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ARTICLE



Da and its mothers of the martyred: meaning and contest in an Iranian war memoir

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ABSTRACT

Zahra Husayni's war memoir *Da* (2008) is widely recognized as one of the most successful productions of Hawzah-yi Hunari's Holy Defence oral history project. Focusing on this work and by using a combination of paratextual analysis and close reading, the present article explores the dynamics of meaning-making as a contested phenomenon within the propagandist messaging of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The analysis hinges on the fact that despite the official promotion of this memoir as a tribute to the mothers of martyrs of the Iran-Iraq War, the narratives of these mothers are surprisingly marginalized within the text. Approaching the Holy Defence discourse as a Lyotardian grand narrative, this article raises the question whether in light of this discrepancy, a counter-discursive reading of *Da* is possible. Exploring this question provides insight into the construction and propagation of meaning in the Holy Defence war memoirs industry in Iran.

Da: Khatirat-i Sayyidah Zahra Husayni (*Da: The Memoirs of Sayyidah Zahra Husayni*),¹ compiled, edited, and written by A'zam Husayni,² was released in 2008 by Surah-yi Mihr,³ the publishing house of the Hawzah-yi Hunari and the most renowned and prolific publishing forum for what is known as the Literature of the Holy Defence or *Adabiyāt-i difā'ī muqaddas* in the Iranian post-revolutionary literary market.⁴

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¹In Kurdish and Lori, The word *dā* means mother.

²Zahra Husayni and her editor A'zam Husayni are not related.

³All the references to Husayni's work in this article are based on the 148th reprint of the book published in 2011. It should be noted that slight or sometimes even major changes in the publication of literature (both in prose and poetry) are not registered as new editions in the Iranian publishing system. A reprint of a work may or may not be a new edition.

⁴Hawzah-yi Hunari-yi Sazman-i Tablighat-i Islami (The Arts Center of the Organization for Islamic Propagation) stands as one of the earliest cultural institutions of the Islamic Republic. Its inception traces back to the months preceding the Islamic Revolution, initiated by writers and artists with Islamist and revolutionary leanings. The Arts Center, primarily named Kanun-i Farhangi-yi Nahzat-i Islami and shortly thereafter Hawzah-yi Hunar va Andishah-yi Islami, came to be a subdivision of Sazman-i Tablighat-i Islami in the early 1980s following the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War. Operating under the direct auspicious of the Supreme Leader, Hawzah-yi Hunari runs parallel to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance as an alternative institution for cultural supervision, with its primary mission focused on shaping policy and disseminating Islamic thought and ideology through and in the field of culture. On the history of the Hawzah-yi Hunari see Fatemeh Shams, *A Revolution in Rhyme: Poetic Co-option under the Islamic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 88–120.

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Holy Defence or Sacred Defence are translations of the term *difā`i muqaddas*, used for the first time by Ayatollah Khomeini on the occasion of the third anniversary of the Islamic Revolution,⁵ one-and-a-half years into the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88). Rapidly since, it turned into one of the well-established ideological concepts of the state; it became the very point of reference for the Islamic Republic's Shiite identity in the course of the war and thereafter. Throughout the years, this ideological concept has evolved into an all-encompassing epistemological framework for the Islamic Republic within which the very function of the state and its institutions can be determined and comprehended. Its authoritative logic shapes the backbone of the Islamic Republic's socio-political agendas, foreign policy, military actions, economics, educational and cultural institutions, crisis management policies,⁶ as well as the very definition of ideal Shiite citizenship.

During and after the war with Iraq, culture turned into the main arena for the representation and propagation of the Holy Defence Shiite values, for example, martyrdom and the Islamic Jihad. Such concepts were often communicated through Shiite narratives such as the story of Husayn Ibn `Ali, the third Shiite Imam, in the Battle of Karbala (in the year 680 CE), a religious account that builds the allegorical base for the Iran-Iraq War and its official narrative in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Such Shiite model narratives are further propagated through war-related cultural products, such as literature, films, visual arts, and museums. In the case of literature, state-sponsored translation projects have been aiming for a possible international audience to disseminate the Holy Defence ideology on a global level. Cultural space, in this respect, has come to serve as the contact point between the state ideology and its audience. Through state sponsorship, Holy Defence cultural products have further evolved to form an autonomous artistic genre. What is known today as Holy Defence Literature (*Adabiyāt-i difā`i muqaddas*), for example, is the result of this state-related cultural phenomenon.⁷

With a focus on Zahra Husayni's *Da* and by using a combination of paratextual analysis and close reading, this article explores the dynamics of meaning-making as a contested phenomenon within the propagandist messaging of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The analysis hinges on the fact that despite the official promotion of this memoir as a tribute to the mothers of martyrs of the Iran-Iraq War, the narratives of these mothers are surprisingly marginalized within the text. Approaching the Holy Defence as a Lyotardian grand narrative, this article raises the question whether in light of this discrepancy a counter-discursive reading of *Da* is possible. Exploring this question provides insight into the ways that meaning is constituted and propagated in the Holy Defence war memoirs industry in Iran.

Da, like most samples of Holy Defence non-fiction literature, is a commissioned work produced within the framework of a state-sponsored oral history/memoir project by the

⁵Avvalin karburd-i vazhah-yi difa`i muqaddas tavassut-i chah kasi bud?, *Navid-i Shahid*, February 11, 2014, <https://navideshahed.com/fa/news/315705/> (accessed September 9, 2023).

⁶For the deployment of the Holy Defence framework for crisis management during the COVID-19 pandemic see the article by Olmo Gözl and Kevin Schwarz in this special issue.

⁷This includes both non-fiction (memoirs, oral histories, etc.) and fiction. In recent years the production of war-related fiction in Iran has distanced itself from the state ideology. For a detailed discussion on the new developments in Iranian war fiction see Gouliā Ghardashkhani, 'Narrative Geometry in `Ali Reza Gholami's *Divar* (The Wall): New Developments in Iranian War Literature', *Iranian Studies* 53, no. 5–6 (2020), doi: 10.1080/00210862.2020.1808449. See also Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami, 'Narratives of Silence: Persian Fiction of the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq War', in *Moments of Silence: Authenticity in the Cultural Expressions of the Iran-Iraq War 1980–1988*, ed. Arta Khakpour, Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami and Shouleh Vatanabadi, (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 217–35.

Hawzah-yi Hunari. Despite being an exceptional example of war memoirs in Iran due to the portrayal of a woman as its heroic protagonist and sole narrator, it remains entirely consistent with the official discourse. The work was a bestseller and reprinted more than 140 times within the first three years after its publication.⁸ In 2021, its 159th reprint was released. In its marketing profile, *Da* is acclaimed for having reached a wide audience from different social, political, and ideological backgrounds, a feature that is usually absent in the reception and readership of works that are in line with the Holy Defence ideology.⁹ Yet the success of the book seems to be the result of a deliberate state-sponsored project to strategically generate data and widen the scope of the work's readership, such as the frequent reprint of small numbers of copies and the distribution and donation of free copies to educational and state institutions throughout the country.¹⁰ *Da* has also been officially endorsed by 'Ali Khamenei, the present leader of the Islamic Republic, as a 'good' specimen of 'recording the true and real history of the Islamic Revolution'.¹¹ In its critical context, it has been praised as the 'documentary archive of the war' reproducing the 'official discourse of [that] war' (*guftimān-i rasmi-yi jang*).¹² *Da* has so far been translated into English, Arabic, Bosnian, and Urdu.¹³

A grand narrative and its stress-zone

In reading *Da*, I treat the concept of the Holy Defence as a Lyotardian grand narrative that is prone to be both diluted and enlarged by what Lyotard conceptualizes as the little narrative or the '*petit récit*'. Little narratives can be defined as individual (or individualized) narratives that in treating the topic of narration (history and ideology, for example) do not intend to be unifying and universal. They are plural and heterogeneous and can create a statement that is capable of unsettling the grand narrative in question.¹⁴

Iranian prose literature on the topic of the Iran-Iraq War forms a rich reservoir of such little narratives. These little narratives are sometimes in the form of autonomous works, for

⁸Laetitia Nanquette, 'An Iranian Woman's Memoir on the Iran-Iraq War: The Production and Reception of *Da*', *Iranian Studies* 46, no. 6 (2013): 943. In this article, Nanquette gives a thorough account of the production, reception and distribution of Husayni's memoir and analyses the official marketing and the promotion strategies resulting in the dubious data concerning the popularity of the work.

⁹*Da* is also a prize-winning work in the fields of history and biography. Among other awards, the work was the winner of the 9th Shahid Ghanipur prize in biography in 2010, 'Barguzidigan-i nuhumim dawrah-yi kitab-i sal-i Shahid Ghanipur mu'arrifi shudand', *IBNA*, 3 March, 2010, <https://www.ibna.ir/vdcex78p.jh8ewi9bbj.html> (accessed September 8, 2023); it also won the Jalal Al-i Ahmad prize in documentation and historiography 2009, 'Da barguzida-yi jayizah-yi Jalal Al-i Ahmad shud', *Khanaronline*, 22 November, 2009, <https://www.khabaronline.ir/xdRp> (accessed September 8, 2023).

¹⁰Nanquette, 'An Iranian Woman's Memoir'. See also Paul Sprachman, 'Translator's Introduction' to *One Woman's War: Da (Mother), The Memoirs of Seyyedeh Zahra Hoseyni* by Seyyedeh Zahra Hoseyni, trans. Paul Sprachman (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2014), xi—xxx.

¹¹'Didar-i jam'i az mas'ulan-i Hawzah-yi Hunari va dastdarkaran-i tawlid va intishar-i kitab-i *Da*', *KHAMENEI.IR*, May 10, 2010, <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=9360> (accessed September 8, 2023).

¹²'Siyidah Zahra Husayni: Vaqi'iyat-ha-yiman ra bah dast-i bad misiparim', *Tasnim*, June 8, 2015, <https://www.div.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1394/03/18/763714/> (accessed 14 Apr. 2022).

¹³See 'A'zam Husayni: *Da* zarrah'i iradat ast bah madaran-i shuhada-yi Khurramshahr: Faraz va nashib-ha-yi nigarish-i kitab az zaban-i nivisandah', *Tasnim*, October 28, 2018, <https://www.div.tasnimnews.com/fa/news/1397/08/06/1863378/> (accessed September 8, 2023). In this report, the translation of *Da* into Spanish, Turkish, and Russian are also announced.

¹⁴See Lyotard, *La Condition postmoderne*; and its English translation *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). For the application of a similar theoretical framework (involving the dynamics between Lyotardian grand and little narratives) on the study of Iranian modernist literary works see: Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami, *Literary Subterfuge and Contemporary Persian Fiction: Who writes Iran?* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

example, in the form of an entire novel or a particular short story and therefore more visible. In the context of war-related fiction in Iran, we can think of works by Shahriar Mandanipur, 'Ali Reza Gholami, Hossein Mortezaeian Abkenar, and Nasim Mar'ashi as examples of alternative narratives of the war challenging and even unsettling the grand narrative of the Holy Defence in their entirety.¹⁵ But little narratives can also be virtually 'little', embedded in works that in fact vigorously reiterate the regime's ideology and its grand narrative of the war in this case. I use the word embedded in the sense of hidden, something that is there but has to be dug out and elaborated upon in critical discourse, so that its counter-discursive quality can be demonstrated.

One should beware of reducing the dynamics here to a binary of pro- and counter-Holy Defence; it is important to realize that although little narratives (extended or short, obvious or latent) do disturb the homogeneity of a grand narrative, they also widen its scope, helping it to adapt and become relevant to the conditions of the here and now. The process is an ambiguous one. This means that what counts as incompatible with the Holy Defence grand narrative in the context of Iranian war-related narratives might in the long run be received as a standard 'sub-version' (as opposed to subversion) of this literature.¹⁶ Instances of this phenomenon abound in post-war Iranian war fiction: for example, works by Ahmad Dehqan, Habib Ahmadzadeh, and Mohammad Reza Bayrami belong to this category.¹⁷

Thus, by using the words 'diluted' and 'enlarged' above, I deviate from Lyotard's postmodernist view that emphasizes the 'delegitimation' of grand narratives vis-à-vis the plural condition of disseminated knowledge in contemporary times.¹⁸ While in Lyotard's view, plural little narratives are celebrated as the ultimate counter-force against grand narratives, in the examination of the Holy Defence, a complicated process of adaptation and survival can be detected. There are certainly little narratives that act as agents of counter-discursivity, but they are also capable of facilitating adaptation and engaging a wider range of audience for the Holy Defence grand narrative.¹⁹

For locating counter-discursive little narratives in literature, I rely on the concept of the 'implied reader'.²⁰ This refers to all those textual conditions that trigger the imagination of the reader in a narrative text to make up for the unsaid. I argue, however, that in ideological literature, this space is not exclusively and unconditionally granted to the reader. It is in fact a contested space.

¹⁵For an analysis of 'Ali Reza Gholami's alternative war novel see Ghardashkhani, 'Narrative Geometry'. For a close reading of Nasim Mar'ashi's controversial war-related novel *Haras* (Pruning) (2017) see the piece by Amir Moosavi published in this special issue. For an analysis of Abkenar's anti-war novel see Amir Moosavi, 'Sonic Triggers and Fiery Pools: The Senses at War in Hossein Mortezaeian Abkenar's *Scorpion*', in *Losing Our Minds, Coming to Our Senses: Sensory Readings of Persian Literature and Culture*, ed. Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami and Amir Moosavi, (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2021).

¹⁶Commenting on this phenomenon, Tohid Asadi has used the term 'sub-version' with this particular meaning in the context of the Iran-Iraq War literature in Iran in a personal communication.

¹⁷For the study of works by these authors see Mohammad Reza Ghanooonparvar 'War Veterans Turned Writers of War Narratives', in *Moments of Silence: Authenticity in the Cultural Expressions of the Iran-Iraq war 1980–1988*, ed. Arta Khakpour, Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami and Shouleh Vatanabadi (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 88–102.

¹⁸Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 37–41.

¹⁹Whether this observation can be attributed to all that is identifiable as 'grand narrative' is beyond the scope of the present article; but this definitely applies to the dynamics within the Holy Defence culture. I am grateful to Christoph Werner who made me aware of this crucial dynamic.

²⁰Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). On Iser and his reader-response theory see also: Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore, MD and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

Thus, within Holy Defence culture, I identify a liminal phenomenon that I would like to term as the *stress-zone*. The stress-zone of the Holy Defence is the virtual space, where the text and the (potential) reader meet and the process of meaning-making is simultaneously initiated and suppressed. This dynamic is not limited to the encounter between a finished product and the reader of the text. Rather, it is an integral part of the production process and the hegemonic engagement with the implied reader, incorporating such matters as publishing permits, censorship, marketing, etc.²¹ For example, in a recent critical discussion held at the editorial office of Iran's Book News Agency (known as IBNA) in September 2022, Murtiza Qazi, at the time the director of Marz-u-bum (a publishing house connected to the IRGC), refers to the reasons why a certain war memoir was not granted a publishing permit. According to Qazi, the narrator of the memoir had mentioned a clash between himself and his superior commander at the time of the war, a narrative that distorts the image of the Iranian army as a unified force.²² Since this counter-discursive reading was potentially possible, the editorial board decided against the publication of this particular war memoir.

The stress-zone of the Holy Defence culture, in this sense, is the virtual zone of negotiation between the hegemonic truth and the implied reader. It is the ambiguous zone, where meaning is both created and suppressed, and where the reader is both rejected and desired. This is not a new observation per se. However, this approach to the indispensability of ideological truth is not just a criterion for endorsement or rejection of works within the Holy Defence publishing industry, but rather functions as a *critical stencil* even after the publication of the already endorsed works. The emphasis on a work's ideological truth is an attempt on the part of the authorities to cut the meaning of the cultural product in question into the desired shape and promote *that* particular reading. So, it is not just the cultural product that might count as propaganda in this context, but also the official marketing as well as the official reception of that work on the level of critical discourse.

In the case of *Da*, while certain aspects of the work have been deployed to attract a wider audience for it, such as its form as memoir narrated by an active heroic woman on the battlefield,²³ the same elements seem to be threatening in the wider context of socio-cultural gender roles in the Islamic Republic. For example, the anxiety over the simultaneous desire for the reader and the rejection thereof can be discerned from a discussion session held at the Hawzah-yi Hunari in June 2015 shortly after the publication of the Urdu translation of the book.²⁴ Farzanah A'zam Lutfi, lecturer at the department of Urdu Language and Literature of the University of Tehran, emphasized during the meeting that *Da* is neither a 'novel' (*rumān*) nor 'mythology' (*ustūrah*); it has 'its roots in historical

²¹This also includes post-publication bans and re-issuance of permits.

²²'Haqiqat-i jang az tariq-i sabb-i kamil va daqiq-i vaqi'iyat-i jang hifz mishavad', *IBNA*, 29 September, 2022, <https://www.div.ibna.ir/vdchv-nxi23niqd.tft2.html>, (accessed September 8, 2023).

²³*Da* is one of the early instances of women's war memoirs published in Iran. A considerable number of memoirs and/or oral histories focusing on women and their participation in the Iran-Iraq War have since been published by Surah-yi Mihr and other state-affiliated publishers such as Buruj and Rivayat-i Fath. An interesting example is *Muhajir-i sarzamin-i aftar: Khatirat-i Kuniku Yamamura (Saba Babayi), yiganah madar-i shahid-i zhapuni dar Iran* published in 2020 by Surah-yi Mihr. The work gives an account of a Japanese woman (married to an Iranian man) as an exceptional case of the mother of the martyred.

²⁴'Sayyidah Zahra Husayni: Vaqi'iyat'. The Urdu translation of *Da* was severely criticized at this session. The most important argument expressed against it was that the translator had allegedly not been familiar enough with the 'culture of martyrdom' (*farhang-i shahadat*), thus accounting for why the 'spirit of the Holy Defence' (*ruh-i difa'-i muqaddas*) is not properly reflected in the translation.

reality' and thus should not be allowed to become 'distorted'. She continued by stating that 'today's critical studies tend to approach this book through feminism. We have to prevent [the studies of] this book from moving in these directions'.²⁵

The report does not comment further on Lutfi's remark; but in light of the fact that from the state's perspective Islam and Western feminism are incompatible,²⁶ it can be inferred that any kind of reading labelled as feministic or centred on the question of women would potentially be a threat to the kind of truth promoted by Husayni's memoirs. This is why Lutfi, the university professor at the session on *Da*, categorically dismisses and warns against a feminist reading of Husayni's narrative lest the singular truth of the Holy Defence grand narrative be distorted through further (possibly alternative) analyses of her text. In her dedicated duty of promoting a particular reading of *Da*, Lutfi fulfils the role of *critical stencil*, shaping the meaning of the text into the desired cut or limiting its meaning potential.

If we take Marianne Hirsch's statement that '[a]ny full study of mother-daughter relationships in whatever field, is by definition both feminist and interdisciplinary' at face value, then Lutfi's remark becomes critically provoking.²⁷ Can there be a 'little' counter-narrative embedded in a state-sponsored work in which the mother of the martyr, from whom the title of the work is derived, becomes a textual representation in her daughter's autobiographical and yet highly propagandist narration?²⁸

The answer to the question above hinges on *Da's* narrative genre as a hybrid of a woman's memoir and propagandist oral history: While as a woman's memoir—dedicated to the narrator's own mother—the work raises the expectation in the reader for some *individual* (confessional, personal) story, its production within the official framework of an oral history project of the Hawzah-yi Hunari guarantees a *typical* ideology-oriented story of the war. Although the narrator of *Da* (as a matter of principle) almost exclusively opts for the typical in her narration, there are incidental digressions to the individual side. The friction between these two narrative frames imposed by the work's generic hybridity casts light on latent 'little narratives' that concern the representation of the figure of the martyr's mother in Husayni's memoir.

Da, a woman's war memoir: synopsis

Da is an autobiographical account based on more than a thousand hours of interview between Zahra Husayni and A'zam Husayni, the compiler and the editor of the text. The latter can be identified as the known ghost-writer behind Zahra Husayni's autobiographical account, who has been able to retain the narrator's character traits and personal voice.²⁹ The work is written in a simple and straightforward language in order to reach

²⁵Sayyidah Zahra Husayni: Vaqi' iyyat', Lutfi's remark in Persian: '*Naqd-hā-yi imrūzi sa' y dārand kah in kitāb rā bah hīṭah-yi naqd-i fiministī bikishānand. Bāyad talāsh kunim kah in kitāb bah in samt-hā naravad*'.

²⁶For an example of a typical Islamic critical approach towards feminism in contemporary Iran see: Qasim Ahmadi, 'Arzyabi-yi intiqadi-yi fiminism az manzar-i akhlaqi', *Pazhuhishnamah-yi akhlaq*, no. 33 (2016): 115–36.

²⁷Marianne Hirsch, 'Mothers and Daughters', *Signs* 7, no. 1 (1981): 203.

²⁸The narrative relationship between daughters and mothers in Persian/Iranian contemporary literature has been the topic of several recent works. Regarding Jewish-Iranian memoirs narrated by daughters about the silenced experiences of their mothers, Fotouhi goes as far as defining the narrating daughter as the verbalization of 'the mother's silenced voice'. Sanaz Fotouhi, *The Literature of the Iranian Diaspora: Meaning and Identity since the Islamic Revolution* (London and New York: I.B.Tauris, 2015), 171. See also Sahar Maziar, 'Female Experience in Persian Post-Revolutionary Fiction by Women' (PhD diss., University of Bamberg, 2023).

²⁹Sprachman, 'Translator's Introduction', xi.

a wider audience. Its narrative style, marked by a serious tone and a monological discourse, aims to avoid any kind of ambiguity in conveying the text's ideological message. From a historiographical perspective, *Da* is a valuable document providing evidence about women's active participation in the Iran-Iraq War in different capacities. While the conventional cultural position allocated to women within the Holy Defence is bereft of subjectivity and always dependent on an absent male agent for representational value,³⁰ this work with its seventeen-year-old female protagonist,³¹ constantly functional and present in the heart of action (alongside other women), offers an exception to the androcentric Holy Defence culture. Nevertheless, for the most part, the work is in complete accordance with the state's grand narrative of the Holy Defence. Every detail of the work, including dialogues, incidents, conflicts, characters, moral decisions, and actions are presented in accordance with the ideological narrative of the war and the Islamic Republic's values.

The narrative of Husayni's memoir can be divided into three main parts. The first part of the book (52 pages) is about Zahra's childhood and early recollections of her life in Iraq, the forced emigration of her family from Iraq to Iran and the account of her family's economic deprivation in Iran making their settlement in Khorramshahr difficult.³²

The second part of the narrative constitutes the main corpus of the book. It is a 457-page detailed chronicle of the first three weeks of the Iraqi invasion of Khorramshahr in the autumn of 1980 (22 September to 13 October) during which the seventeen-year-old Zahra becomes actively involved in the war. She volunteers in Jannat-Abad, Khorramshahr's graveyard, for washing the corpses and burying the dead. Under the supervision of a medical team, she also learns and offers paramedic assistance to the injured soldiers and civilians. The second part of the book ends with the narrator being seriously wounded by shrapnel while trying to take medical and military provisions to the frontline. This part of the book also contains the account of the martyrdom of Zahra's father and that of her beloved nineteen-year-old brother, 'Ali.³³

The last part of the narrative (196 pages in length) consists of random snapshots from Zahra's life during and after her recovery, her reunion with her mother and grandfather who had left the region for safety, the family's relocation to Tehran under the protection of Bunyad-i Shahid,³⁴ and the narrator's marriage and her life in between Tehran and Abadan. This part of the narrative stretches over about thirteen years.³⁵

The book also has an appendix containing interviews, cross-referenced passages, a series of photographs, and facsimiles of other documents.³⁶

³⁰For example, the sister of the martyred (*khvāhar-i shahīd*), the mother of the martyred (*mādar-i shahīd*), the wife of the martyred (*hamsar-i shahīd*). For a study on women's active participation in the Iran-Iraq War see Mateo Mohammad Farzaneh, *Iranian Women and Gender in the Iran-Iraq War* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2021).

³¹The bulk of the work is allotted to the narration of the early days of the war, when the narrator was only seventeen years old.

³²Husayni, *Da*, 17–69.

³³*Ibid.*, 74–531.

³⁴The Martyrs' Foundation (Bunyad-i Shahid-i Inqilab-i Islami, now Bunyad-i Shahid va Umur-i Isargaran) was founded in March 1980 to grant financial and logistic support to the families of the martyrs and disabled war veterans. For a short introduction to the Foundation and its wartime activities see the entry *Encyclopaedia Iranica Online*, s.v. 'Bonyād-e Šahīd', <https://wwwdiv.iranicaonline.org/articles/bonyad-e-sahid#prettyPhoto>, (accessed September 8, 2023).

³⁵Husayni, *Da*, 535–731.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 735–87.

Da and its mothers of the martyred: the embedded little narrative

The highly propagandist paratext of *Da* implies that Husayni's memoir is a celebration of the mothers of the martyred and the sacrifices they have willingly made for preserving the geopolitical integrity of the Islamic Republic of Iran during the Iran-Iraq War. This involves not only the title of the book, but also other paratextual materials including interviews, discussion sessions, etc. For example, Zahra Husayni, in the introduction of the book, emphasizes:

I have named this book *Da*, in order to express my appreciation and gratitude for the self-sacrifice of mothers of the martyred, especially my own forbearing mother, who devoutly offered all her love and existence to God. For without these zealous and heartbroken mothers, the self-sacrificing soldiers of [our] homeland, would never have marched towards the battlefields. It was only through the backing and support of these heroic women that the Iranian courageous youth stood up against the invading enemy for eight years sacrificing their sweet lives for our freedom and security today.³⁷

Another example is the comment by Murtiza Sarhangi, the director of the Bureau of the Study and Research of Resistance Literature,³⁸ in a discussion session on *Da* and its translations:

In the first press conference on the publication of *Da*, I said that Saddam got defeated in the war by the Iranian mothers and not by our tanks and artillery. [He was defeated] by mothers who, all by themselves, packed the bags of their sons and placed their boots behind the door, so that they go to the front. Now that these books get translated, I feel that our job is being completed and the world can now understand how we have resisted.³⁹

Interestingly, despite this kind of propagandist framing of the content of Zahra Husayni's *Da* regarding the 'backing and support' of the mothers of the martyred and their agency in mobilizing the youth for the war, martyrs' mothers are virtually absent from the entire narrative of *Da*. I should emphasize here that thematically the narrative of *Da* is neither about the mothers of the martyred nor about the narrator's own mother as such: The bulk of Zahra Husayni's work is devoted to the account of her own experiences and ideas as an active woman in wartime Khorramshahr, often with a self-heroizing effect. Now and then, there are incidental references to women who have lost a child to the war—sometimes as fallen soldiers and sometimes as children amongst the casualties. But there is no further narrative around these peripheral mothers of the martyred whose names are often mentioned no more than once, if at all, in the entire text. In spite of this general absence, however, there are two concrete cases of *mādar-i shahīd* that by comparison (and only by comparison) are framed by a slightly wider narrative margin. A closer look at these cases will reveal an ongoing discursive tension within the text of Husayni's memoir concerning the representation of the ideal image of the martyr's mother. One of these cases is of course the narrator's own mother *da*,⁴⁰ who becomes a martyr's mother after the martyrdom of her son 'Ali (the narrator's beloved brother) and the other one is 'Abbas's mother.

³⁷Ibid., 14.

³⁸Daftar-i Mutala'at va Tahqiqat-i Adabiyat-i Paydari.

³⁹Sarhangi: *Da bah dur az dastur-i zaban-i tablighi-yi jang bah dunya amad*, *Mehr News*, June 9, 2015, <https://www.div.mehrnews.com/xvz8J> (accessed September 8, 2023).

⁴⁰Throughout this article, '*Da*' (with capital D) refers to the title of the work, and '*da*' to the eponymous character.

‘Abbas was a friend of ‘Ali who having become a martyr prior to him turns into a role model for him on the path to martyrdom.

The reader does not encounter ‘Abbas as a living character in the narrative. He functions as a prop to highlight the significance of his mother as the ideal mother of the martyr. The story of ‘Abbas’s death is recounted towards the end of the first section of the memoir as a prelude to the beginning of the war and the military occupation of Khorramshahr by Iraqi forces. According to the narrator, ‘Abbas was a revolutionary guardsman (*pāsdār*) killed late in the spring of 1980 (a few months before the official outset of the war) by the Iraqi guards in the border area between the two countries.⁴¹ ‘Abbas’s mother is first mentioned at his funeral.

Accompanied by the guys from the *Sepah*, we went to ‘Abbas’s place. The guys were very sad. We were all crying. [...] Unlike us, ‘Abbas’s mother was calm; and when she saw our agitation, she consoled us by saying: ‘Abbas has walked the path he wanted; not everyone is granted the privilege to walk this path.⁴² You should also be happy; why are you crying?⁴³

References to ‘Abbas’s mother resurface in the text of the memoir a couple of times. Nevertheless, the narrative scope of her story is strictly limited to what the narrator or other characters recall about ‘Abbas’s funeral as presented in the snapshot above. The above passage is practically the *only* story narrated about ‘Abbas’s mother. Her character is not elaborated further; it is fixed and unchangeable, similar to an icon popping up from time to time as a base for *comparison* against which the ideological virtues of other characters, including those of the narrator’s mother, are measured. In the following, I provide several textual examples of the juxtaposition between ‘Abbas’s mother as the iconic mother of the martyr and *da*’s failure to live up to this icon.

A few days after ‘Abbas’s funeral, the narrator notices her brother ‘Ali standing pensively next to the window facing the courtyard:

He was dressed in black and was holding a big picture frame in his hands. His own photograph was in the frame. [...] I asked, what is this, ‘Ali? [...]

‘Ali said: I have taken this photograph, so that when I become a martyr you can put it in my *hijlah* for everyone to understand that the path I have walked was chosen with heart and soul. [...] I do not want you to cry when I become a martyr. I would like you to be like ‘Abbas’s mother, confront the issue with patience and strength. You should console everyone [else].

I did not know how to answer ‘Ali. But just when I noticed that *da* was overwhelmed [by what she had heard] and about to weep and wail, I started to make jokes with ‘Ali and laugh.⁴⁴

After this dialogue, the reader of the memoir already knows that ‘Ali is soon to become a martyr in the war. The text is heavily signposted by elements that reflect the official ideology regarding martyrdom and self-sacrifice. ‘Ali is dressed in black, both as a sign of mourning for the loss of his friend and as part of a symbolic ritual through which he pre-enacts his own funeral as a martyr, a theme that is further reinforced by framing his own

⁴¹Husayni, *Da*, 65.

⁴²The word ‘path’ refers to the metaphorical appropriation of mystic topoi by the Islamic Republic in poeticizing the concept of martyrdom. For a detailed analysis of this appropriation see Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, *Martyrdom, Mysticism and Dissent: The Poetry of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988)* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021); see also Shams, *A Revolution in Rhyme*, 166–203.

⁴³Husayni, *Da*, 66.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 66–7.

photograph in preparation for the occasion. In this way, ‘Ali simultaneously occupies two proclamatory positions to reproduce the state ideology of martyrdom. He represents a devoted volunteer soldier ready to sacrifice his life on the path to martyrdom. But, at the same time, he occupies the post-mortem position of an already martyred soldier who has found eternal bliss through his chosen path of self-sacrifice for which he has now no regrets.⁴⁵ The narrative of ‘Abbas’s mother, as the ideal mother of the martyr, persists in the text with all its brevity and intransigence. The dialogue is compact, both in length and content, reiterating the main tenets of the Holy Defence grand narrative regarding the culture of martyrdom and the share of model sons and mothers in its constitution.

However, the final sentence of the above excerpt opens up a different window on the matter at hand. For a brief moment, it frames a soon-to-be mother of the martyr as a character, who does not seem to be willing to offer her son to the cause of the war. Through this transient narrative window, the reader is able to cast a short glance at a more private angle of the story of martyrdom and the emotional turmoil it might effectuate: *Da* being ‘overwhelmed’ and ‘about to weep and wail’ (*kam māndah shīvan va zārī kunad*) by the mere idea of her son aspiring to become a martyr stands in sharp contrast to the dedicated and composed ideal projected by ‘Abbas’s mother. The latent individual ‘little narrative’ of the narrator’s mother is briefly juxtaposed with the iconic type represented by ‘Abbas’s mother. I use the terms brief and latent here, since the description of the mother’s grief is immediately cut short and the narrative is redirected towards light-hearted jokes and laughter. The topic of the mother—once raised—is instantly avoided. The next paragraph after this dialogue shifts its focus back to ‘Ali’s history.

A more explicit passage about the mother’s disapproval concerning her son’s intention to become a martyr is mentioned after ‘Ali’s death. Sitting in an ambulance with the corpse of ‘Ali on her lap (on the way to the graveyard for his burial), the narrator is reminded of an argument between ‘Ali and *da*:

Once, *da* told ‘Ali: Quit the *Sepah*. Anyone who joins the *Sepah* [sooner or later] becomes a martyr. Quit! Go join *Jahad-i Sazandigi!*⁴⁶ Go join whatever you want! Just don’t stay in the *Sepah*! I am always worried.

‘Ali got suddenly infuriated and said: Do you think that ‘Abbas’s mother was not worried? Do you think that Musa’s mother was not concerned? Do you think they did not have families? I will stay in the *Sepah* until [the very day] I become a martyr. Then he dashed out of the house. *Da* sat down and cried a good deal.⁴⁷

Surprisingly enough, according to this passage, *da* had not been supportive of the idea of her son walking the so-called path of martyrdom. On the contrary, she wanted him to opt for other ways of involvement in the war that excluded martyrdom as a highly probable scenario. In this sense, there is a stark contrast between the way *da* as a potential mother of the martyr is portrayed in the dialogue above and the paratext of Husayni’s memoir.

For the reader’s convenience, I refer once more to the relevant statement in the introduction of the memoir as well as the one uttered by Sarhangi during the discussion session on *Da*.

⁴⁵On the liminality of the figure of the martyr see Olmo Gölz, ‘Gemartert, gelächelt, geblutet für alle: Der Märtyrer als Gedächtnisfigur in Iran’, in *Gewaltgedächtnisse: Analysen zur Präsenz vergangener Gewalt*, ed. Nina Leonhard and Oliver Dimbath, (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2021), 127–50.

⁴⁶Construction Jihad.

⁴⁷Husayni, *Da*, 354–5.

It was only through the backing and support of these heroic women that the Iranian courageous youth stood up against the invading enemy for eight years sacrificing their sweet lives for our freedom and security today.⁴⁸

[Saddam was defeated] by mothers who, all by themselves, packed the bags of their sons and placed their boots behind the door, so that they go to the front.⁴⁹

No matter how propagandist and ideologically charged Husayni's memoir is in its general approach to the official discourse of the Islamic Republic, the representation of its *actual* mother of the martyr—after whom the memoir is titled—does not comply with the standard ideological definition of this honorary title in the grand narrative of the Holy Defence. But what is even more important than this suboptimal representation is how the propagandist paratext of the memoir—contesting with any possible alternative readings—compensates for this latent 'little narrative'.

The failed reform vs. Replacement

There is precedent in the literature of the Iran-Iraq War regarding the possibility of training a suboptimal mother of the martyr into perfection. This can be seen in Qasim 'Ali Farasat's wartime novel *Nakhl-ha-yi bi-sar* (The beheaded palm trees) published as early as 1982.⁵⁰ The character of the martyr's mother in this novel can be regarded as the prototype of this ideological topos in the Iran-Iraq War fiction. Yet, this mother of the martyr has to work her way into perfection, step by step, as she endures the subsequent martyrdom of three of her children during the Iraqi occupation of Khorramshahr (22 September 1980–24 May 1982). The initially imperfect mother of the martyr of this novel who cries and makes a scene during the burial of her first martyred child embarrassing everyone present (in particular her two sons)⁵¹ is guided by her older son, Naser (the protagonist), to learn how to behave as a decorous mother of the martyr.⁵² By the end of the novel when the martyrdom of Naser (coinciding with the liberation of Khorramshahr) is communicated to her, she has already evolved into the embodiment of the ideal *mādar-i shahīd*. Depicted as blissful and proud at the conclusion of the novel, she stands for the mighty agent who has made securing the geopolitical integrity of the country possible.⁵³

This, however, is not the case in *Da*. Despite 'Ali and Zahra's efforts to change the attitude of their mother towards martyrdom, what 'little' information we have about *da* within the text of Husayni's memoir, indicates that she never came to accept the martyrdom of her son as something blissful. After the delivery of the news regarding 'Ali's martyrdom, which results in her demonstrative weeping, passing out, and self-flagellation,⁵⁴ whenever the reader catches a glimpse of *da* through Zahra's eyes in the text, she emerges as a woman in ceaseless mourning. This, however, does *not* mean that *da's* narrative presence in the memoir becomes more reinforced after this point. As

⁴⁸Ibid., 14.

⁴⁹'Sarhangi: *Da*'

⁵⁰Qasim 'Ali Farasat, *Nakhl-ha-yi bi-sar* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1982; repr. Sarir, 2006).

⁵¹Farasat, *Nakhl*, 72–8.

⁵²Ibid., 134–5

⁵³Ibid., 191.

⁵⁴Husayni, *Da*, 631. In this scene, *da* picks up a thick branch of a tree from the ground, hits herself on the head with it and starts bleeding.

a character, she never becomes the focalized subject of extensive and detailed attention. The references to her character are minimal and dispersed within the long text of the memoir. Nevertheless, the reader gets to know that Zahra struggles in bringing her mother to terms with 'Ali's martyrdom. She finds her mother's constant weeping unbearably annoying. Sometimes, she screams furiously at her and wants her to acknowledge the mere fact that 'Ali has been martyred. Sometimes, she leaves the house to escape her presence. Sometimes, she introduces her to other mothers of the martyred as role models who have managed to retain their strength and high spirit.⁵⁵ In the same context, the narrator gives the account of one of her dreams involving 'Ali after his death:

Once, in my dream, I saw that 'Ali has come to visit us, but is very upset. [..]

Da entered the room. 'Ali cast a wrathful look at her and turned his face away. I said: 'Ali, *da* was really looking forward to seeing you. Why are you acting like this?

He said: *Da* bothers me a lot with her crying.

I told *da* about this dream; she was really impressed. She said: What can I do; I can't help it.

I said: Do cry but [do it] in memory of the adversities [suffered by] *ḥazrat-i Zaynab* and in memory of Imam Husayn.⁵⁶

Unlike the iconic *mādar-i shahīd* in the Holy Defence culture, *da* remains the perpetual mourner of her martyred son. She is never reformed into the repentant mother of Farasat's novel who eventually masters her ideological role. The best she might be able to do in order to roughly fit into the framework of the grand narrative of the Holy Defence is to take her daughter's advice and re-interpret her object of grief by crying not for her martyred son but 'in memory of Imam Husayn'. For whether she ever succeeds in redirecting her mourning towards a pious religious act encouraged in reference to the Karbala incidents, there is no textual evidence.

But *what* replaces this flawed portrayal within a highly propagandist work marketed as a homage to the mothers of the martyred? Who exemplifies the ideal in this specific work? 'Abbas's mother of course functions as an icon; but her story is too short and her character too flat to inspire the reader. What about the narrator herself? Can it be assumed that it is Zahra who aspires to turn into this ideal or at least to act it out decorously as a symbolic substitute for the deficient figure? The text of the memoir, at any rate, does suggest this replacement.

This happens at 'Ali's funeral, a site from which *da* was deliberately kept away by the seventeen-year-old Zahra who insisted her mother leave the town immediately for safety. In fact, *da* was not even informed about the martyrdom of her son at the time of his burial.⁵⁷ It is Zahra at the site of 'Ali's funeral who steps forward to address the attendees:

Why are you crying? [..] Today is 'Ali's wedding day. He has said it himself that 'the day on which I become a martyr is the day on which I become a groom'. So, you should all celebrate. 'Ali's wish has come true.⁵⁸

⁵⁵Ibid., 679.

⁵⁶Ibid., 679–80.

⁵⁷Ibid., 351.

⁵⁸Ibid., 355.

Resonating the discourse of 'Abbas's mother,⁵⁹ Zahra successfully enacts the role of the flawless mother of the martyred at 'Ali's funeral replacing a potentially suboptimal version of a martyr's mother both physically and discursively. This act of replacement has further implications for the representation of gender roles in the Iran-Iraq War memoirs: it merges two Holy Defence honorary titles for women, namely the mother of the martyr and the sister of the martyr, into one entity. Whereas these titles often signify passive or supportive subject positions for women, given Zahra's assertive narrative presence and her role as the active female war protagonist in this specific work, a new and rounded definition of these roles is presented to the reader.

What else can the absence signify?

Discussing Luhmann's systems theory, Lyotard observes that the 'reduction in complexity is required to maintain the system's power capability'.⁶⁰ In relation to ideological literature this statement means that the narration of simple monological truth is preferred over complex ambiguities and potentials for further interpretations. It is of crucial importance here to emphasize that Zahra (the narrator of *Da*), should not be mistaken for Zahra Husayni (the real person), who at some point had agreed to cooperate with Hawzah-yi Hunari. Zahra the narrator-protagonist of *Da* is a textual representation based on the real person but constructed by A'zam Husayni, the compiler-editor of the memoir. In a 2014 interview, A'zam Husayni explicitly identified herself as the 'writer' (*mu'allif*) of the text, expressing her discontent about the fact that she as the 'writer' of the text has been omitted from the cover of the English translation of the book. In the same interview, she also refers to herself as the *creator* of the work using technical terms such as '*khāliq-i aṣar*' and '*padīd-āvarandah*'.⁶¹

A'zam Husayni's emphasis on her role as the writer of the text highlights the quality of the work as narrative *construct* and at the same time sheds light on the production process of the work. Based on what we know about Zahra Husayni (the real person) through interviews, talks, her actual activities in the war, and her general demeanour, we can assume that she indeed identifies with her ideological placement within the Holy Defence culture. But still it should not be ignored that A'zam Husayni, as the so-called *creator* of the work, hired by the Hawzah-yi Hunari, has actively shaped the text of Zahra Husayni's memoirs, not only by choosing the right questions and directing the course of the interviews but also by re-arranging Zahra's oral narrative into a coherent written chronicle. In re-arranging Zahra's oral input, and in her role as the staff of the Hawzah-yi Hunari with certain ideological obligations, she might have reduced/reframed potentials for ambiguity and nuances of Zahra's oral renditions about her mother's condition after 'Ali's martyrdom leaving much of the unfitting story out. This is only a speculation but a probable one.

Compatibility with the kind of truth endorsed by the Islamic Republic is an important criterion that determines whether a work is publishable or not. Publishing houses that

⁵⁹As mentioned earlier, 'Abbas's mother was trying to console the attendees of her martyred son's funeral by telling them that 'Abbas has walked the path he wanted; [...] You should also be happy; why are you crying?', 66.

⁶⁰Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 61.

⁶¹'tiraz-i nivisandah-yi *Da* bah mutarjim-i inglisi-yi in kitab: guftugu ba Sayyidah A'zam Husayni', *Mashreq News*, October 14, 2014, <https://www.div.mashreqnews.ir/news/353983/> (accessed September, 2023).

function as the main producers of Holy Defence Literature proper (both fiction and non-fiction) such as Sarir, Surah-yi Mihr, Atashbar, 'Uruj, and others are either directly connected to or supervised by a post-war governmental organization called the Foundation for the Preservation of the Works and the Dissemination of the Values of the Holy Defence (*Bunyad-i hifz-i asar va nashr-i arzish-ha-yi difa 'i muqaddas*). The organization was founded in 1990 at the request of 'Ali Khamenei. In its organizational chart the Foundation is placed under the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran (*Sitad-i kull-i niru-ha-yi musallah-i Jumhuri-yi Islami-yi Iran*). Publishers of Holy Defence Literature proper are supposed to follow the statute (*asāsnāmah*) of this foundation and integrate its organizational objectives regarding the preservation and the dissemination of the Holy Defence ideology into their publishing guidelines and marketing policies.⁶²

About thirty years after the establishment of the Foundation, the discourse around its function and objectives on a cultural level is still very much alive. In a recent critical discussion held at the editorial office of Iran's Book News Agency in 2022, mentioned earlier in this article, Murtiza Qazi formulates the responsibilities of the Foundation in the following words:

The duty of this organization is evidently communicated by its very title: The main responsibility of this organization is the 'Preservation of the Works' [...] Preservation of Holy Defence works and values means the preservation of the 'truth of the war' (*haqiqat-i jang*) through recording the 'reality of the war' (*vāqi 'iyyat-i jang*) in its literal, complete, and exact sense [...]. However, it is important to note that not all memoirs and [narrative] documentations of the war are necessarily publishable.⁶³

What Qazi means by this comment is that the truth/reality of the Holy Defence should be meticulously archived (or preserved), regardless of the ideological nature of that reality, but only a certain type of this literature (the one that is completely compatible with the values of the Holy Defence) can be published, disseminated, or propagated. This means that A'zam Husayni and the production team of *Da* had the responsibility of ensuring that the content of *Da* does not deviate from the truth of the grand narrative of the Holy Defence. In other words, A'zam Hoseyni has acted as the *critical stencil* of Zahra Husayni's memoir during its production process in order to secure its desirable ideological content; and this interference might have resulted in *da's* narrative absence from the work.

Conclusion: meaning and contest in *Da*

As evidenced by the examples provided above, Zahra Husayni's memoir, despite its official promotion as a tribute to the mothers of the martyred, does not attend to the narratives of these mothers in length. In comparison to the extensive bulk of the book, one could even argue that the mothers of martyrs are conspicuously absent from its pages. Within the book's limited narrative scope devoted to these mothers, it is even possible to locate a latent Lyotardian 'little narrative' that introduces the narrator's own

⁶²For the complete text of the Foundation's statutes per 12 March, 2005 see <https://khatkesh.net/rule?id=29564> (accessed September 8, 2023).

⁶³'Haqiqat-i jang az tariq-i sabb-i kamil va daqiq-i vaqi'iyat-i jang hifz mishavad', *IBNA*, 29 September, 2022, <https://wwdiv.ibna.ir/vdchv-nxi23niqd.tft2.html> (accessed August 22, 2022).

mother—after whom the book is titled—as substandard to the ideological notion of *mādar-i shahīd* within the Holy Defence grand narrative. Going back to the theoretical function of Lyotard’s little narratives as individual stories that potentially unsettle master narratives, it is relevant to ask whether, in light of its non-conforming mother of the martyr, a counter-discursive reading of *Da* is possible at all. The short answer to this question is: probably not. But the long answer sheds light on the dynamics of propaganda and meaning-making within the Iran-Iraq War memoir industry.

With the prospect of persuasion, the producers of ideological literature in the Islamic Republic enter a precarious game that strongly depends on the reader’s response: By certain deviations from established ideological norms, the system seeks to expand the scope of its readership.⁶⁴ This strategic manoeuvre opens up a critical space, conceptualized as the *stress-zone* of the Holy Defence in this article, where contest over the meaning potential of a particular text commences.

In the case of *Da*, the deviation from the standard is due to the introduction of an active heroic woman as the main protagonist of her own war memoir—as opposed to the conventional mass production of androcentric Iran-Iraq War memoirs by war veterans. As Murtiza Sarhangi, the director of the Bureau of the Study and Research of Resistance Literature indicates, *Da*’s production process has distanced itself from the common ‘grammar of war propaganda’ (*dastūr-i zabān-i tabīghī-yi jang*).⁶⁵ This deviation has given rise to specific discrepancies, often manifested as contests over meaning on several levels. In order to control and regulate the consequences, for example, state-related institutions and cultural forums strategically discourage the act of reading by creating a critical paratext that competes with the main text seeking to fit it into the reductionist logic of a grand narrative. In addition, within the structures of the memoir itself, a similar contest can be traced through the friction between the individual and the typical narrative frames of the work imposed by its generic hybridity as a woman’s memoir and ideological oral history. In this latter case, a more complicated process of contest can be speculated in light of the fact that war memoirs as epitomes of the ideological truth of the war are heavily scrutinized for potential deviations and textual ambiguities by the institutions involved during their production process.

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⁶⁴For a discussion on the deployment of a similar strategy regarding the production of series in the Islamic Republic of Iran, see the article by Nacim Pak in this volume.

⁶⁵Sarhangi: *Da*, <https://www.div.mehrnews.com/xvz8J> (accessed September 4, 2023).

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