Bagh-e Nazar باغ نظر

Bagh- e Nazar, 16 (73):5-16 /Jul. 2019
DOI: 10.22034/bagh.2019.149735.3784

The Discourse Analysis of 'the Holy Defence' Paintings during Wartime (in Comparison with Soviet War Paintings)*

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Received 2018/10/04 revised 2018/11/27 accepted 2018/12/23 available online 2019/06/22

Abstract

Problem Statement: The Art of 'the Holy Defence' has been the official trend of Iranian art for the better part of a decade. This art has been a very clear cut materialisation of such discourse that had once been constructed around Iran-Iraq War, commonly known as the Holy Defence discourse. a discourse although surrounded an actual war taking place in an actual time and space yet by no means stayed within its limits and furthermore demonstrated a certain mode of thought that went beyond the military struggles of the given era.

Aims: This investigation aims to scrutinize the question of the fundamental elements of such discourse and how its elements integrated into the Holy Defence Art during Wartime.

Methodology: The present investigation is a descriptive analytic study that uses books, catalogues, magazines and websites as its main ways of access to the artworks. Having the general theory of the mentioned discourse discussed and the main jargon of this theory defined, the six key elements of this discourse, namely the insiders, the enemy, the fight, the victory, the defeat and the woman, that are the frequent elements of the artistic discourse of the war, have been thoroughly examined.

Conclusion: Having the discourse elements of this art studied and compared with another discourse formation of war painting, namely the Soviet Art, the unique way of articulation of such elements in the Holy Defence Painting Discourse is another aim of this study to undertake. This study also intends to look through the decisive role of spirituality in the formation of such discourse and concludes the Holy Defence Discourse Was not just dealing with Iran-Iraq war but it was representing much larger strives which were not confined within the limits of war fronts and military struggles.

Keywords: *The Holy Defence Painting, The War Art, Discourse Analysis, The Iran-Iraq War.*

* This paper is derived from the Ph.D. thesis of Mohamadreza Rabiee Poursalimi entitled "An investigation into the variety of representations of people in socio-political paintings of Iran in 1970s and 1980s", supervised by Dr. Kamran Afshar Mohajer at Art University of Tehran in 2019.

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Introduction

As the rumble of discontent grew louder during 1978 that led to the Islamic Revolution, new attitudes were also rising on various cultural and artistic ; tendencies that sought the same goals as the heterogeneous revolutionaries did. the goal was simple: Pahlavi must go. Painting, however, had a particular place. In the pre-revolutionary Iran that any open objection to the regime was rather impossible, the responsibility of objection and opposition had partly fallen upon the art that was able to give the pressures a wide berth. artists like Ayub Emdadian, Samila Amirebrahimi, Hanibal alkhas, Nosratollah Moslemian, Hossein Khosrojerdi, Morteza Katuzian, Bahram Dabiri, Sirus Moghaddam and Nilufar Ghaderinejad pioneered such art. they were mostly young artists and under the influence of socialism, who assumed the responsibility of speaking against the tyranny of the rulers and inflaming the fight. The very advent of the revolution in 1979 did not have many immediate effects upon the hegemonic trend of the Iranian socio-political paintings. the very combatant art of the pre-revolutionary era lived on only with more multiplicity and vastness than before, still keeping the oppression of Shah's regime as the main theme. The turning point in the socio-political paintings of Iran, however, came about in 1980 when the war broke out. The religious painters who were actively present in the social scene since the revolution evolved a new trend with new energy and new ideas during wartime. Painters like Kazem Chalipa, Iraj Eskandari, Naser Palangi, Habibollah Sadeqi, Hossein Khosrojerdi, Mostafa Gudarzi, Morteza Asadi and Abdolhamid Ghadirian singled out the religious elements and created a new style of painting in the context of the war that grew to receive the title of the Holy Defence Painting. This new painting although bore a certain resemblance to the revolutionary-era painting, yet it cultivated new elements too and caused a new use of the pre-existing elements that turned a new page on the history of the Iranian contemporary painting. The main business of the Holy Defence Painting was no longer to demonstrate the tyranny of the monarchy and to preach subversion. It was more of an expression of some new spirituality that was born with the Islamic Revolution and this art had taken over the task to establish and preserve such spirituality in a positive fashion. (Aleali, 2012) This painting was boldly present in the wartime society: whether it was the walls of the houses or the pages of the books or mosques or roads, all were platforms for this art to be presented and circulated in a very large scale.

The present study attempts to provide an answer to the question of what the Holy Defence Painting spoke of and how the formation of its visual elements was integrated into this painting and how the ideological message procured a visual expression. This study aims to deal with the matter of how the Holy Defence painters turned a reality such as the war with all its miscellaneous features into a consistent visual discourse, shaped as painting, and what details they brought out and what they preferred to ignore.

This study first makes use of structuralism to explain the procedures during which the meaning is engendered within the social context and then tackles the question of how such procedures could be analysed using the discourse theory. The theoretical grounds of this claim that the meaning could be produced through discourses and texts is explained as well as the problem of how the discourse, by defining the central signifier(s) and investigating into the articulation of other parts of the discourse around such signifier(s), could be analysed as a consistent whole.

Having the theoretical bases defined, this study also explains what artworks have been selected as the case study and why. Through investigating the artworks and categorising them, this study also intends to identify the central signifiers around which the discourse of the Holy Defence painting has been structuralised and to analyse the ways of cooperation between such signifiers and the more marginal ones. Finally, the results will delineate an overall landscape of the discourse the Holy Defence painting generates.

The Earlier Studies

There are not many studies concerning the discourse analysis of the Holy Defence painting. most of the

literature around this art deal with the political aspects or have tried to locate its origins. Sara Aleali's study (2012), 'An investigation into discursive changes in political – social paintings in Islamic revolution and post – revolution eras in Iran during the years 1978 to 1989', is an exception that deals with the discourse of the paintings of the era in question too. The study investigates what and how the discourse of the political painting of the late revolutionary era evolves into the war era. In this study, Aleali discusses how the criticising and revolutionary art of the late 70s grew to the solidifying art of the ruling class during the 80s and contemplates the effective factors in such a transition. Another research that tackles such question is 'a study of the influence of ideology and political thinking on the use of visual elements in the paintings of the Islamic Revolution' by Morteza Asadi and Ahmad Nadalian (2012). they have undertaken the task to illustrate how the artists' ideological affiliations have affected their choices of symbols in their art. they have done so by analysing the works of both religious and dissident artists. They have also endeavoured to identify and discuss the visual sources that have been influential over the political-artistic trends.

Theoretical Basis

- **Discourse**

The idea of discourse that has widely been in use within the contemporary humanities has drifted to the human studies from the area of linguistics. Ferdinand De Saussure, the Swiss linguistic, noticed, through his historical examinations of linguistics, that different languages generate different images of the reality. He realized that the meaning in the language, far more than a simple reference from a linguistic structure to the outside world, has risen from internal relations of the language's constituents inter se. This trait that Saussure calls 'the distinctive aspect of language structure' means that the language is not a translucent crystal clear instrument for expressing whatever already exists, but is a certain system with the capacity of change and substitution that should perceive the self and the world. In other words, each language displays the world in its own way based on its capacities (Culler, 2011).

This new understanding of the language soon transcended from the linguistics to the social sciences. If all manners of language were not merely equal representations of the outside reality but the different and autonomous systems of meanings that would not embrace the whole of the outside reality, then the notion of ideology becomes obsolete. Ideological knowledge has always been construed as the act of distorting the outside world and the aim to counter it was to reach a scientific understanding of the world as it was, distortion-free, that is to say, the world construed as it abided without the distortion of ideological language. In fact, to assert the idea of discourse requires all fashions of speech about the world to be distortive towards the world. As Milles (2009: 13) postulates, ideology then loses its meaning and 'the discourse establishes a way of organizing or representing the experience, that is the ideology in its neutral meaning destitute of all negative implications.' The substitution of the idea of discourse for the dichotomy of the scientific vs. ideological recognition triggers enormous after-effects. Arguing the process in which the subject was constructed, Louis Althusser had emphasized on the ways in which ideology engendered the subjects by the means of addressing them. He argued that by setting up a cognitive (and deceptive as he believes) system ideology predefined man's capability of action and they would do whatever their ideological understanding allowed them to do (Althusser, 2009). According to Althusser, to carry out the liberating action one might be in dire need of a non-ideological and scientific knowledge of the social world, because it is the very knowledge that constructs our potentials for action and the right actions seem to be impossible without any right scientific knowledge. The substitution of the idea of discourse for the dichotomy of ideological vs. scientific knowledge gave way to two greater aftermaths. First, any system of meaning is, inevitably and due to the essence of the language, a certain way of representation and no discourse takes precedence over the others in the sense

of being closer to the reality. The second outcome was that the expiration of the dichotomy of scientific vs. ideological knowledge brought the critiques of ideology and the struggles for achieving a scientific truth to a halt. The widespread belief in the linguistic discourses per se generated a new task for critical studies. admitting that 'language is not merely a channel through which we share the information of our psychological and behavioural status or the realities of the outside world but on the contrary, a system that creates and constructs the social world and engenders social identities and social relations,' (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2011: 30) raised language to the place of a system that created power. In other words, 'the change in discourse is a way of change in the world. The strife in the discourse level causes change and reproduction of social reality' (Ibid: 30).

So the discourse analysis could be construed as the examination of the mechanisms through which various discourses redefined the real world and its subjects. Michel Foucault marked the preliminary stages of this new trend. He studied the different forms that create different discourses of their subjects. To Foucault, the critique of discourse meant the critique of the power. The understanding of the power as a discourse urged him to discard the earlier notion of power as negative and oppressive and incited his investigation through its constructive features. He focused on how power creates discourses that the individuals embrace and therefore they also embrace a certain way of subjectivity by the very act of embracing those discourses. A rather long quote from Foucault will bring the matter at hand further in light:

'Had the power done nothing but suppress, and had it said no more than no, do you really think anyone would obey it? What makes the power look good and what makes it acceptable is the simple fact that the power does not simply burden us with a force that says no, but goes past things and creates them; causes joy, makes knowledge and engenders discourse. It should be regarded as a productive network that runs through the whole society far beyond something negative that knows nothing to do but suppress' (Soltani, 2012: 45).

• Discourse Analyses

The popularity of the idea of discourse as a cognitive system that constructs not only the social world but also its agents, turned discourse analyse into a fundamental occupation in social studies. The discourse analysers 'take an interest in the ways of utilizing language and discourse to secure social goals and also in the ways such practices may play a role in social changes and stabilities' (Bloor & Bloor, 2011: 8). The discourse analysis seeks to discover how and through which mechanisms the different ways of representation produce a rather consistent system of meaning and how such a system plays out at the social stage. In this way, 'the discourse constitutes all the phenomena in which there are interactions and symbolic communications between individuals and such communicative interactions are usually created through speech or writing or imagery' (Ibid: 17). Therefore, the discourse analysis usually pursues its course by way of analysing the text. In the discourse analysis of the text, they usually try to uncover what a given text by a certain utilization of language intends to reveal and also, inevitably, seeks to hide in the meantime. The discourses are mainly structured around the processes of exclusion or banishment. 'In this process, such things that find the opportunity to be uttered look evident and natural. The naturalness is caused by the excluded and the unutterable' (Mills, 2009: 20).

From this point forward, discourse analysis takes different courses. Jorgensen and Philips (2012) have at least found three courses of discourse analysis that are different in three fundamental features: firstly, concerning the part discourse plays in the world, a wide spectrum of differences is there from whether the whole social reality is constructed by discourse or a limited part of it. Secondly, as to the matters being discussed, one extreme stresses upon the daily speech while the other end put the stress on the abstract texts. And the third matter of division as to discourse rather deals with the role the analyser assumes in it that varies from an observant scientist to a combatant activist.

This study, however, uses the discourse theory presented by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and takes a quick glance at the most significant features of this branch of discourse analysis.

• Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory

'The main idea of the Discourse Theory [of Laclau and Mouffe] is that the social phenomena are never closed and concluded and the meanings can never be stabilized perpetually. This gives way to the constant social strives over the definitions of society and identity that as such bring about social influences. The discourse analysers endeavour to demonstrate the direction of such strives over the solidification of meaning throughout all the levels of the social.' (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2011: 53) The analyses based on the discourse theory deal with how the main signifiers of a certain discourse produce meaning when put together and which meanings they prefer to exclude and ignore. The particular trait of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory is the stress it puts upon the idea of articulation. The discourse theory is placed at such end of the discourse analysis spectrum that regards everything as constructed by discourse and so it does not refer to any solid notion without the space of the discourse to analyse the discourse structures. Hence, the articulation rises to a more important place in the discourse theory. The meaning of all the constituents of the discourse has to be defined necessarily based upon the relation of the constituents to one another and there is nothing beyond the discourse to play a role in defining them. Therefore, to Laclau and Mouffe, all the signifiers of a discourse are joined like the rosary beads that is to say one cannot examine any of the beads regardless of the others. To speak of one signifier in the discourse theory per se will bring us to analyse other signifiers too and this is the most prominent trait of the articulation. Building on this, the basic notions utilized in Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis method have been illustrated.

• Articulation, element, moment, central signifier

Articulation means to integrate the scattered signifiers in a way that a new identity is generated out of them. These scattered signifiers are called elements and they turn into moment after they are solidified within a certain discourse. The focal point is designated to a prominent and privileged sign around which other signifiers are organized (Laclau & Mouffe, 2013: 171).

• Closure, Hegemony

When a certain meaning is solidified for a sign, then the sign has reached closure. A discourse that is solidified within its own society and looks natural is hegemonic. 'To become hegemonic for a discourse means that the meaning of it is widely accepted to the public opinions or in other words there has been some stoppage for the meaning of the sign, however brief such stoppage may be' (Soltani, 2012:83). Then the discourse would be also an attempt, 'to change the elements into closure by reducing the ambiguity of their meanings to one perfectly crystallized meaning' (Ibid: 79).

Based on this, what we seek in the Holy Defence painting is to locate the main web of the signifiers and how they have been articulated within the given discourse.

Method

The method of this study is descriptive and analytic. To address the question of discourse in the Holy Defence painting, this study will use the artworks that have been produced during wartime in Howze Honari as Howze has long been the unrivalled representative of the Holy Defence painting. The case studies include all the Howze artists' artworks that could be accessed in museums, exhibitions, books, magazines and the websites and the instances that have been presented in this study have been selected from these works.

To clarify further the traits of the Holy Defence painting discourse, the studied works have been compared with some counterparts from another discourse of the wartime art, namely the Soviet war

art, to clarify the distinction between the works at hand more evidently. The Soviet art here is used merely to set up a background for the analysis as far as the Holy Defence painting discourse are concerned in a comparative manner and with no details being discussed about it.

The questions this study arises around the discourse analysis of the Holy Defence painting serve to investigate how the analysed paintings manifest war as the Holy Defence and how this art turns the war front chaos into a meaningful system of values. So some of the signifiers our study concerns are quite predictable. The fight, out fighters, the enemy, the victory and the defeat are the signifiers the very event of war imposes on any discourse that intends to speak to it. The marginal signifier of women will also be discussed for the significance of this issue within the subject of our study.

Findings and Discussion

We begin with the enemy that is the beginning point and the casus belli of each and every war. By examining the paintings, we will try to place this element within the discourse and incite a chain of actions in which this signifier along with other signifiers constructs the meaning in relation to one another.

- **Us, the Enemy and the Fight**

Every war, being a war, consists of the fight of two parties over one thing. It has always been inevitable in all the artistic traditions that have looked towards the war from behind the trench of one of the rivalling parties to see the enemy as an evil force. This evil, however, bears great distinctions in different traditions of thought. What the enemy's evil means within the art discourse depends upon the historical context and the non-artistic discourses that turn hegemonic within the society. In Fig. 1, there is an example of the enemy's evil, Germans, in a Russian painting. The evilness the Germans represent in this artwork finds its meaning in their attack on these people's home, Russia, and their harassment of Russian women and children. This evildoing constructs the resistance, referring to which the Russians called World War II as the patriotic war. They, the enemy, the Germans, have attacked the homeland, Russia, and have harassed Russian women and Russian children, so fight they should do to save the homeland.

The Holy Defence painting, on the other hand, is a bit different, to say the least. There is little trace of Iraq and Iraqi soldiers as the Enemy in all these artworks, even as meagre as symbols. In other words, the evil over which we should prevail in the Holy Defence painting is not to be found in the war front but somewhere beyond. To find the evil in the painting discourse of the Holy Defence is a bit more complicated. In the more practised forms of the war art, the evildoing is simply attributed to the other side of the battlefield and the plain embodiment of it would be their soldiers and weapons. In the Holy Defence painting, however, an Iraqi soldier is seldom depicted and the symbols that tell of the other side being an Iraqi are even rarer. Therefore, we know from the very beginning that Iraq is not going to be the materialisation of the evil the Holy Defence discourse is fighting against. Therefore, we may find ourselves in need to seek a quite different meaning of the evil and the enemy within these works. 'The Coin Worshipping Rats,' Kazem Chalipa's renowned work (Fig. 2) is a good departure point perhaps for such a quest. In this work, there's a martyr in the middle of the painting wrapped in a shroud and a woman, probably his mother, is bending over his body but with a raised hand as a gesture of calling the

Fig. 1. Partisan's mother, Vasily Gerasimov, 1943. Source: artpoisk.info

others for the martyr's path and there are multitudes of soldiers behind the martyr and his mother marching on. Beneath him, however, there is a pile of human beings jammed into some hole with their coins and in such fear and avarice that they have lost even their human visages. In such a composition, the fighters fight rather an inside temptation than anything else. The huge vice they have overcome before they volunteer for the war front is the desire of acquisitiveness and social irresponsibility, a way that leads to nowhere but the very dirty vaults of the Coin Worshiping Rats within the painting. In the Holy Defence painting, we face many of such paintings that give us an epic and revolutionary account of the soldiers being sent to the war. The fight has been started from within the city and the homeland.

The same logic also goes on in the battlefield. Few soldiers the paintings present in the battlefield, shooting at the enemy by their firearms. Bullets will not vanquish the enemy they fight; so, what good are the weapons in the battlefield? The battlefield in the Holy Defence painting is highly symbolic. A renowned painting by Mostafa Gudarzi, 'Resistance,' (Fig. 3) shows us this symbolism in a very evident fashion. A slender adolescent, with a stout spirit though that is emphasised by his posture, has faced a distant shapeless army alone. The ground on which he is standing is all covered with flowers, greenery, and light while the other side is sunk in dark and wilderness. The adolescent boy has no weapons and the fight he is anticipating does not look to be demanding such weapons either. The fight as far as this boy is concerned is more a spiritual notion. This absence of the enemy is the specific trait of the Holy Defence paintings, observable in different paintings that depict the Iranian soldiers. Fig. 4, that is a Russian painting of the Soviet soldiers in the Second World War is right opposite of this standpoint. The apparent enemy that we saw in Fig. 1 requires a fight with machine guns and shelters but the Holy Defence instances seldom show any trace of shooting and physical struggles. Fig. 5 by Ali Vazirian is one of the best paragons of representation of the soldiers within

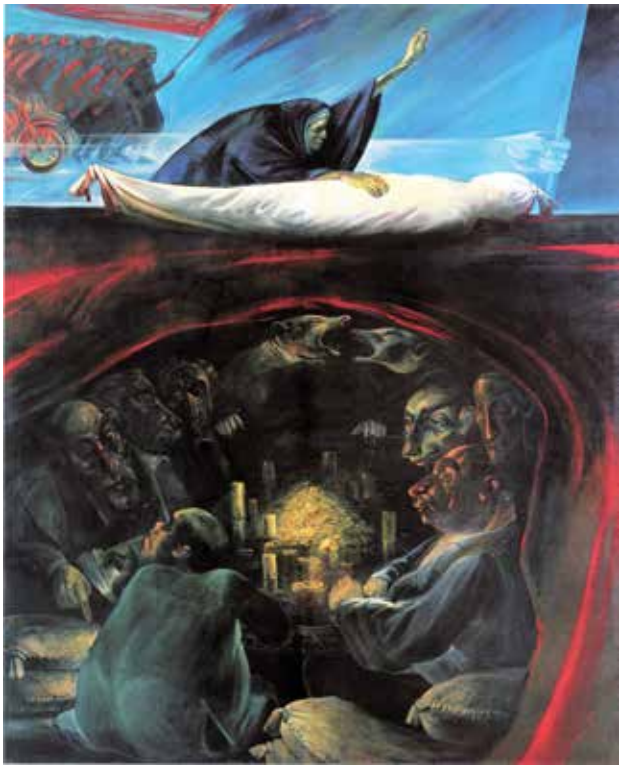

Fig. 2. The Coin Worshipping Rats, Kazem Chalipa, 1984. Source: Chalipa, 2012.

Fig. 3. Resistance, Mostafa Gudarzi, 1986. Source: Gudarzi, 2009.

the Holy Defence. It is not only the fact that the soldier here is not fighting but furthermore, he is immersed in a hypnotic contemplation in the farthest possible status to the fire and fury of the war.

Hence, we can go to our next signifiers, namely the insiders, the soldiers. Such enemy as described before needs to meet their own match. As it is pointed out, our

soldiers are rarely seen fighting in the common sense of the word and in many cases, they are not even armed at all. Our soldiers' fight was not against Iraqi foes but a much larger enemy that has been mentioned before. To fight such worldly material vice, one demands certain spirituality, an inner growth, which has become possible by religion and mysticism. Fig. 2, 3 and 5, are examples of the inner struggle of these fighters. The enemy by its very nature defines the way of the fight. The soldiers in this image are depicted precisely opposite the enemies (Fig. 2). The modesty of their looks and the humane serenity in their countenances

Fig. 4. Machine gun snipers, Fedor Alexandrovich, 1942. Source: gallery.tver.ru

Fig. 5. The throne of the sun, Ali Vazirian, 1987. Source: The Center for Visual Arts of howze honari (2010).

are right opposite to the degradation and disgrace of the avaricious in Chalipa's painting. The safe haven of these soldiers is neither the safe basements of great mansions nor fleeing the country but some divine spirituality and God's beautiful nature.

Given the certain sort of evil represented in the Holy Defence discourse, the right place for the soldiers of the good to fight this evil is not limited within the frontline. As we saw, the Holy Defence painting not only knows no boundaries of representing the soldiers only in the frontline but also can prove their point outside the realistic representation system of the frontlines even better. The course we took from the enemy to the fight and the insiders will continue in another level. Although the deeply spiritual structure of the Holy Defence discourse may serve best to demonstrate the perpetual strife between the good and the evil, yet the Holy Defence painting which was supposed to represent a real war was under obligation to respond to the events of that war. the most significant events in a war are the military victories and defeats and they are expected to be squeezed into the Holy Defence painting.

- **The Victory and the Defeat**

There are usually two sorts of victories, the one that concerns the war that is ensued by the end of the war, and the one with the battles and progresses in certain frontlines. The second one has usually been depicted with many soldiers cheering and celebrating in the battlefield. The first one, on the other, hand usually associates with the themes of homecoming when the war has ceased. The two Fig. 6 and 7, are examples of such scenes in Russian painting. Fig. 6 depicts some Russian soldiers after they have conquered a town and Fig. 7, the return of the soldiers after the war is over. The most important difference between these two is that Fig. 6 is still suffused with an epic air. The composition and the way the colour and soldiers' gestures are fashioned serve to demonstrate the war's spirit. To keep such spirit up signifies the continuance of their presence in the battlefield and the military vigilance and preparation before the war is officially ended. In Fig. 7, on the other hand, the war is

no more in the space. The colours are varied now and the composition more delicate. The man is happy to be at home in peace. Such paintings put the war spirit aside and welcome the peacetime after the war.

The blatantly different manner of the Holy Defence in the depiction of the victory is hard to miss. There is no homecoming and seldom are the cheering and celebrating in the battlefield. The victory in the battle is often a spiritual achievement, represented by multitude paintings of praising God and prostrating or the soldiers have been put in an airy place that is a token of the spiritual deliverance on these soldiers' part. Part of such representation is probably derived from the actual circumstances of the war itself. The war was mostly fought in empty deserts, bereft of the population, and for the most part, all the progress had been secured upon a lifeless terrain. Yet the lack of any considerable painting about many a great event as the Reconquest of Khorramshahr should be interpreted in the light of the hegemonic discourse of that era. The spiritual nature of the fight is in fact quite clear in the representation of the victory. To march on in the Holy Defence discourse means to go forward in the spirituality that is depicted in a symbolic fashion by nature and heaven. (Fig. 8)

The representation of the defeat is the most unique trait of the Holy Defence painting. There is no artwork, in any part of the world that shows the complete and ultimate defeat of their own side of a war . So the damage is usually fashioned as the fallen, whether in the front or through depicting their families behind the fronts. Fig. 9 is an example of such loss in the Soviet painting. A father holding flowers in his hand is weeping across the ruins of the war and a little girl, probably the daughter of the fallen soldier, is consoling him.

The unique trait of the Holy Defence, in this case, is quite the opposite of whatever had been considered as a norm in the world. There is no such a thing as defeat in the Holy Defence painting. No paintings that emit the feeling of failure and the irremediable loss could be found in this trend. To be slain, in this discourse, is the martyrdom and martyrdom is supposed to be the highest victory. So what is usually identified as a loss in a normal war is regarded as the highest achievement in the Holy Defence painting. In such discourse, no achievement in the world beats being killed or amputated in the battlefield and such losses are honours that not everybody is worth them. So, the dichotomy of the victory and the defeat takes the shape of the dichotomy of the victory and the martyrdom in this discourse that is derived from the profoundly spiritual

Fig. 6. Minsk in 1944, Valentin Volkov, 1944. Source: masterrussian.net

Fig. 7. Return, Andrey Lysenko, n.d. source: wwii.space

Fig. 8. Vanguards, Kazem Chalipa, 1982. Source: Chalipa ,2012.

Fig. 9. Don't cry grandfather, V. Licho, 1945.
Source: www.allworldwars.com.

discourse of the Holy Defence. Fig. 10 demonstrates this spiritual ascension quite properly. Martyrdom, in this discourse, is ultimate individual salvation. There is no loss in being killed but the best of fates.

There is as much process to be seen in the depictions of the wounded also. Although the wounded are one step below the martyrs, yet they have reached a very lofty place by being wounded and amputated in the war. The wounded and the fallen in these depictions are the main winners of the war surrounded by a set of symbols.

• The Women in the Holy Defence Painting

Much has been said of the women's active role behind the lines of war and their representation has always been a consequential part of the war discourse. In the war paintings, women could be found in a wide range of depictions, whether in military gear or behind the lines in a nursing outfit and beyond the wars as women who bravely take over the management of the society in the absence of the men. Fig. 11 is the Russian example of such women's presence in the front.

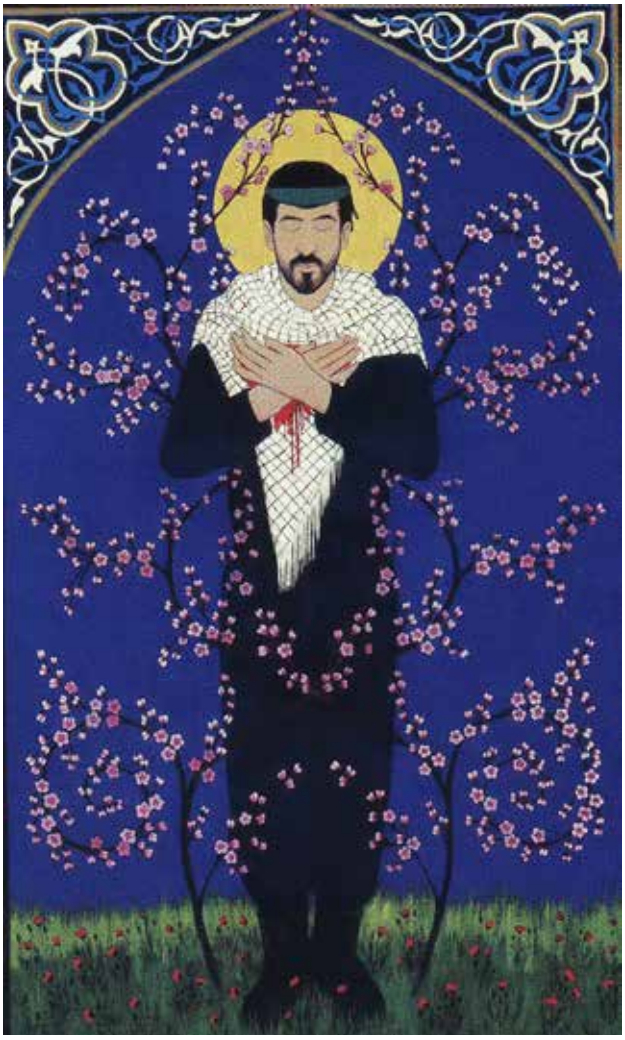

Fig. 10. n.t. Ahmad Nadalian, n.d. Source: Gudarzi, 2009.

In the Holy Defence painting, however, the women are assigned with no such roles. It is not only that the women are not depicted in the war fronts shoulder to shoulder with the men, but they are not depicted even as nurses behind the lines either. Women, in other words, have no direct relation to the Holy Defence as a war[1]. Yet the Holy Defence painting is brimming with the presence of women and in this aspect, namely the depiction of women, this is one of the most prominent trends of war painting. The strong presence of women in such works is secured owing to the men's presence though. They are mothers and wives who send off their sons and husbands to the war with great willingness and welcome the returning corpses of their beloved ones with passion and love. The representation of the women in the Holy Defence painting is the

representation of a patient being that is perfectly faithful and is ready to sacrifice herself and all she has, specifically the men of her family.

In a very crucial part of the women's depiction in the Holy Defence, there are mothers who bid their adolescent sons farewell to the battlefields. The participation of these mothers in sending off their sons to the war fronts signifies the epic spirit of women in their motherly sacrifice as far as their contribution to the war is concerned. Fig. 12 shows women who have lost a family member in the war, as a martyr. As it is said before, to become a martyr in the battlefield is no irremediable loss but enviable happiness. In the representation of such martyrs' mothers, there are manifest signs of such loss to be found, the loss that does not belong to the martyr but originates from the agony of the living. Yet for the most part, such works usually show the loss as the cost of a higher goal. In these works, the families of the fallen are connected to such springs of faith and spirituality through these losses that could not be reached otherwise.

Conclusion

Holy Defence Painting Discourse

The Holy Defence Painting has never claimed documentation of the Iran Iraq War's events. Following the revolution and the outbreak of the war, the intellectual and political sphere of the country was so consumed with the war that most of the social life in Iran was redefined by the defence of faith and country. Therefore, the Holy Defence painting, like other features in the Holy Defence culture, did not only concern the war fronts. It was rather thorough strife over a new lifestyle to be defined and introduced to the society and this gave the war against evil like Iraq a wider range of meanings. The greatest quality of the Holy Defence, in other words, was the very totality and encompassing nature of it, beyond a border clash between Iran and Iraq. This generalisation affected the visual elements of this painting a great deal. The expression of the Holy Defence painting is deeply symbolic and the artworks that belong in this trend brim with symbols.

Fig. 11. Sister, M. Samsonov, 1960. Source: www.allworldwars.com.

Fig. 12. Behesht-e Zahra, Abdolhamid GHadirian, 1982.
Source: The Center for Visual Arts of howze honari (2010).

What is revealed by the examinations brings the articulation of different signifiers within this discourse to light. Needless to say, the definition of the enemy and the fight in this discourse necessarily demands a certain way of looking on the notion of victory in such fight and across such enemy. In a discourse that defeat bears no meanings and death is regarded an achievement rather than loss, the relation between the frontline and home inevitably changes. While most discourses about war see the return to home as the return to the good, here the spiritual superiority of frontline prevents the homecoming from being so dignified and revered. it does not matter the war has halted or not, the frontline is always better than home. The family who bears this inconsolable

suffering after they have lost a member gets a highly valued, though pricey, honour.

This closely interwoven web of meanings could be pursued much more. The Holy Defence discourse in Iran has been the dominant discourse in all aspects of the Iranian social life for a long time and has not yet lost all its significance. The discourse of the Holy Defence painting has roots traceable outside of its realm (Aleali 2012) that had been reigning over the Iranian art until few years after the war ended. This text was no more than an attempt to cast about for the significant features of the Holy Defence painting discourse in the wartime. Any trend as sizable as what has been examined in this paper has to bear many exceptions and different angles, all of which this study has put aside for the sake of a large picture of the Holy Defence painting. The fate of this painting in the post-war era is another interesting area of study and a very significant one that demands a study of its own that could unfold many other angles of this discourse if undertaken.

Endnote

1. Apart from a few works, for example, several paintings by Nasser Palangi in the first year of war.

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Rabiee Poursalimi,M. & Afshar Mohajer, K. (2019). The Discourse Analysis of 'the Holy Defence' Paintings during Wartime (in Comparison with Soviet War Paintings). Bagh- e Nazar, 16 (73):5-16.

DOI: 10.22034/bagh.2019.149735.3784
URL: http://www.bagh-sj.com/article_88986_en.html