The novels, short stories, and novellas in this period elaborated on the social issues as literary themes. These themes were economic problems, and oppression of the working classes by the ruling elite classes. Simin Daneshvar wrote her stories, plays and novels from the 1960s onwards when the novel was an emerging genre for Iranian literature. Daneshvar's literary engagement is the narratives of the everyday lives of the people whose voices are silenced and who are invisible in society.

---

<sup>6</sup>Iraj Parsinejad, "The Development of Modern Persian Prose: From the Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth" in *A History of Persian Literature: Persian Prose* by Bo Utas.

In *Words not Swords: Iranian Women Writers and the Freedom of Movement*, Farzaneh Milani writes about an interview in which Simin Daneshvar, one of the prominent writers of Iran, once said: “Let Simone de Beauvoir come and live for a year the life I live here and if she can still produce one line of writing I’ll change my name” (Milani 2011, 184). While Daneshvar’s statement suggests the hardships of living in Iran as a woman, she is reflecting on a self-determinant and resistant creativity.<sup>7</sup> She presents the idea that people experience the reality of life differently in various parts of the world. While Iranian authors experienced censorship and institutional control, they came up with creative pathways to revolt against rules and boundaries. For example, during those early years of the Islamic Republic, authors such as Goli Taraghi, a critical novelist, moved to France and wrote about mental illness and depression, which was rare in the Iranian literature of her time. Taraghi stated that she recovered thanks to the literature which helped her to make a “rope of words” so that she pulled herself from the “depth of darkness” (Milani

---

<sup>7</sup>During the constitutional reforms of the Shah, religious clerics considered Shah’s legislation immoral, subordinate to western imperialists, and insulting to Islamic values. For some Islamic clerics, it was unjust and immoral to give women equal rights with men because it was against the divine plan of God for men and women. Moreover, women’s inclusion in bureaucratic jobs and schools would distract men and cause them to sin. Although Shi’i clerics supported the Constitutional Revolution during the Qajar dynasty, women’s rights were not given much attention and remained limited because the main concern for the reforms was to create a majlis through which the legislative powers of the monarchy would be limited. According to Parvin Pajdar in her “Feminism and Islam in Iran” (2007), the early encounters of feminism in Iran coincided with nationalist intentions and that’s why early age marriages were regarded to be inappropriate and hazardous for the nation’s development. Later, feminist protests from Tahereh Qorrat ol-Eyn, who took off her veil in front of the *ulema* were the first moments of when Iranian feminism confronted the Islamic challenge. This shows that the development of feminism in Iran was pre-Islamic thanks to the encounters with Bolshevik socialism. Reza Shah’s government established in 1925 took the responsibility of creating a nation-state as a social reformer which included issues such as forced unveiling, women’s education, and segregation from public domains to the political agenda of the new government. However, the inclusion of women in the social sphere was limited to governmental organizations. The Pahlavi regime opposed women’s independence from family affairs, and that’s why the Family Protection Law was introduced in 1967.

Unable to go beyond the codifications of Shi’i laws on civil life, Islamic activism became an opponent of Shah’s reforms because many religious women had been excluded from the state-sponsored nationalist feminism. Therefore, the new Islamic upraise would be claiming the freedom of the veil and fighting against western ideals of turning women into “sex objects” (Parvin 2007, 58). In a sense, the Islamic defense of women’s rights prepared the roots for the revolution in 1979 and came with a claim for an authentic model for women. The rivalry between the Pahlavi regime and Shi’i clerics resulted in the instrumentalization of Islam as an ideological apparatus to justify the decisions made by these opponents. On the one hand, both Reza Shah’s and Mohammad Reza Shah’s focus on regulating the civic aspects of Iranian life created rigid and strict rules to be employed such as dress code and subjugation of people to a “good taste” of citizenship, which excluded Islamic demands and the mallas. On the other hand, mallas justified the Islamic intervention in the politics and moral corruption of the society with a claim for getting rid of the neo-colonialist influences in the country. Having mentioned the historical rivalry between the Pahlavi region and Shi’i *ulema*, we need to observe in ways which Islam and nationalism become intermediary tools for keeping women’s bodies under control. In a sense, both parties function through these ideological apparatuses and tend to employ the doctrines of these ideologies in order to save and empower their authorities. In “Feminism in the Islamic Republic: Years of Hardship, Years of Growth”, Afsaneh Najmabadi writes that while the authorities in the parliament of the Islamic Republic discussed the color of women’s hijab, women in the Islamic Republic overcame the hardships and became even more distinguishable in artistic domains, sports, industry, and academy (2005, 59). The agents of the Islamic Republic knew that women’s power was a significant source for winning the rivalry against The Pahlavi regime, therefore they claimed a new anticolonial society at the center of which the women would stand as the primary, authentic, and indigenous solution before the imperialist threats. However, this did not last long because as Najmabadi asserts, their efforts for the emancipation of the women were superficial and contestable. A few months after the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime, secular women were accused to benefit from the privileges of belonging to the aristocratic classes. They were asked to give up on these privileges from the former regime and join the new women’s movements. Journals sponsored by the Islamic Republic such as *Nida’*, *Zan-i Ruz*, *Farzaneh*, and *Zanan* came up with the publications about the everyday hardships of rural women and turned out to be successful public campaigns carried out by the Islamist women activists with an allegedly new Islamist post-revolutionary framework (Najmabadi 2005, 62).

2011, 183). Her emergence as a literary success was not unique, and many Iranian women emerged as literary figures in the post-revolutionary era thanks to their imperative to tell what dissent is.

This imperative to represent the dissident voice can be seen in the pre-revolutionary eras. In the first section of the thesis, an example from pre-revolutionary cinematic representation, *The Cow* (*Gav*, 1969) by Dariush Mehrjui, a novel, *Sūvashūn* (*A Persian Requiem*, 1969) by Simin Daneshvar, and finally three narratives from the post-revolutionary period, *The Colonel* (*Zaval-e Kolonel*, 2009), *Thirst* (*Besmal*, 2014) by Mahmoud Dowlatabadi and *Women Without Men* (*Zanan Bedun-e Mardan*, 1989), will be discussed to make an analysis and comparison of how the literature of resistance worked in Iranian literature. What is common to these artistic creations is that they employ metaphors of illness so that they can express what is not expressible because of censorship by the state. However, the use of metaphors is not only a creative resistance to censorship. Its use also represents one's resistance to existential unrest such as Dowlatabadi's *The Colonel* in which the characters suffer from disappointment, fear, and violence, thus becoming an image of a disappointing society. In other words, the family in the novel is an analogy to Iranian society after the Islamic Revolution.

To be able to reflect on the changes that Iranian society experienced after the revolution and the colonization of Iran before the revolution, literary figures made use of metaphor as a literary technique to avoid being censored by the state and the emerging political oppression<sup>8</sup>. One reason for choosing pre and post-revolutionary novels and a movie is to develop the idea of the importance of metaphor for Iranian literature and textuality over time. The metaphor itself is a manner of existence for the Iranian artistic creation. In *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present, and Future*, Hamid Dabashi's (2001) discussion of metaphor reveals that Iranian creativity employs metaphor as an explanation of reality and their identities (Dabashi 2001). The poetics of the metaphor has always been a way of making politics and making of everyday life in Iran according to Fatemeh Shams (2021) in her *A Revolution in Rhyme: Poetic Co-option Under the Islamic Republic* (Shams 2021). While authors such as Mahmoud Dowlatabadi defined the terms of the aesthetics

---

<sup>8</sup>In terms of creating an analogy for the Iranian society, Shahrnush Parsipur's *Women Without Men* (*Zanan Bedoone Mardan*, 1989) is a similar novel to Dowlatabadi's (2011) *The Colonel*. Parsipur's aesthetic mode in the novel embeds the conflictive and chaotic atmosphere of the post-revolutionary society into the language of the text which distorts the sequence of time, reason, and space while narrating the "unexpected" events. In other words, the novel sheds light on the unexpectedness of the revolution and its impacts while embodying the unbelievability of this unexpectedness to the tone of the text thanks to magical realism as a mode of its aesthetics. It is not surprising to realize the proximity between the terms "magical" and "unexpected" from this statement, which is a clear indication of the novel's dedication to the atmosphere of ambiguity in the post-revolutionary Iranian society as an existential issue. What is unexpected of course is both the attributions to the revolution, which implies radical political changes, their outcomes, and the sense of ambiguity that emerge as a result of these radical changes that Iranian society did not anticipate.

of sociality and politics in the post-revolutionary era, writings by the authors of the era from the 1950s to 1970s such as Simin Daneshvar, Forough Farrokhzad, and Sadeq Hedayat and the filmmaker Dariush Mehrjui used aesthetic apparatuses to critically engage in Iran's belated modernity.

#### 1.4 Post-revolutionary Literature and Multi-layers of Resistance

The common theme through which the metaphors in the works of these authors function is mental sickness and unrest because their works tell the stories of traumatized people who suffer from psychosomatic symptoms. Metaphors of illness or mental unrest play several important roles to represent the themes subjected to censorship and deconstruct the ossified ideas of the dominant ideologies. For example, the Sacred Defense literature (*adabiyat-e defa'-e moqaddas*) in Iran, the official narratives of war fiction supported by governmental organizations, creates a recasting of martyrdom of Imam Hussein in Karbala through the Islamist revolutionaries fighting at the fronts during the Iran-Iraq War. However, the postwar representations in literature diverged from the Sacred Defense culture (Moosavi and Bajoghli 2018, 74). Authors such as Mahmoud Dowlatabadi who is not governmentally supported and had a novella allowed to be published in Iran only in a foreign language but not in Persian created examples of such divergent literature or literature of resistance to the Islamic Republic's monolithic ideology of war. Dowlatabadi's novel *The Colonel* in this sense deconstructs the idea of modern-day martyrdom through the themes of grief, mourning, and traumatic experience. Both in terms of content and form of representation through different figures of speech, *The Colonel* diverges from the sacred narrative of the martyrdom emphasizing heroism and reinscribing of the Karbala Battle. From this point of view, Dowlatabadi's novel "desacralizes" what is determined to be sacred by Iranian politics (Moosavi 2020). This thesis discusses and does a close reading of the works by Daneshvar, Mehrjui, Parsipur, and Dowlatabadi together for arguing how the metaphor of sickness is a resistance against the suppressive state because sickness as a theme blurs the narrative. What all three works share in common is that they employ the theme of sickness to make social and political critiques in similar ways although they were textually created in different eras such as pre and post-revolutionary periods. While Mehrjui's work is a movie, it is similar to the novels in the sense that its critique is a realistic depiction but one that diverges from reality in its contextual narrative. Moreover, these works can be analyzed together to support the argument of metaphors as a form of literary resistance

because they are the leading narratives of their periods. Daneshvar's novel is a leading realist narrative for Iran's literature while Dowlatabadi's modern piece plays with the narrative with its heteroglossic account in a way similar to Mehrjui's movie which diverges from the conventional themes of *filmfarsi*<sup>9</sup>.

As mentioned above, the second chapter focuses on memory and the ways in which it is shaped in the historical pinpoints of Iran first of which is the Iran-Iraq War and the second, the Islamic Revolution. This chapter adds to the research field of literary analysis because it makes an ecocritical reading of Dowlatabadi's *Thirst* and a non-feminist reading of Parsipur's *Women Without Men*. In other words, a new perspective of reading is available in this paper because feminist readings of Parsipur's texts are already available, however, a focus on the existential crisis is necessary. Therefore, a re-reading of this text by Parsipur is an attempt to delve into the narrative themes of the text. The aim of this chapter, in comparing Dowlatabadi's and Parsipur's novels is to explore the theme of metamorphoses in both literary pieces as a form of resignation from the political and everyday oppression that individuals are always already going through. While the *Thirst* explores the impact of political oppression on the human psyche, *Women Without Men* is a gendered expression of sentimental violence. Both texts were written in post-revolutionary Iran, and that's why making a comparison of them would be significant to observe the atmosphere of post-revolutionary politics.

The last chapter focuses on the gendered modernization of Iran because this topic is a crucial part of understanding subjectivity making in Iranian culture. The gender problem is also the main question of Iranian modernization because conservative politics was the agenda of the processes that led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic. As a counter-attack to the Western imperialism, Islamic solutions to the gender problem were reframed as an independent Iran facing the "corrupt" Western culture. Except for the novel by Daneshvar and the movie by Mehrjui, all of the pieces are written in the post-revolutionary era. This indicates that resistance through literary creativity is an important factor in 20th-century Iranian written and visual corpus. The theme of metamorphoses is not a subject to written literature only. The metamorphosis into animals as well as turning mad, is a dominant theme also in the films, which again reflects Iranian modernism as a temporally interactive phenomenon.

---

<sup>9</sup>According to Hamid Naficy who defines it in *A Social History of Iranian Cinema: The Industrializing Years, 1941-1978*, *filmfarsi* is a branch of popular feature films made between 1948-1978 in Iran. These melodramatic movies focused on the clash between the class contrasts as well as the dichotomy between chivalry and evil. The "escapist fantasies" in these movies were regarded by religious people to be contaminated with Western popular culture products because the main themes were sex and violence. Some critics define these movies as a reflection of the absurdity of the Shah's contradictory authoritarian modernism of the time (Naficy 2011, 145)

As the notion of martyrdom is one of the dominant themes in Dowlatabadi's texts, the chapter on the Sacred Defense Literature explores the changing forms of martyrdom employed in the texts to create a critique of it. Both texts of Dowlatabadi are the representations of the paradoxical nature of martyrdom. *The Colonel* elaborates on the everyday life of families which lost their children during the establishment period of the Islamic Republic. *Thirst*, on the other hand, narrates the shock that the soldiers were exposed to during the Iran-Iraq war. In a sense, the texts deconstruct the sacred or holy connotations of martyrdom through its representation of soldiers as turning into weak, mad victims. Dowlatabadi overcomes the censorship authorities through the analogy between the Karbala war and Iran-Iraq war, as the symbolism of Karbala is very significant for Shi'ite politics. Today, contemporary Iranian literature is very much engaged in the preservation of its culture and ideology. Authors resisting this literary toolkit are censored by the government. For example, Laetitia Nanquette writes that Mahmoud Dowlatabadi is one of the authors whose books are not allowed to be published in Iran by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (Nanquette 2021, 100). Although the book *The Colonel* is published in several languages such as German, English and even Persian in Afghanistan, the novel is illegally distributed in Iran and found copies of it are confiscated by the ministry.

Finally, this thesis explains how the same literary production might be interpreted diversely by the ideologies of different groups such as the Iranian academics and viewers of the diaspora and the agents or the followers of the Islamic Republic of Iran. For instance, while Mehrjui's movie is appreciated by the supporters of the Islamic Republic because it is a critique of Shah's failing modernization struggles, thus justifying the emergence of the revolution, the movie that again narrates the same time period, *Women Without Men*, is regarded as a feminist narrative which tends to depict the condition of Iranian women as weak and vulnerable. Both narratives employ the theme of resistance, however, they are not appreciated in the same way or by the same agents. This is a clear example of an indication of how resistance as a theme itself cannot be a monopolized literary narrative topic or technique because it can be evaluated very diversely. Such a comparison makes it necessary to figure out what resistance means for contemporary Iranian literature today because Iranian literature is engaged in political connotations of resistance as well. That's why Iranian politics is aware of the ideological importance of employing literature as a means of reproducing their means and goals. That's how the literature and resistance become a toolkit for realizing the subjective and personal goals on a smaller scale or political ones on a larger scale. Because the Iranian everyday existence is very much shaped by its politics against Western imperialism, literary

writings, even though they are about personal atrocities, also reflect the impact of politics on individuals' lives. And, because everyday life is shaped by past events and politics, memory itself plays a big role in the literary narration.

This first chapter in this thesis analyzes the metaphorical representations of resistance through the theme of sickness in Daneshvar's *Suvashun* (1969), Dariush Mehrjui's *Gav* (1969), and Dowlatabadi's *Colonel* (2011). Simin Daneshvar's novel is a realist depiction of the *occidentosis* as a condition of the Iranian identity. Jalal Al-i Ahmad comes up with the term for the first time in the Iranian intellectual context as a term defining Iran's excessive admiration for Western cultural expressions, lifestyle, and even politics. In that sense, Daneshvar's novel is a literary narration of this term by Ahmad. It narrates the rivalry between Iranian clans who politically disagree by their side towards the Western imperialist existence in Iran. *Gav*, on the other hand, narrates the problems in society created by decadent, unjust politics. It narrates the psychological downfall of the individual as a result of the failing politics to provide the people with the humane living conditions. The chapter finally concludes with Dowlatabadi who is a contemporary Iranian novelist. His *Colonel* depicts the idea that the Islamic Revolution could not succeed in bringing peace to the Iranian society. His novel degrades the term of martyrdom and indicates that the sacredness of martyrdom is pre-conditioned by the governing ideology of the country because family members of the same household can differ in terms of their martyrdom and death according to the ideas they support. The novel demonstrates that if the martyr is a soldier or individual supporting the Islamic Republic, he is blessed by death. However, his brother might be a traitor if he acted any kinds of behaviours contradicting the doctrines of the Revolution.

The second chapter deals with the memory of violence. The violence mentioned here does not have to be physical. It can be psychological, political, and sometimes even futuristic in the sense that everyday life imprisons people to their hopes. Dowlatabadi's second novel analyzed in this chapter is *Thirst* (2014). In this novel, there are two journalists writing the same news about the Iran-Iraq war. One is Iranian and the other is Iraqi. They are forced by the colonels to write fake news. Such a narrative affirms the idea that reality itself is not single for the soldiers suffering at the war zone although the colonels are enjoying the praise they receive for their bravery. Iraqi and Iranian soldiers are stuck in the desert suffering from thirst and hallucinating because they are malnourished and tired of the atrocities of the war. The second novella discussed in this chapter is Parsipur's *Women without Men* (1989). It is a well-known feminist narrative among diaspora readers as well as Iranian readers. However, this thesis focuses on the individuals sufferings in terms of hoping for a better future and self-realizing by a journey to a magical garden.



The main theme is memory for analyzing the both novels because the political and violent events are inscribed on the memories of the individuals, and we, as readers, witness this inscribe through the voices of the characters in these literary pieces.

The final chapter firstly discusses the Iranian modernization process. Because Iranian politics is shaped by its relations to Western powers which want to control its oil sources, Iranian political intellectual comes up with the question of culture as an authentic defending tool against these powers. And, the question of women itself arises as a cultural dimension which fights back against the Western powers that aim to "deteriorate" Iranian culture. Because the question of gender is also a dimension of subjectivity for the Iranian characters in the pieces discussed in this thesis, this chapter elaborates on this gendered dimension of subjectivity for the Iranian politics and the emergence of the Revolution. Finally, this thesis concludes by evaluating the emergence of the Sacred Defense Literature in Iran as a literary canon because it aims to demonstrate how resistance can be a term that is gaining new meanings for literature, politics, and history. This section is important in the sense that it introduces a new form of resistance although some literary critics might tend to view it as a nationalistic and patriarchal discourse. However, it is important to discuss it because this thesis focuses on the term resistance itself and its representations. The changing form of resistance also gives way to the question that if the notions and their meaning can change, can metaphor and metamorphoses also take other forms of narration to represent further meanings or experiences of resistance or any other theme? In summary, there is always a possibility that new literary canons or literary techniques can emerge thanks to the cultural and symbolic interpretations of the same or different notions by the different agents or subjects, thus enlarging the capacity of the literature and the representation itself.

## 2. RESISTANCE IN THE FORM OF MENTAL UNREST

### 2.1 Literature, Articulations of Resistance, and Subjectivity

In *The Birth of the Clinic*, Michel Foucault writes “first task of the doctor... is political: the struggle against disease must begin with a war against bad government” (Foucault 2003, 33). One criticism that Simin Daneshvar makes against the Iranian health system in the Pahlavi era is that the hospitals are colonized by Western standards of whom to treat and whom to not. In *Sūvashūn*, Zari, the protagonist, takes an orphan to the closest public hospital in Shiraz, a southwestern city in Iran, where she lives with her family and landlord husband Yousef who is an insurgent to Anglo-Soviet imperialism in Iran, thus being assassinated at the end of the novel, however, the woman doctor rejects examining the child because the hospitals only take care of the British soldiers and their families living in Iran. Metaphorically speaking, one can understand how the British doctor’s rejection of examining the child in Iran is also a rejection of that child’s existence as a subject because he is sick, and curing him would not contribute to anything. The doctor’s behavior reveals that she, as a doctor, is not politically fighting against the colonization of Iran, instead, she is one of those who perpetrate the Iranian nation’s so-called backwardness. While the Iranian nation was challenged by the knowledge of modernization during the Pahlavi reign, it was introduced to discourses of health such as hygiene, race, and medicine. It is ironic that the Western values, which bring modernization to Iran, reject taking care of a child because he is racially segregated. We need to understand one side of the failing modernization in Iran through the medical improvements of the era because they were very important for the region at that time during WWII.

In “From Jinns to Germs: A Genealogy of Pasteurian Islam”, Mohammad Tavakoli-Targhi (2015) discusses that the modernization process during the Pahlavi reign was medicalized. When the Constitutional Revolution in Iran took place

between 1905-1911, one of the main debates was Iran's public health reformation (Tavakoli-Targhi 2015). While modernization created urban spaces where women and men came together, Shi'a clerics defined modernization as "social ills, pains and corruption" (*bimari-ha-yi ijtimā'i, dard hā -ye ijtimā'i, and fisad-i ijtimā'i*) as Tavakoli-Targhi notes (Elahi 2018, 20). For that reason, Iranian intellectuals used the metaphors of illness to describe the controversial discussions on modernization. Metaphors, for Iranian intellectuals, were useful for bypassing the "modern regimes of censorship" as "creative misdirection" according to Kamran Talattof (2000), which is clearly stated in *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature*. Babak Elahi divides metaphors of illnesses in Iranian fiction into three categories to define the creative misdirection suggested by Talattof. The first category of metaphors he writes: "Colonial disease and its nationalist cures. Some writers deploy the metaphor as an (anti) colonial critique of Western imperialism, or an Islamic remedy to 'Western' corruption-the microbial metaphor of foreign infection" (Elahi 2018, 21). The second use of metaphor is to reflect on an existential crisis. Sadegh Hedayat's *Blind Owl (Boof-e Koor, 1936)* is an example of such a use of metaphor to define Iranians' existential condition. The third use of metaphor in Iranian literature is almost experimental because it is deconstructive, and the authors test its limits. Elahi's analysis of Feroz Farrokhzad's short film *The House is Black (Khaneh Siah Ast, 1962)*<sup>1</sup> indicates how the short film is an example of deconstructing the metaphor of illness. Talattof asserts that Farrokhzad's short movie cannot be degraded to an allegory of oppressed Iranian society because it spatializes illness at every level and rejects offering a solution, rather it reveals the state mechanisms which divide people into categories such as governable, classifiable, or not.

To discuss the uses of metaphor in Iranian literature and its importance for representation in a repressive atmosphere, Farzaneh Milani writes about Simin Daneshvar's use of metaphors created by the dialectical discourses:

"In Daneshvar's fictive world, as in her society, a disturbing disjunction between public and private. Wall surrounding houses, an overabundance of keys both metaphorical and factual, chadors covering women, ritualistic modes of discourse, separate quarters within the house, and imposed silences, among others, all reinforce the separation for the private from public. Perhaps this system of closing in space is a behavior that has evolved over centuries of living in a state of terror in an uncontrollably repressive environment" (Milani 1985).

---

<sup>1</sup>Farrokhzad's short movie deals with the people suffering from leprosy.

The dialectical discourse and its representation as private and public are similar to the relationship between the national and the foreigner. While Iran's modernization is made publicly and foreign, its repressed voice is depicted through the houses with big gardens surrounded by the walls where family members come together to discuss their secret ideas. Or, the chadors that cover the bodies and their forced unveiling during the Shah regime are the dilemmas that Iranian modernization was going through during the time when Daneshvar wrote her novel. While becoming the barrier protecting the subjects such as Zari in *Suvashun*. In that sense, the metaphors denote the significations of the signs, words, spaces, and even temporality. Masht Hassan's turning into the cow, for instance, is a metaphorical resistance to alienation from what the character possesses as well because the poverty and lack of food turn him into an animal, the opposite of the human in the human/animal binary. However, industrialization and mechanization in Iranian society created a counter-transformation because Masht Hassan's madness prevents him from turning into a machine. Moreover, he is a villager, and he does not exist for the state as Parvaneh or Amir do not exist because they produce only dissidence, not compliance with modernization or emerging Islamic intellectual discourse. Parvaneh and Amir are the daughter and the son of the nameless protagonist in *The Colonel*. Parvaneh is killed by the revolutionaries because of her dissidence. She is not allowed to receive a proper funeral ceremony, so her father takes her body to cemetery at night to bury. Amir is the youngest son, and he refuses to go out of his house for years because he is traumatized by the torture of Shah's policemen.

Moreover, resistance enlarges the boundaries of subjectivities because it creates a space for self-transformation and self-claim. Nasrin and Frouzesh give an example of this transformation through women's change as characters in the narratives. While Zari, the protagonist of *Suvashun* is a passive housewife at the beginning of the novel and agrees with her husband's resistance to British forces who ask him to sell his food supplies to them, and his brother who is a supporter of British forces. When her husband is assassinated, the local authorities prohibits holding a ceremonial procession. Zari declares her husband to be a martyr and resists the prohibitions against mourning ceremonial in Shah Cheraq shirine. Against the prohibitions, Zari holds a ceremony at night.

## 2.2 Westoxification or *Occidentosis* in Simin Daneshvar's *Sūvashūn*

This section relates to the relationship between metaphor and illness as resistance to suppression in the sense that Daneshvar's novel *Sūvashūn* is an example of how the western influence on Iranian society leaves people sick both physically and mentally. The novel's metaphorical narration of irrational westernization in Iranian society is a critique of foreign intervention and exploitation of Iranian resources because it scrutinizes the dynamics between Iranian society and the foreign people in the country. While those foreigners benefit from the resources of the country abundantly, Iranians are not even able to receive necessary health care systems. In this respect, through the idea of using both physical and mental sickness as means of representing social and political unrest, the novel becomes a protest and critique.

In *Occidentosis: A Plague From the West*, Jalal Al-i Ahmad (1984) defines Iran's struggle for Westernization as an illness similar to cholera or a plague because it sickens everybody in family and society like a plague. Occidentosis is the condition of *gharbzadagi* which can be translated as admiration for the West and its values. Al-i Ahmad's critique of Westernization is that the development of the Iranian nation is always considered to be westward. He criticizes society for behaving like Westerners, dressing like them, or coding the good and the bad according to the rules they rule out. Moreover, mechanization and industrialization leave people in a situation that he calls *māshīn-zadegī* or *mechanosis* (122). He uses this term to describe the mechanization of society as a problem of Western civilizations. In his social and anti-colonialist critique, Al-i Ahmad renders Iran's suffering to a set of diagnoses such as an infection from the inside, metaphorical tuberculosis, and cholera. According to him, Iran's existential restlessness is because of the intruders that exploit not only the economic sources but also beliefs and lifestyles. Daneshvar's employment of this theme is that she indicates the symptoms of *mechanosis* in Iranian society. For example, Yousef and his brother become enemies for political and economic reasons, which Zari believes to be a result of Western influence on Iranian society.

The use of an illness trope is prevalent in Simin Daneshvar's novel *Sūvashūn* (translated as *A Persian Requiem* and published in 1969). The novel offers an experience of Iran's modernization process, however, this process is a troubled one because it is failing due to social and economic injustices that the country is going through. The novel depicts Iran in a setting occupied by the Allied Forces in World War II when a typhus outbreak devastated the country, and people suffered from famine. It is the peasants and the emerging bourgeoisie who were mostly affected by

the outbreak while the occupying forces, especially the British, enjoyed the sources wastefully such as oil and food. The novel begins with waste in the wedding house and the stress of the waste of food continues to be a subject matter of the novel:

"Groups of guests filed into the marriage room just to admire the bread. Zari Khanom <sup>2</sup> and Yousef Khan also managed to see it close up. The minute Yousef set eyes on it, he blurted out loud: 'Those fools! Licking the boots that kick them! And to waste so much at time like this...'" (Daneshvar 1969, 12).

Zari, the protagonist, does not only get anxious about losing her mind. She is also worried because those who are deprived of sufficient food supplies would lose their minds. For instance, when Zari recalls her conversations with the leftist teacher, Fotuhi, who is in favor of communism for a just society in Iran. At the same time, she is perplexed by what Abolqasem Khan, the brother of Yousef, told her about the backwardness of the Iranian nation, and that it is impossible to cure the people with national remedies, rather a western intrusion is necessary for the cure of the country. Regarding the sociopolitical polarization of the characters, the novel fictionalizes the historical documentation of an epidemic and its relation to mental illnesses, women's pregnancy, and in the case of the protagonist, fear and anxiety.

Zari is a chronic mourner from the beginning of the narrative. Her story begins with her loss of emerald earrings gifted to her by her mother-in-law when she goes to the wedding ceremony of the governor of the city, Shiraz. She is asked to lend her earrings to the bride; however, she is not given them back. Later, she mourns for the horse of her son which is forcibly taken from him to be gifted to the governor's daughter, and for that small kid brought to the farm because he lost his parents because of tuberculosis, and lastly, for the death of her husband who is killed by the enemies of him because he rejects to sell crops to the British army. Although Zari is the protagonist, her existence and voice are there to observe the sufferings of the others while she neglects her sufferings and falls sick at the end.

Daneshvar's realist narrative is told from a social and political perspective. Zari's husband, Yousef, opposes the Allied Forces, but when Zari finds out she is pregnant with the fourth child, she gets more cautious and tries to persuade her husband to give up on his resistance. Because she is extremely concerned with her children, Zari gets more paranoid throughout the novel. She, in a sense, becomes a hypochondriac because she suffers from the fear of mental corruption. Zari's case is a metaphorical representative of the Iranian intellectuals afflicted with sociopolitical hypochondria

---

<sup>2</sup>Khanom means lady in Persian.

because when Zari gets acquainted with the physically sick people, her anxieties dissolve. She realizes that her situation, as the wife of a rich landowner, is never worse than those of people suffering from tuberculosis or typhoid.

The novel's critical engagement with imperialism in the country reveals the injustices that people suffer. For example, when Zari takes a little child with typhoid to the closest Missionary Hospital, the British doctor Khanom Hakim or Ms. Doctor refuses to examine the child because the hospital is only for foreign soldiers and officers. The same doctor is also the one who operated on Zari's cesarean births. Zari remembers how insensitively the doctor behaved when they were having a conversation about cancer. While Zari talks about the death of her mother from cancer, Khanom Hakim makes a comment on Europe and Hitler, likening him to cancer. This moment is ironic because the doctor does not take the responsibility of examining and helping a child who is about to die, but she criticizes Hitler for sickening Europe. It is also interesting that the same doctor makes a rich woman give birth while she refuses to examine the child who has nobody to take care of him. The analogy between Hitler and cancer in the novel also tells about the hypocrisy of the intellectuals in the society who refuses to take a step toward bringing equality and justice to the society. The doctor in this regard becomes the hypocritical intellectual because she refuses to take the responsibility to cure the child but complains about the political problems in the world. The scene depicts the hierarchy even among those who are sick because those who are chosen to live are privileged while they receive medical treatment.

### **2.3 Turn of Allegories in Iranian Cinema: Psychosis, Fear of the Other: the Animal**

In *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Michael Foucault writes that beginning from the 18th century started to be institutionalized as a reaction to threats against social order and reason (2001). As madness reflected non-reason and divergence from moral inclinations, mad people were treated the same way as animals. Similarly, literary narratives and movies tend to represent madness as a depiction of animality. In "Madness, Resistance, and Iranian Cinema" (2013), Saeed Zeydabadi-Nejad writes that representation of madness is a challenge to the social order because the mad person is disengaged with society. The subject who deteriorates the social order is otherized and isolated. However, the mad person can be resistant in many ways by not conforming to the norms of the society in a

sense. However, the mad person is always silenced and neglected because she is degraded to a kind of "other".

Dariussh Mehrjui's movie *The Cow* is an important example of Iranian cinema in terms of the themes of madness and thinking about the other. When the movie was released in 1969, it soon became a groundbreaking influence on the "New Wave Iranian cinema" (the 1960s and the 70s) during the Pahlavi reign. Although it was banned because the movie was feared to contradict Iran's image of a wealthy and modern nation, in 1971 it won the international film critics' award at the Venice Film Festival and brought international attention to Iranian cinema. Thanks to its international success, the movie opened the way for governmental support for the New Wave Iranian cinema. The characteristic of the New Wave in Iranian cinema was its emphasis on realism, ordinary people's and village lives unlike filmfarsi movies commercialized by the government to approve a modern and Westernized image of Iran, thus creating a counter-cinema movement in the prerevolutionary era. Thanks to its emphasis on ordinary people's lives, *The Cow* was approved by Ayatollah Khomeini and became the forerunner of post-revolutionary Iranian cinema of the humanist genre. Despite its influence on pre- and post-revolutionary movie genres, the movie resists any narrow categorization of a genre that limits its surreal story and meaning. For example, in *Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema*, Hamid Dabashi (2007) criticizes the interpretations of the movie as a political allegory directed at the Pahlavi regime and questions the universal and enduring themes in the movie through its poetic mediations of surrealist elements. However, the movie can be interpreted as a national allegory thanks to its analogical portrayal of Iranian society which suffered from poverty and injustice during the Pahlavi reign.

The movie tells the story of the farmer Masht Hassan who is extremely attached to his cow almost in a romantic manner. That cow is also the only source of milk for the village. However, when the cow unknowingly dies, Masht Hassan goes mad and finally believes himself to be his cow. The helpless villagers cannot recognize the tragic mental collapse of Masht Hassan. Therefore, on the way to medical help as the final solution to cure him, Masht Hassan dies. The movie begins with a scene in which the children of the village bully a mentally disabled adult while the others laugh and make fun of the children's torture of that disabled man. This scene is an example of the dehumanization of the disabled because the children paint the face of this man in black and physically violate him while making noises similar to an animal's. The scene almost resembles a circus where the animal is staged to entertain the spectator. In that sense, the movie blurs the boundary between human and animal by deconstructing the answer to what a human is. The answer to the human question becomes unclear in the movie's political, psychoanalytical,



and philosophical reading especially when Masht Hassan believes himself to be his beloved, dead cow. Along with the cow, the theme of the other appears when the village is threatened by the Boluriha which is a group of mysterious people coming from out of the village and are not known to the people of the village. This unknown evil group steals from the resources of the village such as food, animals, and water. The villagers fear the Boluriha and perceive them as absolute evil. They paranoiacally watch for this evil coming to their village. Although the villagers tend to define the Boluriha as a dark force and inhuman being, the scenes of the movie show that the Boluriha is nothing more than an armed group of people who plunder the villages. In a sense, the villagers define their existence through excluding, differentiating, and marginalizing the other people who are not from their village. Their definition of the other is through the fear of the other. For that reason, the movie represents an allegory of Iranian society in the middle of the 20th century in which the country was devastated by famine and malnutrition although the British imperialism and its supporters in the country enjoyed the sources almost wastefully.

To express that the movie has deeper meanings in terms of political conditions in Iran, in *Allegory in Iranian Aesthetics of Poetry and Resistance*, Michelle Langford writes:

"In typical allegorical fashion, *The Cow* tells a story that seems too simple to be taken only on a literal level. The film presents the story of a man, Masht Hassan, and his cow. On a literal level, the cow, being the only one in the village and therefore the source of milk appears as a sign of impoverishment. It has also been read as emblematic of Iran's dependence on oil as its main commodity" (Langford 2019, 32).

In this context, the movie deals with many fears such as the fear of the intruder, the foreigner, or the foreign powers because of the fear of losing the cow and hiding it from the Boluriha when Masht Hassan leaves the village and entrusts the cow to the villagers hold a connotative relation between the milk and country's oil resources. Eventually, Masht Hassan finds out about the death of his cow when he comes back from his travels and learns that the villagers tried to hide the death of the cow from him. His mental collapse gets further meanings later. The metaphorical metamorphosis of Masht Hassan reflects on animorphisim which means infusing humans with animal characteristics. Regarding this, the movie is a critique that foreshadows the Iranian future and its economic and social impacts on the human condition. The black and white scenes back up the pessimistic atmosphere of Iranian society as well. The shadowy Boluriha coming out of darkness and beyond the mountains reflects on the microcosmic representation of Iranian society and its

paranoia of the intruder who would come and destroy it.

As a movie based on the story “Azādārān-e Bayal” (“The Mourners of Bayal”, 1964) by Gholam-Hossein Sa’edi, it functions through the techniques that bypass the censorship of the Pahlavi monarchy. Sa’edi, one of the most important figures of Iranian literature, reflected on his disappointment with the Islamic Revolution in his narratives, and he died of alcohol consumption in 1985. Considering this, the movie politicizes the psychotic realism of Sa’edi’s by visualizing his depression and mental collapse through the theme of humans and animals. Unlike masters such as Feroz Farrokhzad and Abbas Kiarostami’s actual realism by zooming the camera on the subjects of the movie, as Dabashi asserts in *Corpus Anarchicum: Political Protest, Suicidal Violence, and the Making of the Posthuman Body*, Mehrjui’s narrative follows the traces of what Theodor Adorno calls “subversion of the content by form” (Dabashi 2012, 169). By this term, Adorno addresses the form of writing in which the content mocks the form and vice versa. In other words, while the formal elements of the movie present a realistic depiction, the content diverges from the realistic depictions of social life in the movie because the textual reading of the movie suggests a metamorphosis of a human into an animal. According to this definition, Mehrjui emancipates from the hardened ideology of realism by blurring the boundary between humans and animals. The subject of the movie becomes an embodied, creative protest against the movie’s realistic depiction of the life subjects live through. Mehrjui resists to the ossification of realism in Iranian movies with critical approaches and creative strategies. Mehrjui’s artistic creativity and critical apparatus camouflage resistance in material reality, not within theoretical significations. Such a critical apparatus is observable in Mehrjui’s other masterpiece *Hamoun* (1989) which tells the story of a failing philosopher stuck between the fast-changing ideologies of Western liberalism and theocratic nationalism clashing with the economic, social, and political injustices in the society. While pre-revolutionary Iranian cinema backed up the Shah’s aspirations for Iran’s westernization between the 1960s and 70s, the emerging Shiite clergy established an Islamic cinema after the revolution<sup>3</sup>. The theme of madness is common between the two cinematic eras. For example, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, a follower of Imam Khomeini, started writing film scripts one of which is *Marriage of the Blessed* (1989) which deals with veterans suffering from shell shock at a psychiatric hospital. A similar argument in this thesis is made through the analysis of both pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary movies dealing with subjectivity and representation of madness. *Women Without Men* and *The Cow* both depict

---

<sup>3</sup>Mehrzad Boroujerdi’s (1996) book *Iranian Intellectuals and the West* (1996) explains how Shah’s failing modernism gave rise to the clergy’s emergence as organic intellectuals who hold strong local networks with ideas of politicization of Islam.

the madness and mental unrest as a resisting strategy against the censorship and political oppression.

## 2.4 War and Trauma in *The Colonel* by Mahmoud Dowlatabadi

After discussing the metaphor of sickness as a critique of imperialism, we need to understand how it also contributes to the critique of oppressive governments. As examples from pre- and post-revolutionary periods, Daneshvar and Dowlatabadi's novels both use the theme of sickness as a societal reaction to oppression. The reason for analyzing the two novels from different eras is to indicate how the theme of sickness is a timeless one to discuss societal unrest. Moreover, the metaphorical use of the theme enables authors to create a censor-free work, especially for those authors such as Dowlatabadi whose ideas were thought to be dangerous by the newly established government, therefore needed to be censored.

Dowlatabadi is one of the prominent figures of contemporary Iranian literature after the Islamic revolution in 1979. In his works, he elaborates on poverty, violence, and injustice to dispossessed groups. During his stay in Tehran after the revolution, he was criticized by diaspora authors. However, when he was detained by SAVAK, Shah's secret police, he was told that "the young people who carry his books turn into be provocative and revolutionary" (Patterdale 2011). The novel discusses a time period shortly after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran under the control of revolutionaries. The novel was first published in Germany and later in the US and UK. It is a representation of the revolution in the sense that it embeds the inevitability of violence, sorrow, and mourning for the lost ones because the Revolution occurred in a violent environment. Moreover, the violence is not only political but also a part of the smallest social groups such as families, which is revealed in the novel when the father kills his wife in an honor killing. The introductory remarks by the translator of the book Tom Patterdale tell us about the title of the book. Patterdale writes that the colonel was the nickname for Mohammad-Taqi Khan Pesyan who was a commander trained in Europe during the Shah's reign (Patterdale 2011, 11). And the father is called colonel as well because he is a retired guard of the Shah. What is more, he names his other martyr son after Mohammad-Taqi Khan Pesyan.

The main characters of the novel are the father, who is nameless and only called colonel by the people, and the dead daughter Parvaneh who is 14 years old and killed for committing crimes against the new Islamic republic. The youngest son is

Amir who is brutally tortured by the Shah's regime and is not able to go out for years and making plans of suicide, and finally, the other older daughter Farzaneh who is married to a violent husband, Qorbani, who makes fun of the colonel and the martyred son who falls dead during the Iran-Iraq war. The narrative begins with a father who has to bury his dead daughter's tortured body at night without any funeral ceremony because she is a political criminal during the early times of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The heteroglossia in the novel is dominant with the diverse utterances of the characters who talk their minds to the reader. The narrative changes the voices from the father to his son, from past to present. The antagonist in the novel is neither the father nor the son, rather the antagonist changes, and the viewpoints in the novel shift between the father and the other characters. Although the omniscient narrator makes the reader aware of every aspect of the characters in the novel, the theme of sickness creatively appears to reconstruct the whole narrative because the multiple viewpoints reflect the mental instability of the characters. For example, the chapters change what the reader is exposed to when the narration changes from the father's to the memories of the son.

While the father struggles with the dead body of his child, we find him in despair and grief for his other children, one of whom is tortured terribly during the Shah's regime, thus living his life at home almost like an exile who is not seen by the people for years and the other died in the war against Iraq. As readers, we confront the grief and mourning of each character through the stream of their consciousness and the revival of their traumatic memories. All the motifs such as mud, rain, darkness, violence, insanity, and chaos point to the environment of Iran in the 1980s. The characters are failing revolutionaries on the verge of madness because of their silent mourning. Amir's self-isolation, for instance, is his mourning for not being able to follow his ideas. They cannot even own their mourning privately because the right to mourn over the dead body belongs to the public as the dead one is a martyr. Mourning in a sense becomes the exile of the failing subjects in the novel because the mourners lose their perception of time and space to the degree of losing their rationality because they are entrapped in a life which is dependent on the pains of the past traumas. Those mourners like Amir who exile themselves by giving up their lives prefer to isolate themselves and not to be seen by the others almost to the degree of being forgotten because they feel degraded and unsuccessful. The novel offers no solution at the end, which suggests the paradoxical atmosphere of the mourning. The more the characters mourn, the more they fail and get far from reality. The shift between their voices can be read as a literary technique for representing the indescribability of grief in written narrative. The novel experiments with the different ways of representing grief and mourning through the characters

with their coping style such as choosing to be invisible, staying silent, or talking about one's grief. What is common for the mourners is that grief exiles them from their souls and deprives them of their sense of reality.

Judith Butler explains our vulnerability as a result of our existence as intersubjective beings. Because we are dependent on each other, we are affected by the loss of others who are important to us. According to Butler, mourning is the result of one's feeling missing because of the unexpected and sudden loss that one has no control over (Butler 2004, 22). To overcome mourning and grief does not mean forgetting what is lost (Butler 2004, 28). Mourning for somebody or something is also mourning for the sudden change of one's self because one is not the old one before the loss. Therefore, our loss of what is fundamental to ourselves is the main motivation behind the grief. By our nature, we are vulnerable because we are always subjected to the gaze of the other. We cannot preempt the violence against us because it is sudden and unexpected at the beginning. If we become aware of our vulnerability, we might come up with nonviolent solutions. In terms of vulnerability, we have to keep in mind that certain lives are more vulnerable when compared to others, thus increasing the probability of violence amongst the groups (Butler 2004, 20). The later parts of Butler's writing differ from the first parts of her writing in the sense that from a psychoanalytical reading of mourning, she shifts to a political critique of the division of the Third and First world countries. She does not believe in such a conception and asserts that our vulnerabilities are international somehow. The father's initial thoughts about the death of his daughter are political in the sense that he is aware she is degraded:

“The colonel was aware that, by giving a coffin and an ambulance, they had shown him some respect, but he also noticed that the driver could not care less and was driving as if he was delivering meat to the butcher's” (Dowlatabadi 2011, 25).

The dead body of Parvaneh is degraded to flesh and is not grievable in the eyes of the regime. And by not giving her a proper funeral ceremony, the state engages in necropolitics. According to Achille Mbembe, necropolitics is the politics of how death works. Elaborating on Foucault's definition of biopower, which is the power that defines who has the right to live or die, Mbembe articulates the state's power over the death of the subjects and the power it gains over their dead bodies (2003). The novel's indication of the state's use of necropolitics is that Parvaneh is dehumanized in this way and her resistance is wiped out as well as her dignity through her death. We have to keep in mind that Parvaneh is not given a proper tomb and the state orders her tomb to be unmarked. From this perspective, her

existence is not only silenced, rather she is regarded as having never existed and resisted the new regime. To understand better, Butler's question can help: "What is the relation between the violence by which these ungrievable lives were lost and the prohibition on their public grievability?" (Butler 2004, 36) The relation is that their depriving a subject of her grievability is denying her voice.

The dehumanization and humiliation of the subjects do not end with Parvaneh's burial but the public executions of those who come up against the regime continue among different groups in the country. What is contradictory is that public grieving is not allowed, but the public performance of torture and punishment is ritualized. The text offers a scene in which a prisoner is sentenced to death:

"The clear intention was to humiliate him. Unseen hand kept pushing his dangling body this way and that, so that it was lit from all sides by the glare of the spotlights. His naked body was just a bag of skin and bones, indicating that he had spent his youth locked up in damp and stinking jail cells. It was hard to see why the authorities were so insistent on publicly disgracing and torturing this man, as the performance did nothing to stop his mother weeping and crying incessantly in Azeri: 'Men evledimi tanimirem, bu benim evledim deyir . Onu mene görsetin!'" (Dowlatabadi 2011, 213).

The mother's grief is public, and she expresses her pain with lamentations. Unlike Parvaneh's father, the mother of the prisoner is made to mourn in public so that her situation would be a menace to those who would think of resisting. As it can be observed from the examples, grief and mourning are personal reactions to traumatic events and the reactions might differ depending on the personality of the mourner. In that sense, there is no single way of one's responding to pain.

Grief appears in other forms as well. For example, the father blames himself for the death of his kids. He mourns for himself as a failing father who caused his children's death.

"A young mind hungers for new ideas and, as a father, I had no right to respond to that perfectly reasonable need. What else keeps a nation alive? So why should I blame myself? What else could I have done? Should I have lied to them? I admit, yes, that sometimes I held the truth back from them and sometimes I inculcated things into them. . . ." (Dowlatabadi 2011, 15).

Father's grief is so intense that he unconsciously tries to find ways to free himself from the sense of guilt for causing his children's death. As such, mourning for the lost ones does not mean forgetting, rather it is to remember and letting the present

be haunted by the past. The father mourns for knowing the unavoidability of the pain and helplessness. Although he thinks he does the right thing for his kids, he is aware of the upcoming violence if he teaches them to resist and follow their ideas no matter what waits for them. The already and always existing violence lets them no escape and that is exactly what the father mourns for. His grief is doubled when he feels guilt for killing his wife to save his honor. He thinks that the death of his kids is a punishment for killing his wife. In that sense, his mourning is a self-punishment as well.

The father does not only mourn for himself, but he also mourns for the young generations who are failing revolutionaries:

"The young were all trying to find themselves in the revolution, trying to give some meaning to their lives. Revolution gave them a thrill and kept their adrenaline going. They were riding a wave of excitement, like a dove that flies higher and higher to reach the sun, until it burns up – that's the acme of truth for youth!" (Dowlatabadi 2011, 6).

The father explains the revolutionaries found nothing but violence at the end of their efforts, which again reflects on their self-blaming and finding out the vainness of burning their futures for their ideological ideas. Hamid Dabashi writes in *Iran: the Rebirth of a Nation* that many revolutionaries were blaming themselves for bringing cruelty upon the Iranian nation. He writes

"Today leading Islamist revolutionaries, many of them in jail or in exile, are coming forward and publicly apologizing for what they have done in bringing this calamity upon their own people" (Dabashi 2016, 120).

The subjects' failing to find the meaning in revolution drags them into long-lasting mourning. Amir, for example, the son who is tortured by the Shah's police and never goes out since loses his sense of rationality and shifts between sanity and madness.

When he is alone, Amir questions his existence and finds no meaning in existence:

"I don't exist, I am nobody's child, I belong nowhere. I exist only to deny myself. My final trick will be to choose the manner and time of my own death, so that the others will have to take to their graves their wish to kill me. This is the only way that I can take my revenge on the horror that has engulfed us" (Dowlatabadi 2011, 114).

Torture ruins not only the body, but also one's belief in herself, ideas, or self-respect. As obvious in Amir's case, the torture he had to go under makes him lose his confidence as a human and will for living, that's why he plots suicidal thoughts.

The body's openness to violence makes the subjectivity open to existential pains as well. Dabashi sees this kind of mourning as an opportunity for freedom and pushes toward taking action for emancipation. He asserts that a self-resurrection is always possible from the ruins because the tortured body becomes the collective symbol of the nation who is tortured and, in the end, the legitimacy of the state is ruined when it tortures the nation. Butler makes a similar argument when she suggests mourning is a step toward one's regaining subjectivity and compensating for one's lost sound (Butler 2004, 44). In other words, mourning is not a surrender but a search for being who we are before the trauma. Although the novel offers no resolution or ending to the stories of the characters, it ends with a man wandering in the streets, playing *setar* and telling poems. The father switches on the lights of the whole house and the story ends. The dark environment of the house is enlightened for the first time as the novel ends, stressing that the ends might be the new beginnings and there is still hope despite everything.

In *The Colonel*, myths, stories, memories, and narratives come together and create internarrative subjects whose consciousness replaces each other so it becomes difficult for the reader to follow who is speaking in the narrative. Those characters carry something in common which is their grief. With its powerful and vivid description of thoughts and emotions, the novel becomes a sentimentally influencing one. It desacralizes the ideologies that drive the people into madness. When the father confesses that he sacrificed his son for the war, he deconstructs the sacredness of martyrdom which is a long-existing belief in Shi'ism, the preeminent belief in Iran. Moreover, this belief gets the right to mourn from the hands of the mourner. When the father attends his son's funeral, he is not able to cry or revolt because his son's grief is no more his grief. The body of the son is sacralized by the state and it is given the symbolic meanings of self-sacrifice and heroism. If the father mourns for the son publicly, it would be confusing for the public because martyrdom is something to celebrate, not to mourn for in their beliefs. Mourning for the martyr is public in Iran because it is a long tradition of mourning for Imam Hussein and Karbala, yet still mourning has different meanings for the society. While it symbolizes the self-blaming and punishment of people who left Imam Hussein in Karbala, it is on the other hand, a belief in being rewarded in the future as compensation for the pains. There is a clear separation of acts of mourning at this point. One is the self-punishment and the state's mythologising of future rewards, thus public, the other is personal, and resisting to state's dictates.



## 2.5 Can the "Bare Life" Resist?

In "Aging Bodies, Hairy Bodies, Barely Human Bodies: Three Essays on Contemporary Iranian Literature", Leigh Korey elaborates on the theory of "bare life" by Giorgio Agamben. She writes that the relationship between governments and subjects is fragile, so any subject can be degraded to the condition of "bare life" (Korey 2018, 98). Such an instance of fragility is evident in Dowlatabadi's novels. For example, while one of the sons of the general in *The Colonel* is a martyr, his daughter is declared to be a traitor, and her dead body is not allowed to be in a proper ceremony of farewell. Another example is from the movie *Gav*. Masht Hassan and his community living in a distanced village in the country are helpless and far from any governmental network which would provide them humane living conditions. They suffer from malnutrition. At the beginning of the movie, the children are bullying the mad man of the village. This mad man is not only the "bare life" for the government. He is also the "bare life" or the non-subject for the villagers. He is not a proper human being.

Through scrutinizing Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Korey writes about the conditions of "bare life"

"They are not subjects in a political sense, and they are not dead, so they are in a liminal state of living, but living outside the the bounds of political community" (Korey 2018, 98).

If these bare lives are in liminal living conditions and their existence has little impact on politics, how they can resist the system that already takes their existence for granted? For example, how can Amir in *The Colonel* be a subject of resistance when he does not come out of his room for years? Or, can soldiers who at war be resistant while they are already dead even before they are dead? These subjects are dehumanized because their existence is denied. At this point, illness is a form of resistance because it prevents the subjects from acting in accordance with the roles assigned to them. If the soldiers turn mad during war, this would be a disaster for the military purposes of a government. Moreover, the women turning mad or suffering from serious illnesses that would prevent them from fulfilling their responsibilities would be a dangerous situation for the families. This concludes that representation of illness or madness is a form of resistance through literature. As Sibel Irzik argues "Literature is compensation for the destructiveness of life and passes from helplessness to subjecthood" (Irzik 2013, 59). Similarly, artistic creations employ narrative techniques such as metaphor or narration of metamorphosis to reflect

on a subject's transformation from the bare life to resisting subjects. Through metamorphosis, subjects claim for a hopeful end for themselves, or they express their wish a better end.

### 3. MEMORIES OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

#### 3.1 Resignation, Ambiguity, and the Revolution: *Women Without Men*

Shahrnush Parsipur's novella *Women Without Men* tells the story of five Iranian women from different backgrounds such as a prostitute; Zarrinkolah, a housewife; Farrokhlagha who owns a garden named Karaj; two unmarried friends; Munis and Faezeh who is raped by a stranger; and finally Mahdokht who is afraid of her sexuality and losing virginity but obsessed with the idea of having children. The story is set through these women's journey to the Karaj garden. However, they do not know each other but they have this goal to reach the garden to meet there. This garden's supernatural atmosphere reinforces the magical realist narrative of the novella. The owner of the garden Farrokhlagha in the novel is a middle-aged woman whose husband's sudden death liberates her, and she decides to move to the garden. Mahdokht, formerly a teacher and an unmarried woman, later turns into a tree in this garden of Farrokhlagha because she wants to fulfill her wish to reproduce but not by having a sexual relationship with a human. The gardener plants her in the garden where her branches grow, and she reproduces offsprings. Zarrinkolah is a prostitute but she does not see the faces of her clients, which can be analyzed as her psychosis or her will to avoid having a sexual relationship with a lot of men. On her way to the garden, she meets the gardener, marries him, and gives birth to a lily. With her breast milk, she feeds Mahdokht which makes the human tree grow bigger. Her feeding Mahdokht enables her to have a final metamorphosis thanks to which the tree explodes and vanishes. Zarrinkolah and the gardener also go under a metamorphosis at the end of the novella. Munis, Faezeh and Farrokhlagha leave the garden and continue living in Tehran. Later, this 1989 novella was turned into a movie by the director Shirin Neshat in 2009, and the movie is acknowledged as one of the most significant feminist criticisms in Iranian cinema. However, this chapter introduces the novella in terms of personal traumas and wishes for expanding personal limits of subjectivities through the representation of characters' metamorphosis and personal

changes.

As discussed before, this thesis analyzes personal traumas in a general sense in a parallel with political oppression and historical conflicts. In the light of this, we need to understand that *Women Without Men* is a literary narrative written in the sentiments of post-revolution, however, reflecting the pre-revolutionary times in 1950s and 60s or onwards. It is necessary to ask whether there is a continuity or separation between the traumatic experiences of the two periods as pre- and post-revolutionary. This novella is a resourceful example of looking for answers to this question because the theme of unexpectedness makes a connotation to the ambiguity and the sense of possibility of a revolution. For example, the metamorphoses of the women in the novella reflect a transition to the Islamic Revolution and the events that led to it. The arrival of women at Karaj is almost an analogical arrival to the time of the revolution, which is similar to Mahdokht's explosion after she grows too much as a tree. After this event, the owner of the house returns to Tehran and continues to live an ordinary life, which is very similar to the failing revolution idea in the sense that nothing has changed for the better for the women. In other words, although the time setting of the novella is the year 1953, it creates a continuity between the two major time periods in the history of modern Iran.

In "Iranian Women's Literature: From Pre-Revolutionary Social Discourse to Post-Revolutionary Feminism", Kamran Talattof mentions the conflict between Shah's White Revolution <sup>1</sup> and the conservatism in Iran regarding the liberation of women in the social space (Talattof 1997, 534). He later mentions how the committed literature on the status of the women written by the Iranian women writers takes the form of feminist writings due to the emergence of the oppression of the women's sexuality by the state. Although he analyzes *Women Without Men* as feminist writing in which the oppression of women's sexuality is addressed in the post-revolutionary period because it was released in 1989, there are more things to discuss in the novel in terms of the "mode of aesthetics" and the ambiguity and rational conflict as the outcomes of the unexpectedness of the radical Islamic Revolution in Iran (Talattof 1997, 533). Parsipur's aesthetic mode in the novel embeds the conflictive and chaotic atmosphere of post-revolutionary society into the language of the text which distorts the sequence of time, reason, and space while narrating the "unexpected" events. In other words, the novel sheds light on the unexpectedness of the 1953 coup and its impacts while embodying the unbelievability of this unexpectedness to the tone of the text thanks to magical

---

<sup>1</sup>As mentioned before, The White Revolution is a set of cultural and political reforms in the late 1960s and 70s to accelerate the westernization of the country.

realism as a mode of its aesthetics. It is not surprising to realize the proximity between the terms “magical” and “unexpected” from this statement, which is a clear indication of the novel’s dedication to the atmosphere of the ambiguity in the post-revolutionary Iranian society as an ideological issue. What is unexpected of course is both the attributions to the revolution, which implies radical political changes, their outcomes, and the sense of ambiguity that emerge as a result of these radical changes.

In his “Fecundities of the Unexpected: Magical Realism, Narrative, and History”, Ato Quayson elaborates on the relationship between reality and the magical by writing that

“In many ways, this notion of the spatialized relations between reality and the magical is an effect of the language that we are obliged to use to describe something that is not easily discernible in reality” (Quayson 2006, 727).

He implies that magic is not separate from the real as it plays the role of reflecting things that are staying behind reality. It is also understood that there are things that language emphasizes hierarchically. If we consider reality as the image of the things that we sense, the magical, then functions to represent what is not explainable due to the limits of the language. Therefore, language represents the revolution as the real first and represents the collective sense of the unexpectedness of the revolution second because the outcomes of this sense are not that easily “discernible” and even expressible by language. The reason for this inexpressibility is that the impact of the unexpectedness on the individual differs for all. Nevertheless, the collectivity that everyone gets influenced is the same for all. The magical then represents this collectivity with the unbelievable parts to it which cannot be captured as a concrete image. Parsipur’s text enlarges the limits of this inexpressible collective experience by not following the linear narrative which is the reason for the incomprehensibility of things behind reality according to Quayson because we follow a “narrative experience” of things that follow a “sequence” (Quayson 2006, 727). In order to distort the sequence of the real, the novel indicates the collective experience with the unexpectedness of the revolution by changing the voices and not mentioning a temporality to the events that are happening to the characters. Therefore, the magical domain of the real which is the unexpectedness of the revolution becomes the ideological debate of the text that follows the consequences of the reality.

As stated before, the sequence of the reason is distorted because the novel creates an atmosphere in which unexpected events occur. The examples of this distortion are that all characters meet in Karaj, Zarrinkolah gives birth to a lily, Mahdokht

turns into a tree, and Munis revives after she is dead. What is interesting is that each character easily accepts the ambiguity of these unexpected events. When Farrokhlagha accepts Mahdokht's becoming a tree by stating "So why are you ashamed of her? Becoming a tree is nothing shameful", there is a sense in her words that there are other things to be ashamed of (Parsipur 1989, 88). Mr. Ostovari seems to confirm that there are other things to be ashamed of when he states "Her poor brother used to say, even if she became a yoghurt maker, that would be something, we would not mind. Yoghurt making, that's work. But a tree, I really don't know" (Parsipur 1989, 89). It is implied to him that being a tree is shameful because it makes the person workless and unproductive. Moreover, there is a realist implication in his statement that being a yoghurt maker is also something that is unexpected and even unreasonable to Mahdokht's family. It might be another discussion whether there are gender roles or the status of women in the Iranian family context in the debate in this part, but what is obvious is that the people suffer from the unexpected events and the unreasonable act of being forced to accept what happens around them. In the first chapters, Mahdokht is presented as "a simple woman", however, it is unexpected that she turns into the tree (Parsipur 1989, 1). Therefore, one might even assert that Mahdokht's self-claim by becoming a tree as she always wanted is unexpected by her family.

The ambiguity in Parsipur's novel also takes a form of timelessness or an unexpected transition to timelessness. Although there are some implications of the date at the beginning of the novel such as "At four o'clock in the afternoon on the twenty-fifth of August, 1953" the very concrete attribution to the time leaves its place in an unexpected sense in which the time turns into a matter of "waiting" for the characters because by waiting longer "everything would have fallen apart" (Parsipur 1989, 13). As linear time is not mentioned later in the text, the unexpectedness of the events becomes less surprising. The narrative shifts among the characters and their stories, therefore the time might change between the past and present. The novel does not narrate a specific time period from now on, rather the time flows when each character is waiting for something. For instance, Farrokhlagha waits for her exhibition and the time that the tree will give blossoms, Zarrinkolah waits for the time her baby to be born, and Faezeh waits for the time that Amir will marry her or when Munis thinks that "She was rotten from waiting", there is a sense of disappointment in her thoughts as she wants to experience love but cannot (Parsipur 1989, 117). The understanding of time is almost a collective experience for each woman because what determines the time for them is the duration of waiting. The dates would not matter in their lives anymore as they are already waiting for the things that were usually unexpected to them. It is also unexpected for the reader to experience such

a transition from the first chapter in which there is not any unrealistic component to the chapters in which Mahdokht turns into seeds and travels the world through the water. Therefore, it is an aesthetic transition as well as a change in the usual understanding of time as linear. By changing the time into a collective experience for the characters in terms of waiting, the novel embeds the unexpectedness of the events in its narrative.

Although there are some moments in which the revolution of Iran might be assumed to be at the same time as the revolutions in these women's lives such as Farrokhlaqa's killing of her husband or Munis' revival, the revolution itself is never mentioned, which is again an indication of its unexpectedness. As the narrative shifts among the characters, it can be asserted that these women were experiencing the revolutions of their lives at the same time. There is not any sequence of the time to the events that happen to these women, but it is sensed that Munis and Faezeh's suddenly taking their way to Karaj is the beginning of an attempt to get rid of the ambiguity of the atmosphere. While the time turns into a matter of waiting for them, the place also turns into a space to arrive. At this point, where all the women meet, which is Karaj, is almost the utopic space in which this atmosphere of ambiguity might be compensated (Talattof 1997, 546). They are almost looking for a space in which they would "see the heads of the men, be a tree, run away from the men who control their lives, and become a tree". This search for space is an escape from the disappointments that they had in their lives. Their sense of disappointment is a collective experience for them, so Karaj becomes their commonplace to reach. However, this place does not remain a utopic one for all of them. Munis, for example, can not compensate for the ambiguities of her life, so she leaves with a will to "becoming light". "Seven years passed, during which she passed through seven deserts" (Parsipur 1989, 128). This transition from Karaj to seven "deserts" represents her disappointments also because, in Karaj, she is unable to fulfill her expectations from life. When compared to the others, who get married, Munis is the only one who manages to deal with the ambiguity in her life alone. At this point, getting married can be assumed to be a way of coping with the unexpected sudden changes in the lives of those women. However, she ends up in "the city" where all the consequences of the unexpected revolution can be observed, unlike Karaj. There is a transition to a realistic view in that part from the unexpected years in the deserts. These transitions in the text embody the ambiguity of the atmosphere to the tone of the narrative.

Having discussed the novella, it is important to bring up the movie adaptation because the movie is universally regarded as one of the most significant feminist criticisms in the Iranian artistic production sector. Similar to *Gav, Women without*

*Men* is an adaptation as well. Moreover, *Women without Men* became an activist artistic product of Iranian feminism for the diaspora. The movie focused on the lives of four women instead of five leaving out Mahdokht. After blowing out when she was a tree, Mahdokht turns into a pile of seeds. Because the movie is a feminist critique of women's suppressed freedom and sexuality, the story of Munis is concentrated in the movie who is forced to marry someone she does not want to by her brother. Munis is the omnipresent narrator in the movie, however, the novella does not come up with an omnipresent narrator or a protagonist. The reason for that can be that the movie is a representation of Iranian women and the difficulties they face in everyday life in the patriarchal society, and by focusing on the examples of women's limitations, it benefits from this representation of women's life in Iran so that the diaspora viewers would be interested. However, the novella is a focus on the impact of the political atmosphere on everybody and the subjectivities suffering from the ambiguities in their lives, which limits their wishes and expectations from their lives. In conclusion, their narratives' embodiment of the collective sense after the revolution and the atmosphere of the ambiguity as a result of revolution is not separate from the mode of aesthetics that the novella benefits from. The capacity of magical realism to reflect this collective atmosphere of ambiguity requires a play with the narrative sequence, temporality, and even reasoning. The magical, not as a wholly separate domain from the real, scrutinizes the unexpectedness both on an ideological level by the characters' utterance to their freedom and expectancies, and on an individual level by focusing on the personal tensions.

### 3.2 Eco-metamorphoses in Dowlatabadi's *Thirst*

Kamran Talattof elaborates on the use of metamorphoses as a literary phenomenon in his *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature* (2000). He writes that through the use of metamorphoses the conventional meanings of images are differentiated so that the authors can convey their messages (Talattof 2000, 13). According to Talattof, Dowlatabadi's literary pieces are examples of the literature of commitment (Talattof 2000, 78). He writes:

"His short stories and novels portray the situations of oppressed classes, especially peasants and rural workers; regardless of their religious beliefs, his characters are the victims of their social classes. The class traits of all his characters comply with Marxist models of class society and historical materialism." (Talattof 2000, 13).



An example of Talattof's reading of Dowlatabadi's text would be that Dowlatabadi tends to portray soldiers as victims instead of perpetrators. They are the sole human beings who suffer from the conditions of the war that they are into. These soldiers are both Iranian and Iraqi, thus making no difference between nations. By doing so, he indicates that suffering is a universal matter, and people need to understand it so that they can step forward for change. For Dowlatabadi, what is considered to be the "true literature" was determined by its contribution to the social change toward justice (Talattof 2000, 2). However, this should not be confused with the nuances in the history of Iranian literature because ideological formations of Iranian modernism is a complex structure that changes over time through the changing series of literary representations. For example, the Sacred Defense literature and its ideological formation is a reversion or re-making of resistance as an ideological toolkit belonging to a totally different political stance. The changing dynamics of Iranian literary modernism will be discussed in the last chapter through the lens of changing politics of resistance.

Although the name of the novel is translated as "thirst", the original name for the novel is *Besmal* which can be explained as "the supplication required in Islam before the sacrifice of any animal". *Besmal* is a theme frequently used in the novel while mentioning a lioness which is believed to suckle the thirsty soldiers during the great wars in the past and the men turning into doves. All this symbolism is ecocritical because it rewrites and questions the boundaries between the human and the animal in times of crisis. While the symbolism is available to Persian readers, it also brings up the question of the possibility of representation. In his modernist writing, Dowlatabadi deconstructs the historiography of the Iran-Iraq war by putting focus on the diverse utterances of the characters. As theorized by Mikhail Bakhtin, the heteroglossia in the novel suggests a powerful question of the possibility of representation because the consciousnesses of the characters are intermingled, and the use of language is diversified by the inclusion of non-fictional genres into the narrative. The novel itself carries meta-narrative elements because as readers, we confront many narrators, first, a journalist from Iraq who is forced by the Master in a military camp to write a fabricated report on the cruelty of Iranian enemies, secondly, the fabricated soldiers created in the minds of Iraqi journalist, thirdly the author, and finally the Iranian author on the other side of the border who writes about the same soldiers who are about to lose their minds because of thirst in the battlefield. While the time and space are unclear in the novel, as the novel begins with "Somewhere, on some spot here on the planet", Dowlatabadi does not only create a critique on war, moreover, he rewrites the war in ecopolitical terms by applying the symbolism of animal, thirst, human dignity, and failing in front of

the nature. The symbolism behind the theme *besmal*, in that sense, stresses the irrationality of the war and sacrificing of any human during the war.

In his novel, Dowlatabadi stresses the idea that suffering from wars is universal, and it does not differentiate between nationalities. The hostility between the two governments is represented through the separation of the "Ajam" from the "Arab". This political enmity vanishes at the war front when the Iranian soldier tries to soothe the thirsty Iraqi soldier:

"I told you the lioness was searching for us, I told you the lioness would find us. I told you that she feeds milk to the enemy captive as well. She does not differentiate between you and me and them, so just take care of yourself until she arrived. First, she has to attend the wounded, do you understand? Keep a grip on yourself. This is a battleground, a war zone, and you are a warrior! If you pull yourself together, I'll tell you how a human being can turn into a dove. A dove. A white dove."  
(Dowlatabadi 2014, 14).

Representing the soldiers as weak and representing their unrealistic imaginations during the war, thus stressing their turning mad, is an alteration of Dowlatabadi's literary style from the topics of the Sacred Defense Literature. In this scene, the thirsty soldiers are hallucinating. Although we do not understand which soldier is from which country, we can understand some implications through the words they use such as *atah* meaning thirsty in Arabic. This implication similarly deconstructs the biases and sacredness of a certain side because as the thirsty soldier implies, the animal would not discriminate the races or the sides. It would feed the both. The shift of the narrators is defined by the term "border" in the novel. In the beginning, the novel asserts that the narrative is happening in "somewhere on the planet" without specifying a place. However, it is a warzone. And, when the narrator changes, it changes by "on this side of border". This ambiguity is a support for the argument that both sides are experiencing the same atrocities. What is common for both sides is that the soldiers are awaiting for a savior. When the soldiers start hallucinating, they talk of the dove more. They believe that the dove will reach them and save them because it is *besmeled* or sacred somehow because it is an innocent animal. When they are waiting for the dove, they remember of Noah who is the savior of the animals during the Flood. However, they are slowly turning into mad. One of the soldiers sorts out words randomly such as "... a breathless dove... conquest... shroud... word... words... forgetfulness... mind... habit...flies..." (Dowlatabadi 2014, 80). This word of forgetfulness is a theme used many times in the novels because it reflects the idea that human beings are forgetful and do not take lessons from past pains.

#### 4. *DEFA'-E MOQADDAS* AND THE LITERARY CANONIZATION OF RESISTANCE IN IRAN

When the issue is literature, the readers need to acknowledge that Iranian modernism is a multiple-sided process, and it does not follow a linear timing in terms of political history. The meanings of notions change, and contemporary politics adapt to the timing of the interpretation of notions such as resistance. For that reason, we need to understand that our readings of texts as criticisms of authoritative states might have been already conditioned by Western conceptions in our minds. However, literature as an independent discourse itself can create non-Western, double mapped, and multiple readings by deconstructing the notions of "peripheral" and "central". In this sense, the notion of resistance gets a new meaning during the Iran-Iraq war and becomes an ideological toolkit of those who want to defend their countries against the invader powers. In the contemporary world, resistance gets another meaning for Iranian society thanks to the emergence of the axis of resistance which compromises the political collaboration among Iran, Syria, and Lebanon against the Israeli, Saudi and Western powers. Resulting from this ideology of resistance, new literature emerged in the 21st century with the poetry read to the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei.

Although this thesis does not focus on the literary close readings of the Sacred Defense literature examples, it focuses on the themes of resistance and the ways it can change for different ideologies. In a sense, this chapter is an introduction or contribution to the representations of resistance with different ideological goals, political ambitions, and changing meanings from resistance to oppressive governments to the contemporary Western politics in the Middle East. While the Sacred Defense literature is a canonization of war literature in Iran, it is institutionally promoted with the establishment of journals such as *the Journal of Sacred Defense Literature* by Shahed University in Iran. The emergence of this literary canon dates back to the Iran-Iraq War between 1980 and 1988. To be clear, the Sacred Defense literature employs the narratives of resistance to

the Iraqi invasion of Iran supported by Western powers. The narrative of these literary pieces is composed of experiences of the soldiers in the war zone and the citizens living under the war conditions (Nanquette 2021, 39). While the Sacred Defense canon is a state-sponsored literary endeavor, the reason that it is celebrated by the supporters of the Islamic Republic is that it, on the other hand, creates a national Iranian identity. Therefore, it would be wrong to say it is a mere state-backed struggle to empower the agents of the Islamic Republic and its bureaucracy. Shabnam J. Holliday explains how politics is shaped around the theme of resistance in her *Defining Iran: Politics of Resistance* (2011). She writes that identity discourse in Iran shifted from the Shah's nationalist *Iraniyat* to Ayatollah Khomeini's construction of *Islamiyat* as the national identity of Iran. Moreover, globalization was regarded as a threat to the Islamic identity of Iran, therefore, it was necessary to build a new identity through which the authenticity of the Islamic Republic would be unharmed. Moreover, Khomeini's belief that Islam was the only solution to Western imperialism accelerated Islam's role in the policy-making for the newly established republic. To justify this Islamic identity, the Islamic Republic wanted to universalize the Iran-Iraq War by attributing it the connotations of Islam fighting against pro-imperialist Arabism (Holliday 2011, 66)

In contemporary Iran, the Iran-Iraq War is one of the cornerstones of the making of Iranian identity. In "War and Resentment: Critical Reflections on the Legacies of the Iran-Iraq War" (2016) Kaveh Ehsani argues that the war eliminated the domestic dissidents of the newly established Islamic government such as the leftists, ethnic minorities, liberals, and even the other Islamic groups. For that reason, the representation of the war beginning in 1980 has been monopolized by the institutions of the Islamic government such as the Martyr's Foundation. The cultural productions of these projects created the frame of "Sacred Defense". Publishing houses got support from governmental institutions and accelerated the publications of war memoirs, oral history writings, and history studies (Ehsani 2016, 12). Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran and the usage of chemical weapons framed a collective resistance against the pan-Arab Iraqi invasion, thus spotting a period in Iranian historical consciousness. This historical consciousness has been maintained until the 21st century by promoting collective support for preventing the country from any kind of aggression and violence. To make this possible, the Sacred Defense declared the war not only against the Iraqi invasion. It was also a war between good and evil, Islam and disbelief, etc. Even Western influence was included in the definitions of this war as "soft war" <sup>1</sup> (Bajoghli 2018, 99). These entanglements of

---

<sup>1</sup>The Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei referred Western influence, and especially the US intervention in the politics of Iran when he used the term "soft war" in 2000.

the war with Iraq and Iran's politics regarding its relationships with the West later contributed to the emergence of resistance, *moqavemat*, as an ideology of Iranian existence framed by the Islamic government which blamed Western countries for supplying Iraq with the chemical weapons to be used against Iran.

In "Desacralizing a Sacred Defense: The Iran-Iraq War in the Fiction of Hossein Mortezaeian Abkenar" (2020), Amir Moosavi explicates the appearance of the Sacred Defense literature as a state-sponsored literary domain. He writes

"The Iran-Iraq War (1980-88) dominated the first decade of the Islamic Republic's existence. The war and its consequences have been the subject of myriad works of Persian literature that include poetry, memoirs, plays, and fiction, in addition to documentary and feature-length films, all of which started to appear shortly after the Iraqi invasion of Iranian territory in September 1980" (Moosavi 2020, 158).

Later, this literary domain would be referred to as the Sacred Defense literature. The main theme of this literary corpus was to reenact the Battle of Karbala and glorify the heroism of the Iranian soldiers. The authors of the Sacred Defense literature were supported by the Islamic Republic as the narration of religious and nationalist frame of war. This frame of war is shaped by Shi'i definitions of martyrdom through which the history of the Battle of Karbala is revisited, and the resistance to Western imperialism is rooted. Although Mahmoud Dowlatbadi rewrites the martyrdom as a controversial term and criticism of the government's imposition of martyrdom as a symbol of heroism, the literary value of the Sacred Defense literature is that it is a new turn in the modern history of Iran. It needs to be accounted for in the national literature-making process. To understand this making of national literature, we need to acknowledge that resistance has changed its direction with the emergence of the Sacred Defense Literature and its circulation and production in Iran.

In *Persian Literature as World Literature*, Abedinifard, Azadibougar and Vafa writes

"The restricted perspective on world literature is further exacerbated in a context where the political will to control the market and the publishing industry advocates censorship and already volatile system of literary production and consumption" (Abedinifard, Azadibougar, and Vafa 2021, 3).

To avoid the market definitions of world literary production, the changing meanings of notions should be appreciated and should not be monopolized by Western definitions, although the books that criticize the authoritarian Islamic Republic,

would sell more in the Western literary market. For that reason, resistance is a complex term because now it has changing meanings in Iranian society. Because Iranian society has been isolated since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the emerging Iranian literature takes a position in the world Literature domain through

"'transfictionality' and 'transmediality', and how the authors employ literature as a medium of expression to communicate with other world cultures by indicating the interconnectivity of textual interactions and transformation" (Abedinifard, Azadibougar, and Vafa 2021, 11).

For such communication, confronting the changing meanings of the notions in different cultures is essential for acknowledging how national literatures become visible. In the history of Iranian literature, there are certain literary figures who resisted the US-led definitions of literary classifications. Vafa addressed Simin Behbahani as the chief amongst them (Abedinifard, Azadibougar, and Vafa 2021, 11). He writes that Iranian authors came up against the Western typologies of "center" and the "periphery" through which literature becomes the domain of imperialism. When we consider literary resistance as a broad, sophisticated, and composite term, we recognize the Sacred Defense literature as a form of resistance literature as well. Asserting otherwise would jeopardize the theorizing of world literature, of the hegemonic Western definitions and claims.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Literature as a site of resistance through representational strategies becomes a political tool to tackle the obstacles of censorship or any kinds of oppression. Although censorship is not always officially imposed, the oppressive political discourse against some authors such as Dowlatabadi and Parsipur enables these authors to come up with their narrative styles through which they express the violent atmosphere that they are exposed. The modernist elements of the novels are reformers because they enhance the representational limits. While benefiting from modernist narrative techniques such as employment of stream of consciousness or narrator shifts, the Iranian literary corpus has had an authentic orientation towards a reconstruction of grand narratives of Iranian literature. For example, Daneshvar's novel is a modern re-creation of the Rostam and Sohrab epic. Daneshvar rewrites the story of Rostam and Sohrab through her resistant husband and his brother who wants to collaborate with the Western powers. Daneshvar's realist writing through her observations of the everyday life of a woman deconstructs Iranian history and focuses on the microcosmic representation of the Iranian macrocosm.

Such a critique of Iranian history and politics are dominant in the other pieces analyzed in this thesis. Although different means create different types of criticism, the common point is that the creativity of metaphor or metamorphoses as a theme enables the writers to at least confront the limits of censorship. *Gav*, for instance, is a gothic representation of poverty and governmental weaknesses to overcome societal and economic inequalities. However, narrating the Boluriha as a metaphysical existence enables Mehrjui to make a visual representation that aims at an indirect criticism through a mad man who is defined by his extreme relationship to an animal, a cow, which is not a desirable thing for society. In the end, Masht Hassan is psychologically corrupt and confuses himself to his cow. The members of the society makes empathy with Masht Hassan at the end because they understand that the existential crisis that Hassan goes through is a result of poverty, malnutrition which the others also suffer from. Masht Hassan's resignation from life is his way of

resisting the existential crisis that he is exposed to because he does not perceive his consciousness anymore, rather he believes himself to be an animal.

Similarly, the soldiers that turn mad in *Thirst* are also resisting the violence of the war. Through such writing of the Iran-Iraq war, Dowlatabadi scrutinizes the gaps between the experiences of the revolution and its afterlives. Moreover, Dowlatabadi does not portray the characters in *Thirst* regardless of their socioeconomic classes. By doing this, he reflects the existential fear and crisis as a non-race or religious feature because the text resists the narratives of separation via the political definition of the society through their nations or races. Dowlatabadi also quarrels with the Islamic connotations of martyrdom and deconstructs the image of a fearless Iranian soldier who is a patriot while the Iraqi soldier is a cruel creature. By portraying the soldiers from the two nations, he indicates that there is no difference between them if human beings are in brutal conditions. Last but not least, the subjectivities are always limited in all narratives. Zari's confinement to her house work and family responsibilities soothes when she involves in resistance against the Western imperialists that do not let her mourn for her husband. In a sense, she finds a way out of her limits by resisting those powers which deprive her of her right to make a decision. The other women characters are also trying to find ways in which they can make an alternative claim to their limited subjectivities as women under politically oppressive conditions which make their everyday lives even more miserable.

Having mentioned the textual purposes of the authors, it is necessary to understand that literary creations can impact the ways societies act and change. That's why censorship authorities tend to control what is written by dissident voices. As Talattof quotes from the story writer Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh from his preface to *Once Upon a Time*,

"Persian literature can change social conditions if it is made more accessible to the masses if it uses colloquial language and dialects, and if adapts new literary forms" (Talattof 2000, 53)

Through these lenses, it is necessary for modern Iranian literature to create ways of representing emerging sensibilities on the levels of imagination. Metaphors, for instance, are means of expressing ideological and political concerns. Thanks to the metaphors, Iranian literary circles grasp their own way of modernity by reconstructing historical, aesthetic, and political codes. These codes might change through time and massive social changes as revolutions, thus changing the meanings of notions. Therefore, the emergence of the Sacred Defense literature is a reconstitution of the theme of resistance so that different subjects and political agents can benefit from the same notion in favor of their political ambitions.



From the interpretation of literary metamorphosis, the readers might achieve the conclusion that revolution was a possibility for other ways of existing for the Iranian identity. It would be naive to assume that the Iranian Islamic Revolution was a result of a sudden, unplanned, or unimagined one because the modern literature of Iran signifies the demands and wishes for the change, metamorphosis, and self-realizing of a better future and for other means of existing in the world without the atrocities of political ambiguities, individual anxieties or even economic concerns. Future research on the signs of the emergence of revolution in modern Iranian literature would be a valuable study. In a sense, the Sacred Defense project and its literature are almost justifications for the revolution for the political authorities of Iran, although the dissidents accept it as a political propaganda tool. This thesis also has indicated that literature is such a powerful field that it can convert meanings to totally different ones, thus making them available to people of dissident ideologies and goals.

Having interpreted the metaphorical representations of trauma in modern Iranian novels and short novellas, a future research questions arises. Is it possible that there might be a broader or brand new literary notion that represents the layers of resistance in the form of objection against politically oppressive atmospheres? Might a novel and recent theory or literary trope arise as a form of literary writing technique itself? This trope might be in the disguise of supporting the dominant ideologies but deconstructing it on its roots? One example is magical realism as a generic writing technique or canon itself. There might be others forms of such writings in the future, however, discovering such a trope is empirical and requires writing techniques confronting each other. Such a new trope can be specific to Iranian literature or even any other literatures from the world. For example, resistance as a notion is self-revealing, and it connotes the objective manners against oppressive powers in any kind. While resistance is changing forms and becoming a tool for nationalistic discourses, as in the example of Sacred Defense project, metaphorical representations can go beyond the allegorical, thus taking stylistically several forms. Because contemporary Iranian literature forms a canon itself by giving different meanings to resistance, a future research on whether Iranian literature gives several other forms of expression in refreshed models of metaphors would be valuable and intriguing because literature is an ever expanding field itself.

As another future research question on this subject, it is valuable to ask which masterpieces from the Iranian literature can be examples of such resistances in a general sense. Or, through which diverse lenses we can analyze the same pieces that are analyzed in this thesis? For example, analyzing Daneshvar's novels and short stories through the lenses of subaltern subjects would be valuable. Roya Khoshnevis

has an article analyzing subalterity in Simin Daneshvar's literary pieces, however, the discussion needs to be introduced further by several other researchers. Khoshnevis discusses subalterity through the theme of woman as author and intellectual. A further discussion would be enlarging the theme to the minorities in Iranian society regardless of the chronology of Iran as pre- and post-revolutionary. In this thesis, what could be further studied is exactly this interpretation of the minorities and their voices in Iranian literature in terms of their resistant acts. In this thesis, resistance is discussed in light of the bare life theory, and an advanced discussion on these literary pieces can be about the subaltern subjects in these literary works.

Subaltern subjects do not have to be the oppressed or the minorities always, for instance, colonel's daughter in Dowlatabadi's novel, who is not given a chance for a proper burial, is also the subaltern of the novel because she is dead, and her body is dehumanized. She is not allowed to claim her dignity even when she is dead. Therefore, any political deaths can be indications of the bodies as subalterns. As this thesis aims to discover the latent discussions of resistance in Iranian literature, the representation of anybody or even any animal in this literature of Iran would contribute to the discussions of existing as dispossessed subjects in the society. As these subjects resist just by being or existing, the reactions or precautions against them by the political authorities or political ideologies would reveal what kind of exclusion policies are carried out against them and what can these subjects do against their dispossession.

Although this thesis focuses on a specific theme in Iranian literature only, it is mindful of global theories of literature. Therefore, it is valuable to question whether there are pieces of literature that Iranian literature carries similarities in terms of resistance or any other subjects. Also, the examples of literary canonizations from the world similar to the Sacred Defense Literature are significant to figure out the nature of the resistance. Such a comparison would reveal a lot about the nature of resistance as an independent phenomenon itself because it does not only tell about the literary representations of resistance but also about the ways how resistance shapes the literature itself.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abedinifard, Mostafa, Omid Azadibougar, and Amirhossein Vafa. 2021. *Persian Literature as World Literature*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Assmann, Jan. 1995. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." *Cultural History/Cultural Studies* 65(1): 125–139.
- Bajoghli, Narges. 2018. "The Outcasts: The Start of 'New Entertainment' in Pro-Regime Filmmaking in the Islamic Republic of Iran." In *Debating the Iran-Iraq War in Contemporary Iran*, ed. Narges Bajoghli, and Amir Moosavi. Routledge pp. 94–122.
- Butler, Judith. 2004. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London and New York: Verso.
- Dabashi, Hamid. 2001. *Close Up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present and Future*. UK: Verso.
- Dabashi, Hamid. 2007. *Masters and Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema*. Mage Publishers.
- Dabashi, Hamid. 2012. *Corpus Anarchicum: Political Protest, Suicidal Violence, and the Making of the Posthuman Body*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dabashi, Hamid. 2016. *Iran: the Rebirth of a Nation*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Daneshvar, Simin. 1969. *A Persian Requiem*. London: Peter Halban.
- Dowlatabadi, Mahmoud. 2011. *The Colonel*. London: Haus Publishing.
- Dowlatabadi, Mahmoud. 2014. *Thirst*. London: Haud Publishing.
- Ehsani, Kaveh. 2016. "War and Resentment: Critical Reflections on the Legacies of the Iran-Iraq War." *Middle East Critique* 26(1): 5–24.
- Elahi, Babak. 2018. "Iranian Condition: Metaphors of Illness in Iranian Fiction and Film." *Iran Namag* 3(2): 18–41.
- Esmailpour, Naghmeh. 2021. "Globalization in Pre- and Postrevolutionary Iranian Literature: A Comparative Study of Authors inside and outside Iran." In *Persian Literature as World Literature*, ed. Mostafa Abedinifard, Omid Azadibougar, and Amirhossein Vafa. Bloomsbury Academic pp. 51–69.
- Foucault, M. 2001. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. UK: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. 2003. *The Birth of the Clinic*. London: Routledge.
- Harlow, Barbara. 1987. *Resistance Literature*. New York: Methuen.

- Holliday, Shabnam. 2011. *Defining Iran: Politics of Resistance*. Ashgate.
- Irzik, Sibel. 2013. "Yaşar Kemal's Island of Resistance." In *Resistance in Contemporary Middle Eastern Cultures Literature, Cinema and Music*, ed. Karima Laachir, and Saeed Talajooy. Routledge pp. 49–64.
- Khadem, Seyed Amir. 2017. *Endemic Pains and Pandemic Traumas: The Narrative Construction of Public Memory in Iran, Palestine, and the United States* PhD thesis University of Alberta.
- Korey, Leigh. 2018. *Aging Bodies, Hairy Bodies, Barely Human Bodies: Three Essays on Contemporary Iranian Literature* PhD thesis The University of Michigan.
- Langford, M. 2019. *Allegory in Iranian Aesthetics of Poetry and Resistance*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Mbembé, J.-A., and Libby Meintjes. 2003. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture* 15(1): 11–40.
- Milani, Farzaneh. 1985. "Power, Prudence and Print: Censorship and Simin Daneshvar." *Iranian Studies* 18(2/4): 325–347.
- Milani, Farzaneh. 2011. *Words, Not Swords: Iranian Women Writers and the Freedom of Movement*. USA: Syracuse University Press.
- Moosavi, Amir. 2020. "Desacralizing a Sacred Defense: The Iran-Iraq War in the Fiction of Hossein Mortezaeian Abkenar." *Iran Namag* 5(3): 158–175.
- Moosavi, Amir, and Narges Bajoghli. 2018. *Debating the Iran-Iraq War in Contemporary Iran*. New York: Routledge.
- Naficy, Hamid. 2011. *A Social History of Iranian Cinema: The Artisanal Era, 1897-1941*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Najmabadi, Afsaneh. 2005. *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*. University of California Press.
- Nanquette, Laetitia. 2021. *Iranian Literature after the Islamic Revolution: Production and Circulation in Iran and the World*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Parsipur, Shahrnush. 1989. *Women without Men*. Syracuse University Press.
- Parvin, Paidar. 2007. "Feminism and Islam in Iran." In *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspective*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti. I.B.Tauris pp. 51–69.
- Patterdale, Tom. 2011. "Introduction." In *Colonel*. London: Haus Publishing.
- Quayson, Ato. 2006. "Fecundities of the Unexpected: Magical Realism, Narrative, and History." In *The Novel: History, Geography and Culture*, ed. Franco Moretti. Princeton University Press pp. 726–759.

- Rahimieh, Nasrin, and Sharareh Frouzesh. 2012. *Articulations of Resistance in Modern Persian Literature*. New York: Routledge.
- Shams, Fatemeh. 2021. *A Revolution in Rhyme: Poetic Co-option under the Islamic Republic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Talajooy, Saeed, and Karima Laachir. 2013. *Resistance in Contemporary Middle Eastern Cultures*. New York: Routledge.
- Talattof, Kamran. 1997. "Iranian Women's Literature: From Pre-Revolutionary Social Discourse to Post-Revolutionary Feminism." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29(4): 531–558.
- Talattof, Kamran. 2000. *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Tavakoli-Targhi, Mohamad. 2015. "From Jinns to Germs: A Genealogy of Pasteurian Islam." *Iran Nameh* 30(3): IV–XIX.