Behrouz Alikhani

[Popular War Songs and Slogans in the Persian Language during the Iran-Iraq War]

Abstrac: Some languages, emblematically, represent in a symbolic way the world of experience of people who are exposed to strong external constraints, especially in times of crisis. This analysis, focusing on the material produced during the yearsof the Iran–Iraq War (from September 1980 to August 1988), serves an example to demonstrate how it is possible to study such kinds of social habitus based on the self- and world-images of people involved, represented through their shared means of communication and orientation.

Keywords: Social habitus, Symbol, Language, Slogans, Popular war songs.

The Iran–Iraq War lasted from September 1980 to August 1988. The economic, political and social fallout was immense. At least half a million people died, and upper estimates stretch this figure to 1.5 million.[1] The war began when Iraq invaded Iran both by air and by land on September 22nd, 1980. It was followed by a long history of border disputes over the Shat al-Arab, the waterway which forms the boundary between the two countries. Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party in Iraq was motivated by fears that the Revolution in Iran in 1979 would inspire insurgency among Iraq's long-suppressed Shia majority. They also desired to replace Iran as the dominant state in the Persian Gulf thereby gaining the attention of USA and other Western nations[2]. The Iraqi military offensive was initially successful, capturing the port city of Khorramshahr by the end of 1980. The question of how to react to this invasion triggered severe power struggles between different revolutionary groups in Iran. The Islamist groups gathered round Ayatollah Khomeini eliminated their rivals in the course of this war, which increased Khomeini's «power chances»[3] and allowed him to consolidate and stabilize his leadership[4]. By 1982, Iranian forces regained the territories they had lost and pushed across the border into Iraq. Iran rejected Iraq's offer of a ceasefire. Although Saddam Hussein had started the war, it was Khomeini who prolonged it (Bulloch and Morris 1989: 147).

The decision to invade Iraq was taken after much debate among the Islamists in the Islamic Republic. According

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1 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4260420.stm

2 US diplomatic relations with Iraq had been severed shortly after the 1967 Arab-Israeli Six-Day War. A decade later, following a series of major political developments – especially after the Iranian Revolution and the seizure of embassy staff in the 1979 Iran hostage crisis – President Carter ordered a review of American policy toward Iraq.

3 The process sociological term «power chance» elicits like another related term «power ratio» more precisely the relationship and the balance which this term should represent symbolically. Thus, I try to avoid reified and static terms like «power» (see Elias 1987: 117 in more detail).

4 Many political analysts like Gary G. Sick who served on the U.S. National Security Council under Presidents Ford, Carter, and Reagan recognise a connection between this consolidation of power and the Iran-Iraq War. In Sick's view, Saddam Hussein may have saved the Iranian revolutionary regime by silencing the opposition, rallying the military, and forcing the clerical leadership to organize itself: (http://www.iranwatch.org/government/US/Congress/Hearings/hirc-021605/us-hirc-sick-prepared-021605.htm) Ayatollah Khomeini himself described this war as "God's hidden gift" (see Moin 2000: 251). This is a clear example of how the inter-state and intra-state power struggles are connected to each other.

to one faction of Islamists since all Iranian soil had been liberated the Iraqi ceasefire should be accepted rather than embarking upon an invasion that was likely to take a heavy toll on Iran's youth, with uncertain prospects of victory. On the other side, a hardliner faction favoured continuing the war until the Ba'ath regime was overthrown. The charismatic leader of the Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, again sided with the hardliners (Karsh 2002: 38). The War transformed the nature of the Islamic Republic from a revolutionary to a military regime. On 21st of June 1982, Khomeini proclaimed in a speech that Iran would invade Iraq and would not stop until an Islamic Shia republic was established in that country. He said, «This is not a war for territory; this is a war between Islam and blasphemy» (ibid.: 36).

Human wave attacks

Under the slogans «War, War until Victory», «War, War until the Removal of Intrigue from the Whole World» and «The Road to Jerusalem Goes through Karbala» a significant number of the Iranian youth were mobilized to go to the front (Abrahamian, 2008: 171). By encouraging heroism among these volunteers, suicidal 'human wave attacks' were launched on Iraqi positions. The volunteers were inspired to prepare for battle by tales of Ashura, the Battle of Karbala, and the supreme glory of martyrdom (Majd 2008: 146)[5]. Such attacks caused Iran massive casualties, as they were met with fierce resistance from Iraqi defensive positions, along with artillery and rocket fire. During the course of 1983, the Iranians launched five major assaults along the front lines. None of the attacks led to substantial success as the Iranians staged massive 'human wave attacks' on well-dug Iraqi positions without artillery, air or armoured support (Brogan 1989: 260-265). Still, Khomeini's position on a truce remained unchanged.

One way to gain access to the social habitus of these young volunteers is to study popular songs and slogans which evoked a very strong emotional reaction. Without these shared «patterns of behaviour and feeling» (Elias 1996: 270) of the volunteers – in other words their social habitus – even the charismatic leader of the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, would not have been able to mobilise them easily for his political purposes. In this paper, I analyse the content of the songs from the most popular war-singers among the volunteers, as well as the official slogans. I divide the songs into two categories: defensive and offensive. All songs can be found in an archive of *The Islamic Propagation Organization* at its homepage[6]. The content of war songs from singers like Mohamad Reza Golriz that emerged at the beginning of the war and during the defensive period was more patriotic than religious. After regaining the lost territories and invading Iraq, however, the content of such songs changed. During the offensive war, the content of the songs became more religious. The Nohe music genre, which has been used by Shia Muslims to express their sorrow for their martyred holy Imams, increasingly replaced other genres of song during the war.

Defensive war songs

In order to show the direction of changes in war songs over the course of the Iran-Iraq War, I am first going to introduce the more patriotic and defensive war songs of singers like Hesam-Aldin Seraj, Mohamad Golriz and Jamshid Najafi. Seraj's song, *Stand Up, It Is the Time of a Journey*, *(Mp3-file no.1)* is about the necessity of defence for the country. He sings:

> It is the time of a journey. We are running out of time. Stand up! The call of the leader is coming. You should give up harmony and pack. It is a disgrace to flee from the battleground and relax. It is a shame to have aliens in our land. We got the order to reclaim our home from the enemy. We should respond to our master [meaning Khomeini]. The master is exceptional: you should trust him. Khorramshahr is a very mystical city with holy features. We wrote the

5 The Shia concept of Martyrdom has been shaped by the deaths of the early martyrs of the Shia faith, Imam Ali and Imam Hussain, and Iranian society and government have further shaped the understanding of martyrdom in the modern age.

6 http://english.tebyan.net/newindex.aspx?pid=155006

story of love with our blood.

In the song, *Red Tulip Petals*, *(mp3-file no. 2)* Seraj sings about the blood of purified people who would be willing to lose their life in the path of love. Again, the leader plays a very important role. His orders should be unanimously followed and everyone is indebted to him. In his song the homeland becomes personified as a woman. The homeland is said to have a skirt full of blood. By personifying the homeland and describing it as impure, Saraj implies that it is the peoples' duty to rid the homeland of blood, thus ridding the homeland of the enemy. In Farsi, 'homeland' is not masculine as it is in German, but feminine. The expression 'to be raped' (*tajâvoz shodan*) is also used when talking about an attack on the motherland.

Praising the role of the leader for his commitment to the homeland in the songs of Mohamad Golriz is also very prominent. In his song, *This Victory is Blessed*, *(mp3-file no. 3)* he congratulates Ayatollah Khomeini for defeating the enemy. Khomeini is described as the protector of the homeland, especially in times of crisis. In the song, *My Leader has Come*, *(mp3-file no.4)* he threatens his enemy and praises the leader strongly:

> If you cause a lot of blood in my country, O my enemy you should know that it will grow a lot of flowers in my garden. If you burn my body, shoot me, cut off my head, O my enemy how can you take the love between me and my homeland? I am an Iranian, Martyrdom is my desire, and my death is the focal point of the universe. I am free; I am from the place of the free people. Waiting is a part of my identity. No capitulation, no compromise, no respect and no request. My body will attack your ruse. Now, the flow of people is coming like a stormy sea and I am full of anger. My star, my leader has come. It is spring and it is time to pick flowers.

Praising the army and revolutionary guards is another topic of these songs. The song, *Pilots, Sailors*, *(mp3-file no. 5)* became one of the most emotionally influential songs of this time. Jamshid Najafi characterised the pilots as the hope of all Iranians who are fighting in a battle between right and wrong. He sings:

> The Iranian army has attacked the enemy from the ground and from the sky. Fly: Angels and Allah might help you. You are the pride of Iran. You have a special place in heaven. You are like butterflies circling around the light [the light is Khomaini, Islam, etc.].

Another patriotic song by Gholam Kovaitipour emerged following Khorramshahr's recapture after nearly two years. It was dedicated to General Mohamad Jahanara who was killed in a battle to recapture this city. In contrast to other war songs, the song, *Mamad, You Were Not There to See*, *(mp3-file no.6)* is not militaristic and speaks about life, this mortal world and the rebuilding of the city. The song does not denote any sign of a will to seek revenge. However, this was the last song of this kind after the war changed its course from a defensive to an offensive one:

> Mamad, you were not there to see, the city was freed. The blood of your brothers was not wasted and it brought good results. Oh God, where is Jahanara, the person who is the light of our tearful eyes. Oh tree that is dipped in blood, a tear of happiness like my tear spread the news of freedom. Aid the land of our friends and brothers. Water the green field of happiness. Even though the burning tree has lost all of its leaves, some day soon, it will bring fruit for us again. The taste of victory was sweet like a date. The ship and myself, the fish and the sea. Mamad, you were not there to see, the tears of the rain watered the flowers of the land, the land of our countrymen. Abadan [the City next to Khoramshahr] is safe again even though it was invaded and destroyed. Now the lands of our friends and countrymen are full of flowers and hope.

Offensive war songs

Gholam Kovaitipour and Sadegh Ahangaran are by far the most popular war-singers in the period of the six year offensive war against Iraq. The songs of Ahangaran are full of images which are reminiscent of the battle of Karbala that took place about fourteen centuries ago. During this battle, Imam Hussain, the second Shia Imam, was killed and beheaded in the plain Karbala which is located in the present-day Iraq. In the songs of these two singers the city of Karbala plays a very crucial role. Both say that the shrine of Imam Hussein in this city should be liberated from the rule of the infidel Ba'athists. Thus, they justify the offensive war in a very mystical and religious way. In the song, *Towards the Kaaba of Hearts*, (*mp3-file no. 7*) Kovaitipour sings about the starting of a new attack to reach the mausoleum of the master. The path to Karbala is equated with the path of prophets. Khomeini, the commander in chief, is characterized as the soul of God. Starting from this period of the war the operations were named after Karbala, such as *Karbala Two*, *Three*, *Four*, and so on.

In the song, *It is the Time of Battle*, (*video-file no. 8*) Kovaitipour described «warriors»[7] as the supporters of God. They are encouraged to sacrifice their lives bravely for the path of the master, and to remove the enemy from the master's grave. They should build a nice place for meeting their leader in Karbala. Imam Hussein would be waiting to embrace them. In the song, *O Mahdi, the Owner of the Time*[8], (*mp3-file no. 9*) he sings:

> We are prepared until the removing of the conspiracy of the world. O Mahdi, the owner of the time we are cheerfully ready! We would sacrifice our lives for the orders of the leader. We are going to fight his enemies bloodily. No matter at what time and in which place, we are ready.

Sadegh Ahangaran, nicknamed «the canary bird of Khomaini» due to his close connection to him, sang the most popular songs of this period in the Nohe genre. The path of Khomeini was propagated in his songs as the path of Imam Hussein. Khomeini is perceived as the skipper of Islam's ship. Therefore, nobody should be worried about the direction of this ship. He chose the slogan, «the Road to Conquer Jerusalem Passes through the Land of Karbala» as the title for one of his popular songs (*mp3-file no. 10*). He tried to motivate volunteers to attack Iraqi territory and went regularly to the front to sing for young volunteers. In the song, *I Have Heard your Request for Support*, (*mp3-file no. 11*) he encouraged «warriors» to join «the Caravan of Karbala». He often employed strong imagery of Ashura, the time of the death of Imam Hussein, to draw similarities between these two battles. In all of his songs, to be martyred is depicted as a reward. This mortal world is described as a prison which can only be escaped through martyrdom making one feel that he should be worthy of going to the war and becoming a martyr. Such a person would be considered to have been chosen by God because he is so good that God wants to have him next to himself. This kind of death is an ascent (*oruj*). In his song, *O Troops of the Owner of the Time*, (*video-file no. 12*) he calls for a war without any mercy:

> O army of the Hidden Imam, get ready! Get ready! O warriors get ready to give your lives. Now, it is the time of courage. O army of Khomeini the hour of martyrdom has arrived. See how the forces of Islam stretch to infinity. To throw the enemy back: get ready! Get ready! You lovers! You believers! Get ready! Get ready!

Packing and getting ready to go to Karbala is one of the most frequent subjects in Ahangaran's songs. In the song, *Everybody Who Would Like to See Karbala, There You Go*, (*video-file no. 13*) Karbala is described as the place of God's lover. In the song, *We Are Going to the Place of Lovers*, (*video-file no. 14*) going towards Karbala is the same as going towards God. God's love is what will absorb the people and bring them towards Karbala. He explains:

> We have become like angels and are free from all restraints. We are always attached to the endless kindness of God. We are separated from each kind of 'I' and 'We', we joined the friend. To rescue Jerusalem we are going with love and will.

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7 That is a self-designation.

8 Mahdi, the so-called "hidden Imam", is the twelfth Imam descended from the Prophet Mohammad. The twelfth imam Shiites await his return. They believe he will reappear in the end times and then in the final battle between good and evil he will bring justice as payment for his martyred ancestor, Hussein.

Utilizing volunteers to repeat all of the parts of the song after him is one of the characteristics of Ahangaran's method that helps to the internalization of the message of self-sacrifice in favour of an overriding principle.

War slogans

War slogans created during the Iran-Iraq War had more or less the same content as the war songs. They are very simple and memorable statements which seek to convey a very strong message. These kinds of slogans are, like the songs, very metaphorical. This is illustrated by the blood of the martyrs in the slogan 'the message of the blood of martyred: Answer to Khomeini'. Martyrdom is a term often used in these slogans:

- Martyrdom is like being embraced by one's mother

- To be martyred is like drinking a juice

- The blood of martyrs is crucial to water the tree of Islam against the blind hearts of hypocrites (monafeghin-e kurdel).

- Martyrdom is a mission

- Martyrs should be taken as role models

- Red death is preferred to a disgraceful and temporary life

- Martyrdom is a choice and not an accident

- Martyrdom is a test

- The last blood drops should be shed to rescue Islam

The front and the trench are other themes of these slogans. The front is described as the front of light and the right against wrong:

- Going to the front is a divine duty

- The front is the place of purity and honesty

- The front is the Islamic university

- The front is the university of self-education

- In the front, one will learn the lesson of readiness to make sacrifices and selflessness.

These slogans were supposed to be seen everywhere in the cities and at the frontlines. They were also written on the headband of the volunteers which were specially carried on operations. The content of such slogans were as follows:

- We never let ourselves be humiliated

- Lover of Hussein, the soldiers of Khomeini

- I have come to make from Karkhe River a sea from my blood

- With the order of the master I give up this life

- I am joining Karbala

- I am a proud warrior for Khomeini

- *Pilgrims of Karbala / Passenger of Karbala*

- *Respond to Khomeini*

- *O' martyr*

- *Listening to the Master of Martyrs*

- *All days are Ashura, everywhere is Karbala*

- *A short way to Karbala / The next station Karbala*

- *Hussein, Hussein is our slogan, martyrdom is our honor.*

- *This battle is the Battle of Karbala*

– *Victory of blood over the sword*

– *Melted in supreme leadership*

Some theoretical implications

Such language symbolically represents the world of experience of people who are exposed to strong external constraints, especially in times of crisis. The degree of self-regulation by the affected is very low and their conscience is less autonomous and more dependent on orientation through different authority instances. Accordingly, the balance between We- and I-Identity is strongly in favour of We-Identity (see Elias N. 2001: 155ff.). The lack of foresight or a long-term view and can be recognised by the steering of conduct of these volunteers (see Elias 2009: 416). It seems that the "affect control" is strongly available by the people involved, but this is less all-embracing, even, and stable (see: Elias 1986: S. 384). Strict obedience to external authorities in a hierarchically structured relationship goes hand in hand with exercising violence towards themselves and towards others. The use of violence towards individuals and groups perceived as enemies serves as a «self-regulation principle of their self-esteem relationships» (see: Gholamasad 2006: 53) as the former oppressed outsiders. The ideal individual should only pursue duties and not rights. The expression, «to be melted in supreme leadership» (*zob-e dar velâyat*) refers, for instance, to the low degree of individuality of volunteers during the Iran-Iraq War. This social habitus is characteristic of a strong emotional need to be connected with a powerful source in order to be able to maintain the familiar self-esteem scheme. In this respect, one can recognize structural similarities between such patterns of conduct and sentiment among human beings in different societies beyond their level of development. From a process sociological perspective, the social habitus of those concerned differ more in regard to their forms than in their structures[9]. The reason or justification for self-sacrifice could vary from more fantasy-oriented religious belief systems to those of more secular-oriented belief systems. There could be a number of explanations for these kinds of self-sacrifices such as ethnicity, nation, religion, or even social class. This analysis serves an example to demonstrate how it is possible to study such kinds of social habitus based on the self- and world-images of people involved, represented through their shared means of communication and orientation. Further comparative studies could help to understand and explain the real structure of such social habitus in different societies in a manner more congruent to reality.

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9 I have previously compared processes of "institutional de-democratisation" in different societies at different stages of development. Although one can see great form differences between these processes in Germany (1918-1933), France (1848-1852) and Iran (1906-1925), structural similarities between them are very easy to recognise (see Alikhani, 2012).

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