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HISTORICAL EVENTS IN PERSIAN NOVELS*

The relation between history and literature has been scrutinised under various aspects. The interest in the overlapping field of history and histories, of facts and fiction has brought together specialists of both fields of research to discuss points of contact and factors of difference between historiography and belles lettres.¹ Hayden White's study *Tropics of Discourse*² has fuelled the discussion about the constructive character of historiography, but we have to keep in mind that the core of the problem is not a recent discovery. The discussions about the parallels between historiography and novel-writing which lie in the establishment of reasonable, well founded and meaningful, but still imaginary links between isolated facts and various occurrences, have accompanied the development of both genres.³

Regarding Persian literature, the question has been raised occasionally in terms of instrumentalization of Iranian history in various genres and periods. The main interest has been focussed on the problem of how national history – or what is conceived as national history – serves the message of the literary text, whether that is the construction of identity, the making of an image or the critique of contemporary socio-political conditions. Persian historical novels as a special case of the literary embedding of history have been covered in several articles and monographs, but more detailed studies about literary representations

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1 – A huge amount of relevant publications has flooded the academic market. Most prominent in the discussions are Hayden White, Paul Ricoeur, Jörn Rüsen (see Priska Furrer, "Raum und Gedächtnis – die Verknüpfung von Ort und Geschichte in modernen türkischen Romanen", in Roxane Haag-Higuchi and Christian Szyska (eds.), *Erzählter Raum in den Literaturen der islamischen Welt / Narrated Space in the Literature of the Islamic World*, Wiesbaden, 2001). Cf. also the collected papers of two symposia: Reinhart Kosellek and Wolf-Dieter Stempel (eds.), *Geschichte – Ereignis und Erzählung*, Munich, 1973, and Hartmut Eggert, Ulrich Profitlich and Klaus R. Scherpe (eds.), *Geschichte als Literatur. Formen und Grenzen der Repräsentation von Vergangenheit*, Stuttgart, 1990.

2 – Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse*, Baltimore, 1994 (6th edn.).

3 – In his "Geschichten von der Geschichte. Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtsdarstellung im Roman", *Poetica*, 17 (1985), p. 228-254, Eberhard Lämmert shows that the problem of creating a narrative that transgresses mere chronology and serialisation of events, evoked parallel answers in historiography and literature from the 18th century onwards.

of history in Persian novels have yet to be carried out.⁴

In this paper, however, I will not try to analyse in which way history is brought to life in various literary constructions, nor will I describe how the general course of contemporary history is individualised in the figures of a specific novel. The general referential function of the historical context in the plot and the implicit and scenic aspects of the representation of history will be rather neglected. Instead, I will confine myself to explicit references to widely known contemporary events of international politics given in the texts. The difference lies both in the temporal and the geopolitical scope. The geopolitical scope is set wider: The paper is not concerned with the treatment of the “own” history but with the manner certain “events” of world history are dealt with. The temporal scope, however, is more restricted: we do not consider the bygone past but contemporary history, which makes a difference in the way these events are remembered. The Russian Revolution and the First and Second World Wars are most prominent among the events in international history with direct and major implications for the history of Iran, which have left traces in literary texts: They serve as a remote political reference point in the plot of a number of novels.

The term of the “historical event”⁵ as a or even the most important constituent in the course of history was for a while given up in face of the critique of positivistic constructions of history, but ironically its “rehabilitation” has gained ground under the auspices of a dialogic and dynamic view of the past. It is not the objective fact and its factual consequences alone that make the “event”, but a dynamic conglomerate of the factual happening and its afterlife in contemporary and later perceptions and interpretations.⁶ The ongoing interaction between

4 – For classical Persian and Arabic Poetry cf. Julie Scott Meisami, “The Past in Service of the Present: Two Views of History in Medieval Persia”, *Poetics Today*, 14 (1993), p. 247-275; *Eadem*, “Places in the Past: the Poetics/Politics of Nostalgia”, *Edebiyât*, 8 (1998), p. 63-106; for the historical novel cf. Franciszek Machalski, “*Šams et Toğrâ*, Roman historique de Muḥammad Bāqir Ḥosrovi”, *Charisteria Orientalia*, Prague 1956, p. 149-164; Basile Nikitine, “Le roman historique dans la littérature persane actuelle”, *Journal Asiatique*, 223 (1933), p. 297-336; and Christophe Balaÿ, *La genèse du roman persan moderne*, Teheran, 1998; for Turkish novels cf. Priska Furrer, “Die literarische Rückgewinnung von Geschichte – Bilder der osmanischen Vergangenheit in modernen türkischen Romanen”, *Zeitschrift für Türkeistudien*, 12 (1999), p. 73-92, and *Eadem*, “Raum und Gedächtnis – die Verknüpfung von Ort und Geschichte in modernen türkischen Romanen”, in Haag-Higuchi and Szyska (eds.), *Erzählter Raum...*, *cit.* Some remarks on history in Chubak’s *Sang-e Šabūr*, cf. Ehsan Yarshater, “The Modern Literary Idiom”, in Thomas M. Ricks (ed.), *Critical Perspectives on Modern Persian Literature*, Washington D.C., 1984, p. 42-62, cf. p. 55 (originally publ. in Ehsan Yarshater, *Iran faces the Seventies*, New York, 1971, p. 284-320).

5 – For Ranke’s conception of the historical event cf. Arno Borst, “Das historische Ereignis”, in Kosellek and Stempel (eds.), *Geschichte – Ereignis und Erzählung*, *cit.*, p. 536-540, cf. p. 537.

6 – «... was aber die Kanonade von Valmy, den Wiener Kongreß oder die Sozialgesetzgebung Bismarcks zum ‘Ereignis’ macht, besteht nicht mehr unabhängig von Kategorien der Wahrnehmung und des Verstehens, das heißt von der Auffassung der Betroffenen, der Handelnden oder der späteren Betrachter ... Setzt nicht der Begriff des Ereignisses immer schon diese bedeutungsoffene Struktur voraus, die dem politischen wie dem literarischen Ereignis gemeinsam ist?» (Hans Robert Jauss, “Zur Analogie von literarischem Werk und historischem Ereignis”, in

“acting and recounting, producing and reproducing subjects” forms the event, which is incorporated in the collective memory as such.⁷ The historical event is constituted by the factual happening, continuous narration and temporal distance. It can be understood as a discernible unit within history, which is labelled and through its label recalls a cluster of associations concerning a given incident and its consequences. This definition of the historical event may be partly transferred to the historical protagonist, who, while having lost his central position in the narration about the course of history, still serves as a label for certain imaginations of the past. As part of the collective memory and the political culture, both the event and the protagonist of history are elements within the ideological orientation of a given society.

Literary representations have an important part in the dialogic process of forming and temporarily fixing an event. The aim of this paper is to show how the explicit topicalisation of contemporary historical events in Persian novels of the 20th century is subject to characteristic changes in representation. Following the (very limited) textual evidence, where events are not subject to scenic incorporation but to monological, dialogical or internal reflections of the narrator or the characters respectively, some of the guidelines of the changes in modern Persian prose literature can be exemplified *in nucleo*.

The events that will be compared below in their literary processing are World War I (including the figure of the German Emperor Wilhelm II), the Russian Revolution (and the Bolsheviks) and World War II. These historical events have in common that they belong to international history and have also become highly meaningful, or even symbolic, in the national historiography of Iran as examples of foreign intrusion into domestic affairs. The – rather mainstream and prominent – novels chosen for the comparative approach cover about seven decades in 20th century literary history: Mortazā Mošfeq Kāzemi's *Tehrān-e maxuf* (Horrible Tehran, 1924-1926), Simin Dānešvar's famous *Savūsun* (1969), and two post-revolutionary novels: Šahrnuš Pārsipur's *Ṭubā va ma' nā-ye šab* (Tuba and the meaning of night, 1987) and 'Abbās Ma' rufi's *Semfuni-ye mordegān* (Symphony of the dead, 1989).

Kamran Talattof's recent history of modern Persian literature «approaches the analysis of modern literature in terms of ideology of representation, literary movements, and metaphor».⁸ Talattof advocates a concept «that views modern Persian literature as a set of episodic literary movements», each being coined by an overruling ideology.⁹ He makes out four “literary movements”: Persianism (late 19th century through the 1930s), Committed literature (from the 1940s to 1979), Islamic and Feminist literature (both after 1979), which have been influenced and nourished by and are interwoven with the ideologies of nationalism, Marxism,

Kosselek and Stempel, *Geschichte – Ereignis...*, *cit.*, p. 535-536; and “Versuch einer Ehrenrettung des Ereignisbegriffs”, *ibid.*, p. 554-560, *cf.* p. 536).

7 – Jauß, “Versuch einer Ehrenrettung...”, *cit.*, p. 556.

8 – Kamran Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran. A History of Modern Persian Literature*, Syracuse, N.Y., 2000, p. 3.

9 – *Ibid.*

Islamism and feminism respectively. Each of the four novels chosen belongs to one of the episodic movements, although their position within the particular movement differs: *Savūšun*¹⁰ and *Tubā*¹¹ are given central positions in Committed and Feminist literature respectively. *Tehrān-e maxūf*¹² and *Semfuni-ye mordegān*,¹³ however, are mentioned as products of the periods of Persianist and Islamic literature, but can at best be called peripheral representatives of the given episodic movements.

The present study will also demonstrate a change in the conception of literary representation, but it will not be placed into the frame of Talattof's categories. It refers rather to principles of literary theory which pervade the products of these literary movements and change along other lines than the ideological ones. Moralising features and didactic functions, for example, permeate Persian prose literature, from the earliest novels up to the Islamic Revolution, regardless of their classification in a particular episodic movement. The view of Committed and sociocritical literature as fundamentally didactic is corroborated by Jazayeri.¹⁴ He saw «the running battle between the old and the new» as a constant factor of «recent literary creations»: «This fight ... takes the form of openly and directly didactic writing or of indirect illustration of social problems...».

The informative and educating function of the novel has been articulated most impressively by Moḥammad 'Ali Jamālzāde in the famous preface to his collection of short stories *Yeki bud yeki nabud* (Once upon a time, 1921). The preface has been taken by literary historians for «the first modern Persian literary manifesto».¹⁵ Writing about the novel, Jamālzāde ascribes high communicative competence to this genre, which promotes and fosters education, progress, and social integration:

... the masses of the people ... will remain lost in ignorance, wretchedness and darkness till doomsday, unless somebody thinks of them and takes care of them. ... first of all, it [the novel] is practically a school to those whose daily labor to obtain a livelihood does not leave them the time or the opportunity to go to school, to complete their education ... The novel, with its charming language ... teaches us useful information, be it historical or scientific, philosophical or ethical. It also brings together different classes of people who, by virtue of the differences of job, occupation, and social intercourse, are completely ignorant of one another's living conditions and thoughts, and even details of each other's way of life, and familiarizes them with one another. ... The novel in-

10 – Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran*, cit., p. 96f.

11 – *Ibid.*, p. 141-148.

12 – *Ibid.*, p. 64.

13 – *Ibid.*, p. 109.

14 – M.A. Jazayeri, "Recent Persian Literature: Observations on Themes and Tendencies", in Ricks (ed.), *Critical Perspectives...*, cit., p. 70-87, cf. p. 84 (originally publ. in *Review of National Literatures*, 2, no. 1, 1971, p. 11-28).

15 – Haideh Daragahi, "The Shaping of the Modern Persian Short Story: Jamalzadi's 'Preface' to *Yeki Bud, Yeki Nabud*", *The Literary Review*, 18 (1974), 8-37, cf. p. 18.

forms and acquaints various groups of a nation with one another: the city dweller with the villager, the serving man with the shopkeeper, the Kurd with the Baluch ... [more examples of this kind] and in so doing removes and eradicates many thousand differences and biased antagonisms ...¹⁶

Jamāl-zāde's "Preface", rather than setting in motion or determining the production of short stories and novels in the following decades, formulated ideas that were already circulating within the literary community of those days and earlier. Mošfeq Kāzemi was Jamāl-zāde's contemporary in Berlin where he studied law in the early 1920s.¹⁷ His novel *Tehrān-e maxuf* was published shortly after Jamāl-zāde's collection. Although it is said to have had a vast readership, it never became as famous as the latter. In its manner of handling the historical event of the Russian Revolution, however, it illustrates Jamāl-zāde's call for "useful information".

Instruction in History:

Mošfeq Kāzemi's Tehrān-e maxuf and the Bolsheviks

Mortazā Mošfeq Kāzemi's novel *Tehrān-e maxuf* (Horrible Tehran) was published as a serial in the newspaper *Setāre-ye Irān* in 1922, and appeared as a book in Tehran in 1924. The sequel of *Tehrān-e maxuf*, titled *Yādgar-e yek šab* was published in Berlin in 1926 (in this paper, as in later editions, both titles will be labelled the two volumes of *Tehrān-e maxuf*, I + II).¹⁸ All in all it did not achieve many flattering comments in terms of literary brilliance: It was called «a poor imitation of European romantic fiction»¹⁹ and «of slight significance» from the artistic viewpoint.²⁰ Some literary critics have called it the first social novel in Iran and – especially in the descriptions of Tehran – a great step towards «un "effet de réel"» in the Persian novel.²¹ The plot of *Tehrān-e maxuf* resembles traditional romances: two young and beautiful lovers, Farrox and Mahin, are separated, and the male hero has to cover great distances trying to regain his beloved. This romance-like plot is embedded into the precise historical setting of the last years of the Qājār reign and the Pahlavi take-over (ca. 1912 until 1921) and an

16 – Daragahi, "The Shaping of the Modern Persian Short Story...", *cit.*, p. 25ff. Jamāl-zāde's portrait of the novel fits into the diffuse concept of early 20th century Iranian nationalism, cf. Tim Epkenhans, *Die iranische Moderne im Exil. Bibliographie der Zeitschrift Kāve, Berlin 1916-1922*, Berlin, 2000, 88ff.

17 – Bozorg Alavi, *Geschichte und Entwicklung der modernen persischen Literatur*, Berlin, 1964, p. 146.

18 – Cf. Kamil Banák, "Mushfiq Kāzimi's Novel *The Horrible Tehran* – Romantic Fiction or Social Criticism", *Asian and African Studies*, 13 (1977), p. 147-152; Yahyā Āryanpur, *Az Šabā tā Nimā*, 2 vols, 5th edn., Tehrān 1357/1978 (1st edn. 1350/1971), vol. II, p. 258-264; Alavi, *Geschichte und Entwicklung...*, *cit.*, p. 145-147; for an overview of the plot and structural analysis cf. Balaj, *La genèse du roman...*, *cit.*, p. 321-328.

19 – Hasan Kamshad, *Modern Persian Prose Literature*, Cambridge, 1966, p. 59.

20 – Vera Kubíčková, "Persian Literature in the 20th Century", in Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, Dordrecht, 1968, p. 353-418, cf. p. 391.

21 – Balaj, *La genèse du roman...*, *cit.*, p. 321.

chored in exact topographical details.²² The attempt to present historical facts in an almost historiographic manner strengthens the precise chronotopic background of the novel. The authorial narrator every so often comments on the historical situation. For example, around the years 1919-1920, the hero Farrox was staying in Baku. The action of the novel is interrupted for the following explanation:

In those days, the Republics of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, which had been formed in the beginning of the Revolution according to Lenin's promises about the freedom of all nations, were busy with their own affairs although rumours began to spread that the Russian Revolution would soon reach these countries as well. ... And the Bolsheviks actually were still busy with warfare against their enemies ... and did not yet bother about the governments of Azerbaijan and the other republics.²³

The comment is removed from of the flow of the narration and explains the political situation beyond the Iranian border in a rather distanced manner. What is said about the conditions of international politics is closely connected to the proper plot: what is explained matters for the story. Baku in its particular historical setting is the appropriate place to stay for the young lover Farrox: Azerbaijan is, as the novel tells us, in a temporary state of independence, and Farrox is not disturbed by any political troubles when preparing his return home. The historical situation is thoroughly linked to the situation of the hero at this stage of the plot. In terms of narrative, however, it is separated from the flow of the story as an isolated authorial annotation. Especially by inserting the segment «according to Lenin's promises...», the narrator clearly marks the didactic. As I have pointed out elsewhere, the strong authorial presence in the narrative of *Tehrān-e maxūf* can be understood as part of a narrative concept rooted in conventions of oral presentation of a story.²⁴ Just as the oral narrator would play his teaching and admonishing part, the authorial narrator moves into the foreground to present background information in the form of "reality bites". The historical paragraph quoted above follows the ancient principle that literature should combine instruction and entertainment by clearly separating the one from the other.

The didactic is one aspect of how the event of the Russian Revolution is dealt with in *Tehrān-e maxūf*. Yet another aspect arises from the hybrid genre-character of this text which combines features of the romance and the novel. In the way it uses the mimetic components of the plot, *Tehrān-e maxūf* displays conspicuous characteristics of the romance. According to Bachtin, the hero of the romance, the situation of his life, his actions and whatever happens to him,

22 – For the "chronotopos" (Bachtin) in this novel cf. Balaj, *La genèse du roman...*, cit., p. 421f., 432, 439ff.

23 – Mortazā Mošfeq Kāzemi, *Tehrān-e maxūf*, (I) Tehrān, 5th edn., 1340/1961; *Yādgar-e yek šab*, (II) Tehrān, 2nd edn., 1340/1961 (1st edn. 1924 & 1926), cf. II, ch. 17, p. 161.

24 – Roxane Haag-Higuchi, "Vom Hören zum Lesen, von der Szene zum Kapitel: Aspekte von Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit in einem frühen persischen Roman", in Verena Klemm and Beatrice Gruendler (eds.), *Understanding Near Eastern Literatures. A Spectrum of Interdisciplinary Approaches*, Wiesbaden, 2000, p. 27-36.

do not have any socio-political significance. The relation between the hero and his beloved is the centre of all events in the romance, which derive their significance exclusively from this – temporarily troubled – love affair. Even an event like war acquires significance only by being related to the love of the protagonists.²⁵ The plot of the romance is governed by the «single-minded pursuit of his beloved in the face of all obstacles».²⁶

In our novel, Farrox has saved enough money and is on the verge of returning home and being hopefully reunited with Mahin, when the October Revolution erupts and prevents him from leaving Baku.

But these incidents were at Farrox's expense: after having been away from Tehran for almost two and a half years and having saved up enough money to proceed to the capital and learn about what had happened to his beloved Mahin, this revolution occurred and for a while, he became desperate about his return to Iran. In those days, when plunder and bloodshed had become customary in Baku, he used to sit in the consulate for hours, desperate and grievous, and think about Mahin and curse those who were responsible for the course his life had taken.²⁷

The Russian Revolution, as soon as it comes in touch with the hero's destiny, turns into a private harassment, presented as if it had happened only for Farrox's personal detriment. This presentation parallels Bachtin's observations about the romance but it differs in a central point: In traditional romances, political motifs of the plot become abstract and ahistorical features²⁸ whereas the early Persian novel is as precise and concrete as possible. In the course of his "single-minded pursuit of his beloved", Farrox has to overcome many obstacles, and the October Revolution is just one of them. The discrepancy between the romance-like plot and its historical references accounts for the isolation of historical events within the narrative. In terms of the plot, they have to be reduced to the level of the hero's love affair, but in terms of instruction, they have to be outlined in a precise and factual manner.

25 – «Die elementare Lebenssituation des Helden, seine Zielvorstellungen, alle seine Erlebnisse und alle seine Taten haben völlig privaten Charakter und nicht die geringste gesellschaftlich-politische Bedeutung. Dreht sich doch der gesamte Inhalt im wesentlichen um die Liebe der Helden und um die inneren und äußeren Bewährungsproben, denen sie ausgesetzt ist. Und alle übrigen Ereignisse erlangen im Roman nur dadurch Bedeutung, daß sie zu diesem inhaltlichen Drehpunkt in Beziehung stehen. ... Es ist bezeichnend, daß sogar ein Geschehen wie der Krieg einzig und allein unter dem Aspekt der Liebesangelegenheiten der Helden Bedeutsamkeit erhält» (Michail M. Bachtin, *Formen der Zeit im Roman Untersuchungen zur historischen Poetik*, Frankfurt, 1989, p. 36). Bachtin, in his historical poetics, is mostly concerned with the European novel, but he refers to Oriental tales as well.

26 – William Hanaway, "Amir Arsalan and the Question of Genre", *Iranian Studies*, 24 (1991), p. 55-60, cf. p. 58.

27 – Mošfeq Kāzemi, *Tehrān-e maxūf. cit.*, II, p. 162.

28 – Bachtin, *Formen der Zeit im Roman... cit.*, p. 27.

Moral in History: Simin Dānešvar's Savušun and the Second World War

More than forty years after Mošfeq Kāzemi set foot on the literary scene, Simin Dānešvar wrote her best-selling novel *Savušun*. As has been stated by almost all literary critics, the informational and integrative function of the novel (conciliating the social classes through a better mutual understanding) gave way to an implicit or explicit social and political criticism from the 1940s onwards.²⁹ This is but a very rough characterisation of the host of stories and novels published during four decades. But what can be postulated as the smallest common denominator, is most writers' concern with keeping the minutes of their society's development, concentrating on social injustice, cultural alienation and political oppression.

Savušun evolves around a land-owning *xān*-family in Shiraz during the years of the allied occupation of Iran (1941-1946). The main conflict is triggered by the historical context. Because of the famine within the population, the protagonist Yusof refuses to sell his crops to the allied troops. He is the upright fighter for justice and in the end pays for his uprightness with his life. The main clue to the interpretative approach is the title of the novel. It refers to the passion of Siyāvoš, an old myth included in the *Avesta* as well as in Ferdowsi's *Šāhnāme*. The myth of Siyāvoš revolves around the motif of the just, peace-loving protagonist, the innocent hero who is murdered by his malevolent enemies. The novel makes double use of the myth, implicitly as an interpretative foil of the plot itself, explicitly towards the end of the novel when a village woman explains the traditional passion play. In its implicit use, however, the myth accounts for an antagonism which pervades both the set of characters and the plot. Talattof considers the novel to «update not only the form, meanings, and metaphors of Committed Literature but also the religious concepts related to Karbala».³⁰ As «Savušun» is a dialectal form of «Siyāvoš», the title proposes a primary link to the ancient Iranian myth. The Islamic associations, however, can be perceived as enhancing the political implications of martyrdom.

As mentioned above, the plot of the novel is motivated by the historical setting, themes like «interests, privilege and influence of foreign powers, corruption, incompetence and arrogance of persons in authority ..., the paternalistic landowner – peasant relationship, tribalism, the fear of famine and the intellectual appeal of Soviet-inspired communism as a way to escape from hopelessness»³¹ are its very ferment. Outspoken references to the international historical situation, however, are rare. It occurs in the following scene: Yusof and his wife Zari are visited by two tribal leaders who want to convince Yusof to sell them all his food supplies.

Yusof shouted: «You want food to give to the foreign troops in exchange for weapons you will then use to shoot your brothers and compatriots? ...».³²

29 – E.g. Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran...*, cit.; Yarshater, «The Modern Literary Idiom», cit.

30 – Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran...*, cit., p. 97.

31 – Simin Daneshvar, *Savushun. A Novel About Modern Iran*, transl. M.R. Ghanoonparvar, intr. Brian Spooner, Washington, 1990, cf. Introduction, p. 9f.

32 – Daneshvar, *Savushun...*, cit., p. 71.

Later Yusof goes on:

«You know, I neither agreed with you when you flirted with the Germans nor do I now that you have made a deal with their enemies. It was you who made Hitler into the Imam of the Age. But those kind of tricks won't work here. It was your flirtations that gave these people an excuse to come here». – «Well, brother, after all, it is war», Malek Sohrab said softly. «A war is not a dinner party. The troops have to be here to protect the oil and the Gulf waterways. They would have come anyway [*mā ham nabudim miāmadand*]. Besides, they come here on leave and for treatment. The main camp is in Khorramshahr. They have no other choice». - Yusof said in a fatherly tone, «You even defend them, my dear boy? This is their war. What is it to us? Hitler is from their own continent. They fattened him up themselves. Let them pay for it. Pay for everything».³³

This paragraph sounds like a political pamphlet in dialogue form. It reflects the general and popular discourse in Iran about what happened in and to the country during World War II. The event is processed by relegating the external aspects (the international war) to the margin and by stressing the internal aspects (the occupation of Iran). The occupation of Iran proper is presented in a dichotomous structure: Besides the antagonisms of “them” vs. “us”, “foreign troops” vs. “brothers and compatriots”, another chord is struck here: “the perpetrator / invader” vs. “the victim”, “guilt” vs. “innocence”. Spoken by Yusof (= Siyāvoš), the projected innocent victim of the novel, this aspect acquires a self-referential quality. The motif of the innocent victim has threefold coverage in the novel: Siyāvoš's mythical destiny, Yusof's biographical destiny and Iran's political destiny are basically congruent in their inevitable victimisation. Parallel to the myth of Siyāvoš, national history can only be interpreted as a piece with guilty evildoers and an innocent victim. There is no direct interference by the authorial narrator as in the above mentioned commentary in *Tehrān-e maxuf*. Instead, the topic is discussed in a dialogue with a clear distribution of the good and bad roles. With its bipolar structure, the information given on the specific historical situation, assumes the character of a moralising political message.

The bipolar structure demonstrated in our analysis of how World War II and the occupation of Iran are presented in Dānešvar's novel, also pervades Karimi-Hakkak's broader portrayal of the literary scene in Iran at the advent of the Islamic Revolution and shortly afterwards.³⁴ He points out that especially after 1953, Iranian poets have dichotomised their view of the society into a unified “us” (“the people” and the authors) and “our enemies” (Shah, government, censure, SAVAK), and he defines this reduction of the complex socio-political interactions to an antagonistic pattern as the working principle and main constant factor of the literary production in Iran:

33 – Simin Dānešvar, *Savūšun*, Tehrān, 1363/1984 (11th edn.), p. 52f.; cf. transl. Daneshvar, *Savushun...*, *cit.*, p. 73.

34 – Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, “Revolutionary Posturing: Iranian Writers and the Iranian Revolution of 1979”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 23 (1991), p. 507-531.

To those Iranian writers who had come increasingly to position themselves on the side of that eternal object of social contestation called 'the people' in the battlefield where the forces of an autocratic state were perceived and portrayed as having lined up against an entire society, the phenomenon of revolution had come to mean ... a leap toward the utopian notion of a society at peace with itself. ... Starting with the widespread perception ... that the monarchical state and Iranian people pursue fundamentally different visions and ideals, many Iranian poets and writers began to articulate their impression of this difference in their literary works in one form or another of opposite entities, positioning themselves with increasing selfconsciousness against the state power structure.³⁵

Karimi-Hakkak further describes the writers' despair when faced with revolutionary reality. He conceives it as a breakdown of the symbolic, explanatory, and communicational system of «familiar patterns of dichotomous opposition».³⁶ The breakdown of the system of antagonistic patterns is brought about by the «introduction of more complex variables, more complicated patterns of cultural contestation aggressively advanced by an unlikely contender – i.e., the traditional religious leaders ...».³⁷ In addition to these «more complicated patterns of cultural contestation», I would argue that the authors had to define their place in society with new co-ordinates or even in a different co-ordinate system. They had to cope with the fact that the Islamic-Shi'ī model of socio-political organisation had an enormous mobilising effect within "the people". Whether they had conceived themselves as having a political mission or not, the realities of the mass movement shoved the poets and writers to a marginal position in terms of influence and mobilising power. They often did not agree with the new potentates, but because of the mass movement in favour of Khomeini, they could not easily refer to the old model of "us" and "them".

On the other hand, in the reference system which shaped the writers' profiles, important items were occupied by the new potentates: the Iranian-nationalist reference including the glorious pre-Islamic history proved to be as vital to the Islamic rulers as to the Pahlavis. Other crucial elements in the reference system were very clearly marked as part of the victorious revolutionary setting: the defence and political priority of the poor masses, who were renamed with the Koranic notion of *mostaz'afin* (the deprived ones), the fight against political and economic dependence from the West and cultural alienation. The revolutionary upheaval and the new political system implemented in Iran, confronted the writers not only with a new set of publicly displayed moral values and the inherent restrictions, but also with the deprivation of their reference system. In my view, it is the last point which induced changes in the post-revolutionary literature. At the same time, in the 1980s, new narrative techniques as well as post-structuralist literary theory were eagerly absorbed and applied in the literary circles in Iran. Both the political irritations in Iranian society and the changes in

35 – Karimi-Hakkak, "Revolutionary Posturing...", *cit.*, p. 508.

36 – *Ibid.*, p. 525.

37 – *Ibid.*

the theoretical implications of literary work may have led to the loss of an unequivocal focus and to the shift to diffuse focalisation in the narrative. Of course, there are several literary works even long before the revolution of 1979 that had already broken with the straightforward, referential type of story. Šādeq Hedāyat's *Buḡ-e kur* (1936), Šādeq Ābūbak's *Sang-e Šabur* (The Patient Stone, 1966), and Hušang Golširi's *Šāzde Eḡtejāb* (Prince Ehtejab, 1968) may be mentioned as the most well-known examples. Formulating the stream of consciousness in inner monologues, these novels express the inner world and psychological images of their characters. The post-revolutionary novels, on the other hand, are more decisive in their dissolution of a wholesale representation of reality. They do not express an individual's imagination of reality, but put forward the notion that reality is nothing but imagination(s). The constructive idea of reality has most conspicuous consequences for the way historical events are incorporated into the narration.

Dissolution in History: Ma' rufi's Semfuni-ye mordegān and Pārsipur's Ṭubā

An intriguing phenomenon in the post-revolutionary prose literature is the use of 20th century history in fictional writing. The Islamic Revolution put an end to a dynasty and turned the period of the five previous decades into "the Pahlavi period". Postrevolutionary authors who set the plots of their novels within these decades, do not write about the very political setting they are living in, but, looking back, about history. Only after the end of a period can a period be denominated as such. The two novels which enjoyed the most vivid reception in the decade after the revolution, 'Abbās Ma' rufi's *Semfuni-ye mordegān* (1989) and Šahrnuš Pārsipur's *Ṭubā va ma' nā-ye šab* (1988) are family sagas, whose plots cover four (*Semfuni*) and ca. seven (*Ṭubā*) decades of the 20th century respectively. Rather than dramatise the effects of a single historical event (like the "allied occupation of Iran" in *Savušun*), both novels unroll the thread of the main events of 20th century Iranian history in retrospect. This thread is loosely knit into the plot itself – as background information, creating an atmosphere, and motivating actional units.

'Abbās Ma' rufi's novel *Semfuni-ye mordegān* displays quite a reductive use of historical items. The following scene refers to World War II: When the Russians occupy Azerbaijan, Yusof, one of the sons of the protagonist family, tries to imitate the Russian parachutists, jumps from the roof and is severely injured. From the time of his accident,

... he had become something between man and animal. Dead and alive. A creature that was constantly chewing. The children accepted it quietly, except Āidin who, whenever he thought of his dumb brother, understood very well that, as far as their family was concerned, the whole war and the attack had been generated only in order to change Yusof's very nature.³⁸

38 – 'Abbās Ma' rufi, *Semfuni-ye mordegān*, Našr-e Gardun, Tehrān, 1370/1991 (1st edn. Tehrān 1368/1989), p. 117f.

This passage evokes the private notion of the political event we have already observed in *Tehrān-e maxuf*. But the event as such has disappeared. Nowhere in the narrative, it is outlined as a discernible unit, but it only occurs in a very limited and segmented imagination of reality, linked to the character of Yusof who incorporates the very opposite of profile and action and becomes almost a non-character. It is only through the interpretation of Yusof's fate as an allegory for Iran's 20th century history that the scene conveys a political meaning again.

Pārsipur's novel *Ṭubā va ma' nā-ye šab* (Ṭubā is the name of the female protagonist) also shows features of dissolution and segmentation. World War I, for example, is mentioned as a mere rumour: «They say that in the European countries an international war has started».³⁹ In this context, Ṭubā's husband, a Qājār prince with reactionary views, introduces the name of the German emperor Wilhelm II to Ṭubā:

During these lonely times he filled his wife's brain with the story and praise of Wilhelm, the Prussian emperor who was the saviour of Iran. After having paid the Russians and English back, this saviour was supposed to come to Iran and rescue the Iranian people. With extraordinary conviction, the prince clung to this dream and little by little, Wilhelm was established as an idol in Ṭubā's mind. With Wilhelm, there would be rain, prices would fall, the aunt's madness would be contained, and there would be a common well-being and flourishing.⁴⁰

The narration focuses – although not exclusively – on Ṭubā, a traditional woman with strong religious and mystical inclinations. The above mentioned *Savūšun*, on the other hand, is also – and more consistently – focused on Zari, the female protagonist. Neither female protagonist interferes in questions of politics. But in spite of these parallels, the presentation of international politics takes a different turn in the postrevolutionary novel. There is no dialogue, as the whole novel is almost completely devoid of dialogue scenes. Ṭubā's mind absorbs the concept of Wilhelm, the saviour emperor and integrates this into her associative thinking. Wilhelm occasionally re-emerges in Ṭubā's thoughts, where he survives unchanged as the cliché that has been formed by her husband: he is called God's envoy (p. 155) and the rescuer of the time (p. 213 f.).

Later in the course of events, Ṭubā learns about the Bolsheviks from an Armenian refugee. The Armenian, who knows only a little Persian, tells her about the promiscuity of the Bolsheviks, thus activating a common cliché for political and ideological opponents.⁴¹ In his words, they «share their women». The Ar-

39 – Šahrnuš Pārsipur, *Ṭubā vā ma' nā-ye šab*, n.p., n.d., p. 149.

40 – *Ibid.*

41 – Moojan Momen in his “The Social Basis of the Bābī Upheavals in Iran (1848-53)” (*International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 14, 1983, p. 157-183) mentions the point with regard to the Babis: «It should be noted, by way of a parenthesis at this point, that although the Bābis were frequently accused by government and religious sources (and the Europeans in Iran who usually reflected these sources) of being communist and preaching anarchy, immorality, and the community of property and even of wives, the accusations should not be taken too seriously as there is in Iran almost a tradition of accusing any heterodox movement of holding

menian uses the verb *taqsim kardan* which means both to share and to divide. Ṭubā thus misunderstands his point and imagines the Bolsheviks as men who cut women to pieces.

He said [*bāševik*] *zanhā-rā taqsim mikonad* and immediately, Ṭubā's mind absorbed the notion of the Bolsheviks cutting women across their waist, although she would not quite understand what it might be good for.⁴²

The standard concept of heretics and rebels sharing their women is mentioned in the second volume of *Tehrān-e maxuf* as well, linked to «the rebels in the north of Iran», who were influenced by the Bolshevik movement. The scene is set in the years 1919-1920, and the “rebels in the north” refer to the Jangalis in Gilan (1917-1921) and the autonomous movement in Azerbaijan of 1919-20. The scene allows direct comparison:

In those days, a number of people in the north of Iran revolted against the central government, and some foreigners were associated with them, and they threatened the capital. ... Everywhere one could hear people talk about how dangerous these rebels were. ... Some were horrified by the thought of losing their wealth and properties and some simple-minded and credulous people feared for their wives to become common property.⁴³

Again, the narrator explains the world to his readers. References – who thinks what about whom? – are elaborated and the scene is placed into a general historical frame. On the contrary, in *Ṭubā*, the upheaval which determined 20th century world history is reduced to a naive image that could have been taken from a horror film. The referential system of the narration does not exceed the limitations of the mind the image has sprung from. Ṭubā nourishes a fantastic and extremely limited notion of this revolutionary movement. Once she has grasped the subject, it is encapsulated in her mind and does not undergo any change afterwards. Ṭubā, as the personification of a closed society, is incapable of communicating, changing her views or going beyond the limits of her own sphere of life. Some pages later, there are some lines in the text presenting a shadow of what might be called a political discussion with a dervish who frequents Ṭubā's house and presents the religious point of view:

He [the dervish] said: «The Bolshevik is the scourge of God». The woman [Ṭubā] once had entered the room and asked why, if the Bolshevik is the scourge of God, he does not believe in God. The dervish ... had answered that this was another manifestation of God's glory.⁴⁴

A third position is embodied by Ṭubā's husband, the Qājār prince, who stands closest to the political implications of the phenomenon. He is presented as a weak creature who can think only about his personal loss and degradation and

these views. The Ismā'īlīs and the Mazdakites were similarly accused» (p. 177f).

42 – Pārsipur, *Ṭubā vā ma' nā-ye šab*, cit., p. 156.

43 – Mošfeq Kāzemi, *Tehrān-e maxuf*, cit., II, p. 70.

44 – Pārsipur, *Ṭubā vā ma' nā-ye šab*, cit., p. 159.

blames the Bolsheviks for the loss of his properties in Azerbaijan. The interpretation of the Russian Revolution is presented in three versions, each of which conveys an extremely limited perspective of the phenomenon. The narration never tries to outline more general historical dimensions of the event in question.



To sum up: The four Persian novels compared above, differ both in temporal scope and in the literary instrumentalisation of historical events. *Tehrān-e maxūf* from the early 1920s takes the contemporary political situation as a background to the plot and clearly discerns between the action and the narrator's explanatory comments on politics. *Savūšun*, on the other hand, dramatises and integrates a crucial historical situation into the plot. The dialogue scenes, in which political issues are discussed, stress the bipolar structure underlying the plot of the novel. Thus, *Savūšun* communicates a clear distinction between what is to be held true and false, right or wrong in the particular historical situation. Both novels, however, have in common that they convey a clear conception of historical facts and relate historical events as the outermost referential frame of the story.

The postrevolutionary novels cover a larger part of the 20th century, never allowing any single historical event to prevail over the rest of the story. Moreover, *Semfūni-ye mordegān* and *Tubā* do not refer to historical facts, let alone truths. In these novels, historical events are no longer external points of reference. They are internalised and integrated into the characters' minds and reduced to biographical items or constituent parts of a character's stream of consciousness. By this process, they lose their chronological linkage and procedural character and fall apart into isolated elements. While the earlier novels convey events as clearly structured, coherent, and meaningful units, the postrevolutionary novels strip them of any general meaning and present multiple individual perceptions of history.