

**REMEMBERING THE SHAHID:  
THE ETHICAL PRACTICES OF RELIGIOUS YOUTH IN  
POST-WAR IRAN**

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*Submitted to*  
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In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

2015

## Abstract

In Iran, the popular motif of martyrdom became of extreme importance during the Iran-Iraq War in 1980-88 by providing an imagery for the War called the *Sacred Defense* and commemoration of the soldiers. Participating in the activities of mainly religious youth, mostly girls, and going with them to pilgrimages, I demonstrate how a relationship with *the shahid* (martyr) who is the model of ultimate perfection that one might attain in life as an individual and a member of the society becomes a means of self-formation through the practices of remembrance. In social memory, the image of *the shahid* encompasses various narratives and memories tightened to emotional experience internalized by these youth. Therefore, practicing remembering through institutionalized forms, this image also becomes a mediator not only between themselves and God, themselves and society, but also a transmitter of the state values embedded into the narrative of *the Sacred Defense*.

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## INTRODUCTION

First time I arrived to Qazvin — an ordinary town in Iran, in 2011. Getting acquainted with the town, I started thinking that the figure of the martyr, in Persian called “shahid”, is ubiquitous. It appeared to me that the lives of Iranians’ were saturated with it: they were living in a street, named after a *shahid*, going to the school, named after a *shahid* and singing there the national anthem reminding about *the shohada* (plural of *the shahid*) again. And maybe on their way back from school, they were meeting a neighbor who had a son *shahid*, greeting him and asking about his health. The Iran-Iraq War (hereafter the War) ended almost thirty years ago, but the memory of the War (Iranians called it the *Sacred Defense*) was embedded into daily life reminding about the price of sacrifice of *the shahid*.

How do these young people engage with this image of *the shahid* and the narrative of martyrdom? How do a constant reminder of the past influence their identity formation? Is it just a figure from the past in a picture or a story, or a person whom they or their parents still remember?

In my thesis, I will investigate the importance of the image of *the shahid* to religious Iranian youth. Moreover, I will approach him as a “memory project” which becomes a reference point to non-secular Iranian youth to relate themselves to the society and the state through practices of remembering which are also interwoven with expressive corporal Shi’a practices.

The omnipresence of the images of martyrs in the mural paintings and posters was noted and investigated by several visual anthropologists such as Marzolph (2003; 2013), Chehabi and Christia (2008), Grigor (2008), Karimi (2008). They questioned the influence of this type of media to Iranians and effectiveness as a means of propaganda in public spaces. Marzolph (2013:183) observed that these images show the values which are central to identity in the Islamic Republic of

Iran, and claimed that the narrative of martyrdom was firstly a tool of political propaganda and is used both to popularize martyrdom, and to confirm the legitimacy of the state.

These observations, however, do not answer to the question why the image of *the shahid* was vastly utilized, and perceived as a still relevant motif for projection of the identity of a citizen of the Islamic Republic? The young generation did not have any direct experience of the Revolution and the War. Why did the narrative of martyrdom remain relevant to some young Iranians and how? Why did the values of the state transmitted through the image of martyrs find their audience?

The importance of martyrdom to identity of the Iranian youth was investigated by Varzi (2006). Her ethnography is the most extensively conducted ethnographic research of the youth and the phenomenon of martyrdom in revolutionary and post-revolutionary Iran. In *Warring Souls: Youth, Media and Martyrdom in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, Varzi concentrated on the Iranian upper middle-class secular (not active practitioners) youth in Tehran. She emphasized that the Islamic subjects in post-revolutionary Iran were formed through the discourses of *self-annihilation* and *self-creation* influenced by Sufi mystical thought. Varzi claimed, that these youth were rejecting the Islamic state, meanwhile the state was constructing them as Islamic subjects.

In my thesis, unlike Varzi, I focus on religious youth born after the War or in the last years of it. They are mainly *basij* students who consider themselves as the progeny<sup>1</sup> and continuers of the war martyrs. I demonstrate that to religious Iranian youth the image of *the shahid* and the meaning of martyrdom (*shahadat*) can be of significant importance employed to their own practices of self-formation. Trying to become better members of society, while at the same time they are

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<sup>1</sup> The only decorations and attributes existing in the *basiji* students' office at the Imam Khomeini International University in Qazvin were pictures of the supreme leader and the martyrs, the tags of the latter and their *sarband*. The *basij* students' room in the dorm looked similar. When I asked about the choice of the posters on the walls (they all were martyrs), they replied that since they were the representatives of the *basij* students, they collectively decided to decorate the room with the pictures of martyrs.

becoming better subjects of the state. I will try to demonstrate how the image of *the shahid* is created and explain its salience in these young people's lives. Prior to that, in the second chapter, I will give a short overview of the meaning of martyrdom in the Iranian context and indicate which historical, political, social and religious factors and traditions were forming it. I will also focus on the narrative of the battle of Karbala which is inseparable from Iranian Shi'a identity and practices and the popular narrative of the martyrdom.

In her research, Talebi (2012) focused on those Iranians who disagreed with the popular narrative of the state about martyrdom and tried to maintain the boundaries between the living and the dead ones. Consequently, she regarded the figures of martyrs in the mural paintings as dead state soldiers who intimidated its citizens by observing their behavior and acting as the moral police. However, nobody questioned how those who admired *the shohada* and saw them as perfect beings, were engaging with them.

In my third chapter, opposing Talebi's opinion about the image of the martyrs, I will suggest another perspective. Focusing on the religious Iranian youth I will depict their attitudes towards *the shohada* who are approached by them as friends. These youth develop very intimate relationships with them. I believe, that this image is a moral exemplar for their self-formation which is inseparable from practicing Shi'a piety. Further, I will try to answer to the questions how cultivation of the memory of *the shahid* perceived as a duty related to their construction of moral self. I borrow this term from Hirschkind (2001) who looked at how the ethics of listening of sacred texts influence the individual and his acquisition of moral dispositions. In this chapter, I will also claim that to the religious youth meaning of *the shahid* and *shehadat* has much broader connotations than death as a sacrifice, a divine status and celestial glory.

After investigation of the material culture and sacralization of dead bodies of new martyrs in Iran, Kaur (2010) argued that the original connotation of martyrdom has been altered. I will come

back to this argument in the last chapter by discussing changes in the narrative of martyrdom and argue that the state needs more than the material basis to maintain the narrative of martyrdom which reconfirms its legitimacy. However, incorporation of the new martyrs to its narrative also shows actualization of *the shahid* as a model for the individual.

One of the most outstanding scholars of the phenomenon of martyrdom in post-revolutionary Iran, Khosronejad (2006) claims that after the War people feel necessity to have memorials of the War and engage with the practices of remembering such as commemorations. Further, he states, that these commemorations become an opportunity for the state to exercise its propaganda. I engage with Khosronejad in order to elaborate on the practices of remembering and relate them to the individual experience.

Therefore, in the fourth chapter, I will investigate *The Rahiyane Nur*, one of the largest “cultural programs” in the country, as one of the practices of remembering the War which offers tours to the War sites. These tours are accompanied by commemorative mourning ceremonies. I will try to answer how a method of representation and narration of national memory of the War in a particular spatio-temporal setting affect the individual, how through embodied practices the narratives become internalized and connects the individual with the state. Consequently, I claim, the religious youth in these tours go through a transformative experience and come back as better citizens.

Last, but not least I will discuss the ethics of remembering and practices corresponding to them. I will argue that the particular understanding of what it means to remember in a particular context, i. e., in the Islamic Republic of Iran, shapes the practice of engagement with the narratives of the War and the State discourse. When all practices are institutionalized and the distinction between the collective and political memory is blurred, I argue, *the shahid* becomes the mediator between the individual and the state and the transmitter of its values. On the other hand, through

the particular understanding of martyrdom influenced by the state discourse, this young individual tries to locate himself/herself in the society and follows the state, thus reconfirming and reproducing its narrative of *the shahid* and *shehadat*.

## 1. METHODOLOGY

My fieldwork was conducted in Iran, in the city Qazvin and its province. Participant observation lasted for two months from the end of February until the end of April, 2015. I chose Qazvin because previously I lived there for a year and a half and studied in the International University of Imam Khomeini. Although it is an International university, it is dominated by Iranians and foreign students are mainly from neighbor countries such as Afghanistan.

Living in Qazvin, I had a chance to participate in various commemorative ceremonies, including Shi'a mourning ceremonies which provided me with knowledge and preparation to the fieldwork. Qazvin is one of Iranian towns celebrated for its contribution to the martyrs of the country.<sup>2</sup> After studying in the Imam Khomeini University for a year, I had acquaintances in the university among *basiji*<sup>3</sup> and *heyat*<sup>4</sup> students with whose help I could enter the field and participate in various students' activities inside and outside the university. This provided me with a better insight to the culture of martyrdom. Together with *basiji* and *heyat* students, I participated in two pilgrimages organized by them, visited three mothers of martyrs and attended ceremonies held in *husseiniyeh* in the students' dorm. In the university, I also participated in various events, such as event for remembering the martyrs held before the pilgrimage of *the Rahiyane Nur* and other talks organized by students about current issues in Iran. In addition, I attended one seminar of "The History of the Sacred Defense" class. Outside the university, I attended the ceremony of

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<sup>2</sup> Such famous martyrs as Shahid Babayi, the commander of the air forces during the War, or the President Mohammad-Ali Rajayi, where of the Qazvinian origin. Often on the flyers or banners about the martyrs of Qazvin are followed by the supreme leader's words: "The profile of the martyrs and volunteers of Qazvin in the War is outstanding."

<sup>3</sup> Basij organization is an organization of volunteers working under the supervision of Islamic Revolutionary guard Corps (IRGC). The organization of students' basijis is one of their branches. From The Iran Primer by the United State Institute of Peace (<http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/basij-resistance-force>). Accessed May 25, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> Religious group in the university organizing religious events. The members of the *heyat* also have *basiji* ID cards.

commemoration of the bodies of the martyrs brought from the War site, several times visited the graveyard of the martyrs of the city called *Golzare shohada* and attended the Nouruz (New Year) meeting ceremony there. I also participated in an event dedicated to the mothers of martyrs on mother's day.

Among the two pilgrimages in which I participated, one of them was to Mashhad, one of the most popular Iranian Shi'a pilgrimage sites because of the Imam Reza shrine. The second pilgrimage was to *the Rahiyane Nur* which was my main research site. Among the sites of *the Rahiyane Nur* are actual battlefields of the War located in the Iraq-Iran border zone and are largely visited by school pupils and students all over the country. In this tour students participate voluntarily (for school pupils it is different). Although mainly chosen by the students belonging to the *basij* organization go on this trip, other students also decide to go to this tour. In this pilgrimage, I could observe how the students engaged to the memory of the War, what they practices and experiences were, as well as experience it on my own. During the pilgrimage, I also held short conversations with the pilgrims in the sites of the tour or travelling from one site to another in the bus. Therefore, participant observation as a method was necessary since in the battlefields, I had a chance to observe the students in the place where feelings and emotions were directly exposed. I gained a deeper understanding of the relationship between the pilgrims, the location and the memory similarly to Francis, Kellaher, and Neophytou's (2004:95) research about the construction of memory and identity in cemeteries.

I conducted more than twenty semi-structured in-depth interviews with students or recent graduates from the province of Qazvin, mainly from the International University of Imam Khomeini, with those who were with me at least in one of the two pilgrimages or those who went to *the Rahiyane Nur* trip in previous years, and those who have never been on this tour. Some of them were individual interviews, some of them were group interviews. Sometimes, after a group

interview, I conducted a follow-up individual interview. All interviews were conducted in Persian. Being able to speak in Persian, I could more easily address the questions about personal experiences in the pilgrimages; as Naroll (cited in Bernard 2006:361) observes, interviewing in native language, the interviewees talk about sensitive issues, express feelings and emotions more openly.

I was also using photo elicitation method: while interviewing I was showing my pictures from the pilgrimages. The interviewees sometimes replied to this action by showing their own pictures which they had taken and liked. I was showing and asking about the given materials received during the trip, about their meaning and their use as well as their application in my interviewees' personal lives. These methods not only deepened the interviews; they allowed me to understand some moments during the participant observation better and provided me with new insights. They also generated emotions, memories and their interpretations by the interviewees. However, due to limitations, I conducted only five interviews with male students. I have conducted semi structured interviews with two War veterans, one of them was a *ravi*, one was working in an organization of the *Rahiyane Nur* and was famous for his story from the War. I also interviewed three mothers of martyrs and one writer who was collecting the memories of the War and of the martyrs and publishing them.

### **1.1. Research Ethics, Positionality and Limitations**

Since I had previously studied in the University of Imam Khomeini, I was a known person with a good reputation. This reduced the students' suspiciousness towards me and their feeling of insecurity; and I was welcomed to join their activities. In addition, I had the same status of student and was of the same age like they were, therefore, during the trip I was approached like one of them and could establish rapport with them. The fact that some students were my friends also challenged

me. I had to decide how to have a close and distant relations at the same time, and how to not impose my opinion on them or stay neutral. However, sometimes our conversations provoked discussions which deepened my understanding of the phenomenon.

An important aspect of research ethics was the issue of religious sensitivity, since I was the only non-Muslim student among them during their religious practices. However, due to the fact that I was from a different religion, my interviewees engaged with me in longer conversations explaining me how to see things from within (Shi'a) Islam which would not have been possible for a person from the same background as my interviewees. However, at the same time, I was dealing with very sensitive questions regarding their feelings and emotions, especially, talking with mothers of martyrs who had lost their sons. This obliged me to be self-reflective all the time and constantly reevaluate my methods.

In my fieldwork, I had to act in accordance to the Laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran and respect *mahram-namahram* relations. This limited my ability to observe male students' activities from inside; therefore, I could observe and perceive the female world and the state discourses related to it better. This was my second trip to *the Rahiyane Nur*. The first time was for a tour organized for the male and the female students together, so I could observe their behavior and interaction. The second trip conducted in my fieldwork this year was organized for girls from five or six universities in Qazvin. Although I conducted several interviews with male students, I could not observe what was happening in their buses or when the activities were organized exceptionally for them. In addition, for my own security, I decided to not interview any of *the Sepah* officers who were the organizers of the trip. Understanding their position could have made a deeper contribution to the research of the phenomenon of the culture of martyrdom.

## 2. THE MEANING OF MARTYRDOM IN THE IRANIAN CONTEXT

*We think that we stayed and they went. But the truth is that the time has taken us  
with itself, and the shahidan remained.*

Shahid Avini

The word “martyr” — *shahid* — in Arabic means the one who bears witness; dying as a protagonist for a holy cause, he witnesses the true nature of his faith (Khosrokhavar 2005:11).

Though there are several concepts of martyrdom in Islam,<sup>5</sup> Cook (Halverson 2007:243), argues that the main meaning of martyrdom is dying while fighting in the battlefield genuinely for the sake of God. It is contrasted to Christianity, where the image of the martyr is more passive, one can die being innocently persecuted and named a martyr. However, the martyr’s death should be unintended (Khosrokhavar 2005:12). Therefore, the martyr attained a special status among people already from the time of the prophet of Islam and was noted in the Quran. According to the Quran (Surah Ali-‘Imran 3:169; Surah Al-Baqarah 2:154), dying for the sake of God, the martyr rejoices him and enjoys his blessing (ibid, 3:171-172). As Ali (in Shirazi 2012:99) states, any martyr’s sins are immediately forgiven by God at the moment of reaching martyrdom<sup>6</sup> since his life, perceived as sacrifice in service to God, is greater than all his sins.

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<sup>5</sup> The encyclopedia of Islam (Kohlberg, 1997:205-206) names several ways how to reach martyrdom based on historical sources. It can be a violent or premature death, natural death or being a “living martyr.” The first type includes the ones who die in a “service of God”, “killed for their beliefs”, and those who died “through disease or accident”, “martyrs of love” or “who died far from home”. The second type includes those who die in a praiseworthy action such as pilgrimage, prayer etc. While the third one is for those who fight the “greater jihad” and their ego. Therefore, it is not surprising that meaning of “martyrdom” is open to interpretations and its expansion.

<sup>6</sup> Iranians do not say that a martyr (the same rule is applied for the Imams) has died. They say he/she “reached the martyrdom” (*be shehadat resid*). Therefore, martyr’s death is not perceived as an ordinary death.

In Shi'a Islam, the notion of martyrdom gained another dimension after the battle of Karbala in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. Although the symbolism and rituals of Karbala or the "Karbala Paradigm" might be considered as one of the most influential forces in forming the political, social and cultural life of modern Iran (Aghaei 2004:xi), Korangi (2009) demonstrates that the phenomenon of martyrdom in Iran has much older historical and literary roots in Iranian culture than the image promoted by the state, which is based on the martyr's devotion for the Islamic Republic of Iran. During the Iran-Iraq War, to which Iranians refer as to "the Sacred Defense" (*Defae Moghaddas*), it was employed as an inseparable element of nation construction (Varzi 2006:6). Moreover, Korangi (2009:543) argues that despite the fact that Shi'ism, which highlights the narratives of "the Infallible Fourteen" (*chahardah mas'um*)<sup>7</sup> is an extremely important part in the Iranian culture of martyrdom, it is only one of many others components resulting in the creation of "willing martyrs" (Korangi, *ibid*).

Glorification of martyrdom and an invaluable importance of self-sacrifice, as Korangi (2009:528) writes, was present in classical Persian literature before the Safavids introduced and spread Shi'ism in Iran in the 16th century. The themes of self-sacrifice, "ultimate self-destruction" for a higher aim are found in the 13th century legendary masterpiece of Persian literature called *Shahnameh* ("The Book of Kings"). In this epic poem, there are present the elements of self-sacrifice, resistance and benevolence to the country; the heroes are fighting on the side of the Good with a physically stronger "Evil" (one of his attributes is unbelief) and winning with the help of divine interference (Korangi 2009:534). These motifs, according to Korangi (*ibid*), are a constitutive part of "the martyr complex"<sup>8</sup> noticed after the War.

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<sup>7</sup> The Infallible Fourteen consists of the prophet, his daughter Fatima and the 12 Imams (Dabashi 2012:329).

<sup>8</sup> Korangi (2009) sees Iranian psyche as enthusiastically greeting martyrdom and depicting it heroic colors. He names it "the martyr complex."

Furthermore, the form of Shi'ism which the state religion and foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran carries and fosters the culture of mourning and commemoration with distinct integrated corporal and emotional expressions. From the very beginning, it was influenced by Sufism (ibid: 530). This love-beloved relationship, longing for the beloved one, therefore, self-sacrificing for it till the level of self-annihilation is often an attribute of the martyrs of *the Sacred Defense* who in the way of God reached the moment of martyrdom and met their beloved. In classical Sufi poetry this self-annihilation is accompanied by the loss of the lover's ego represented by his name and becoming *hich* — “nothing”, which Korangi (2009:239) associated with the nameless martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war and their desire to reach the beloved (Korangi 2009: 536; Varzi 2006:30-32). However, today in the discourse of the *Sacred Defense*, nameless martyrs are associated with genuine Shi'a love and connection with Fatima, desire to die like her whose grave remains unknown (Khosronejad 2012:11). The presence of a Sufi mysticism line in the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran is also claimed and investigated by Varzi (2006). During the Iran-Iraq war, martyrdom became a policy of the State and in addition to the meaning of the union of the loved and the beloved which was always present in Sufism, and the union of God and his servant, as in Karbala symbolism, it also became represented as a union of nation and its citizen (Varzi 2006:47).

However, the model of the highest degree of sacrifice, meaningful and beautiful death and resistance until the last possible moment which today in Iran is inseparable from the discourse of the War is Hussein's conduct before and during the battle of Karbala in the 7th century AD (Korangi, 2009; Flakerud, 2012; Dabashi, 2012). The narrative of Karbala is based on a battle of Hussein, the grandchild of the prophet of Islam and the son of Ali, the first Shi'a imam versus Yazid caused by political argument for the leadership of *the ummat* (Muslim community). Afterwards it became a symbol not only of the split between Shi'as and Sunnis, but also served as

a marker defining the Evil (Yazid) and the Good (Hussein), as well as the attributes and characteristics of these two contrastive worlds (Aghaei 2004:9).<sup>9</sup> The motif of the fight of the good (Hussein) and the evil (Yazid) is also projected depicting the fight of Iranian soldiers with their antagonists emphasizing that Iraqi army was demoralized, as it was claimed by war propaganda (Korangi 2009:532) and it is still seen in narratives about the War and representations of Iranian soldiers in films.

In the narrative, Hussein's army of seventy-two people were left to fight alone against the army of Yazid counted in thousands. Their conditions were terrible: even the access to the water for Hussein's comrades was cut (Korangi 2009:532; Aghaei 2004:133). These conditions are compared with Iranian situation during the *Sacred Defense* where Iranians felt isolated by the international community politically and economically (ibid). Traditionally remembering the conditions of the War, one can hear that Iran was fighting against forty-two countries (the number of countries remembered by people sometimes is bigger, sometimes is smaller, but the misbalance of powers is always underscored), did not have equipment to stand against the resourceful Iraqi army, and even experienced the lack of water and food. Moreover, this motif with an allusion to the Karbala continued and is reflected even in today's political discourse where Iran is seen as isolated, is sanctioned, but still fighting, although alone: what Korangi (2009:534) calls the "minority complex".

The image and idea of martyrdom was revived, became more articulated and started playing a vital role in the eve of the Islamic Revolution in Iran with the rise of such influential Iranian thinkers and Shah opponents as Ali Shariati who devoted lots of his attention to the discussion of Shi'ism and its revival in Iran, and made a huge impact on the Iranian youth (Aghaei 2004:100;

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<sup>9</sup> Even today in Iran, one can hear in talks using the image of Yazid, or interpretation of the battle of Karbala, in order to explain person's or a group's moral stance and to draw the line between the two sides.

Khosrokhavar 2005:43; Varzi 2006:8-9). His ideas were popular among students and served to advance the Islamic Revolution of Iran and is still respected and appreciated today: On the official board of the *basij* students of the International University of Imam Khomeini in Qazvin, there are several small pictures present in the corner of it. Among several martyrs, there is also a picture of Shariati. He emphasized active Shi'ism and, therefore, stressed the importance of martyrdom. According to him, martyrdom is the right path to choose when one is not able to carry out *jihad* — fight and efforts in the way of God — like Hussein did and conceptualized *shehadat* (martyrdom) as an entire sacrifice of oneself for a concept or a cause. Therefore, if the cause is holy, the essence of the dying one for this cause — the martyr — becomes holy as well (Shariati in Aghaei 2004:103-104). His non-existent physicality transforms into an existent thought (Shariati in Varzi 2006:50). Moreover, the interpretation of martyrdom by Shariati, as Khosrokhavar (2005:44) states, gave to an individual a perspective how to reunite with society.

During and after the Revolution the meaning of martyrdom became heavily politicized and given an international dimension. Everyone, who was fighting imperialism — not only the regime of the Shah but now the US, the Soviet Union, Iraq or Israel and their influence — and died, was named and regarded as a martyr based on the well-articulated Karbala Paradigm (Aghaei 2004:132-133). In addition, Karbala symbolism and rituals were also employed to evoke self-sacrificial sentiments (Flaskerud 2012:37). Marzolph (2013:169) summarizing the meaning of the martyr in Iran, simply defines it as “each person whose violent death is linked to the service of ideals propagated by the Islamic Republic of Iran.” When the War broke out in 1980, the interpretation of the War which was started for the geopolitical reasons became enriched by terms of religion, culture and identity, which made it appear as a defense and as a resistance (with its roots in Karbala symbolism), as well as the forth bringer of values. Therefore, Iranian soldiers were not simply

martyrs, but they became sacralized, given a high position after the Imams, and portrayed with special features of perfection attainable not for everyone (Khosronejad 2012:4-5).

Today in Iran the authority to announce death as a “martyrdom” and to sacralize dead bodies belongs to the state (Kaur 2010). However, this process can also be contested within the public sphere (ibid). In the state discourse which welcomes and celebrates martyrdom, there could be observed several types of martyrs. Among them and the most prominent ones are the martyrs of the *Sacred Defense*. Another type of martyrs are *shohada-ye elmi* — the scholars who were working on the nuclear energy issue and were assassinated<sup>10</sup>.

As I demonstrated, the concept of martyrdom depends on its particular context and is open to changes and modifications. These changes should not contradict the Quran, and the main values attached to the martyrdom which for Shi’as are often transmitted through the Karbala Paradigm. Simultaneously, the degree of elasticity of martyrdom, makes it applicable for interpretations of historical and social circumstances and merge divine and mundane elements.

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<sup>10</sup> *The martyrs of Nuclear Energy*. <http://isargaraneslam.blogfa.com/>. Retrieved 29 May, 2015.

### 3. THE SHAHID AS A MODEL OF PERFECTION

#### 3.1. The Profile of *the Shahid*

I spent long hours discussing what or who *the shahid*<sup>11</sup> was with people whom I met in the pilgrimages and events about the martyrs (*the shohada*) and the War. The ones who admired them confirmed their divine and high status and depicted them as models of perfection.

This status of theirs was closely connected and correlated to the position and impact to ones live by *the aimeh*. *The shohada* are lower than *the aimeh*, but closely connected to them. Therefore, *the shohada*, like *the aimeh*, can mediate between a person and God, or mediate between a person and an Imam. *The shahid* is perceived as sinless and being close to God knowing something that ordinary people cannot know; therefore, one may ask from a *shahid* to intercede with God for him, ask for forgiveness or help.

Having this divine status and immortality, *the shahid* can physically exist and intervene into a person's life. I asked Mohsen, a 25 years old *basiji*, who *the shahid* was for him. He replied that *the shahid* was his friend. Mohsen emphasized that the latter was the real friend who was always there when needed, who listened to him, and that he could see the result of this communication. He also assured me that *the shohada* were present there at the moment of our conversation as well.

Nilufer, one of the *basiji* girls, with whom I went on the pilgrimages, was confirming it as well and told me how a *shahid* changed her thinking. During the trip to *the Rahiyane Nur*, she liked one boy and was looking at him, when according to her, she was not supposed to:

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<sup>11</sup> In Persian, the plural of word *shahid* is *shohada*, and *shahidan*.

We shouldn't look at the *namahram*<sup>12</sup>. But, ok, I was looking at him. I liked him; for example, I wanted us to get married and so on. Afterwards, that *shahid* came to my dream. And that boy came there too. Both came. He said to me: 'I am married'.

Later she wanted to check whether the dream was telling the truth or not, and discovered that the boy got married just before the trip.

Dreams were a personal meeting place with *the shahid* through which he acts upon the physical life (Mittermaier 2012). Therefore, the changes in one's life after connection with the *shahid* are perceived as the result of this communication.

However, the popularity of the image of *the shahid* lies in the combination of his divine status and mundane personality before his martyrdom (*shohadat*). Many who talked about their relatives who became martyrs, their son, or neighbors' son who became *a shahid*, emphasized their exceptionality, and talked about them as being "something different" from the others, sometimes adding some mystery to it. Nonetheless, this popular perception is not distinctive from the image circulating in every type of media presented by the state. The image contains several features representing a perfect man in all life spheres both on a family, and on the state level from his very birth until his death. *The shahid* is an ideal son, brother, husband, neighbor, a good student. He is devoted to the others, honest and just. Among the dominating personality features of *the shohada*, two are often represented together: 1) giving priority to spiritual matters, God and *namaz*; and 2) being humorous, fun, joking and tricking each other. Combination of the earthly and spiritual faces into one unit makes *the shahid* appear as an attractive exemplar. The most prominent shohada who often were commanders in the War (*shohada-ye shakhes*) are acknowledged for their incredible and often just decisions during the operations, determinism to fight until the end which is another

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<sup>12</sup> *Namahram* is the one you can marry in Islam, therefore, there are certain rules of behavior towards the *nemahram*.

feature making *the shahid* appear as a national hero and inspiration, especially for those, who reject the divine nature and miraculous stories about the *shahidan* as a part of the state propaganda.

*The shahid's* exceptionality is well integrated into the representation of the War martyrs. After describing to me what *the shahid* was for her, Mehri — in her early twenties and an active *basiji*, who was one of the helpers in organizing and managing the pilgrimages — said:

It wasn't always like this... Now some people are saying: 'What is the *shahid*? What is *shehadat*? What was the War, why did we go to fight?' During the same war there were two types of people: Some of them really understood that they *have to* go to fight in the War, both for rescuing themselves, and their country. They really understood that in order to reach God they have to do it. But some of them, at the same time were persons who went there only for their performance, to show-off; or maybe they wanted something that after that when they would have come back after the War and in order to reach what they wanted, they went to the War. But none of them ever became a *shahid*. Always that person, who is honest in his deeds, sees the result of his action.

Death for Mehri was the confirmation of perfection of *the shahid*, because he must have been a pure person to “reach martyrdom”; therefore, one who died in the War is considered to be a good person *per se*. In addition to a war, one can become a *shahid* during the time of his army duty, dying working in dangerous scientific projects, or dying defending people who are innocent in another country (especially, if they are defending their belief and are Muslims)<sup>13</sup>; or dying later as a *janbaz* — wounded war veteran — due to his wounds. Sometimes *janbaz* is called *shahid-e zende*, i.e., the alive *shahid*.

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<sup>13</sup> It refers to Marzolph's (2003) broader definition of *shahid* as “each person whose violent death is linked to the service of ideals propagated by the Islamic Republic of Iran.” However, in a popular perception this attitude must be linked with personal virtues and purity as well.

### 3.2.From Self-Formation to Martyrdom

These personality features possessed by *the shohada* are perceived as acquired through the process of self-formation (*khod-sazi*). However, the highest level of *khodsazi* is *az-khod-gozashtegi*<sup>14</sup>, the ability to leave all the fields in his/her life to which one is attached in the material world, “pass” through everything what is important for “self”, and give his life for the sake of God. This also implies that it is done for the sake of others.

*Shehadat*, as the peak of *az-khod-gozashtegi*, infers a decision taken facing the death and the ability to see and wish only God at that stage.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, martyrdom, is not just a death. It is a higher death. Consequently, to reach martyrdom is to reach the state of passing through one-self, a recognition of attaining this stage, as well as acknowledging that the subject lived the life in closeness to God and his/her deeds were the righteous deeds.

Often, it is narrated how the most prominent *shahidan* left the opportunities they had in their lives for studying or carrier even abroad, and came back to defend their own country. *The shohada* are presented as simple people, who had no attachment to material things (*sadezist*), were satisfied with the smallest possibilities in their lives and even buying things to the poorer ones instead of buying to themselves. During the War, many young *basijis*, even teenagers younger than 15, went to fight. They were often from rural areas and religious families (Karsh 2002:62). Therefore, it is not surprising that this image of a pious simple shahid became dominant.

<sup>14</sup> Varzi (2006) and Khsorokhavar (2005[2002]) use terms *khod-sazi* (self-construction) and *bi-khodi* (self-annihilation). However, I use term *az-khod-gozashtegi* (it could be translated as self-sacrifice or devotion. Literary it means passing through, leaving one self) because it was used by my interviewees.

<sup>15</sup> This understanding of martyrdom is in concordance with Shariati’s representation of it as “desired by our warrior, selected with all of the awareness, logic, reasoning, intelligence, understanding, consciousness and alertness that a human being has” (Shariati in Kaur 2010:450).

*Sadezisti* is also a part of the state discourse. Often in mosques sheikhs talk about the IT as something that causes confusion and prevents from peace of mind (*aramesh*), which is desired by every pious Shi'a aiming to connect to *the aimeh* and is opposed to *asayesh* — relief caused by material comfort. The feeling of *aramesh* is attainable only by detaching oneself from the daily troubles of this material life. This ability of the *shohada* to rise above everything that is material, ordinary, and the features found as frustrating in people, leads people to see them not only as “triumphant” heroes embodying their collective character (Giesen 2004:17), but also as an achievable project for their lives. Afsaneh, a member of the *heyat*, told me:

Some of these *shohada*, in my opinion, this is my personal opinion, more or less, the time of our lives is similar, maybe we have 10 years difference in this cycle of our lives, maybe 20 years difference. So we're very close to each other... We can look at their lives as patterns, look what they did that managed to reach *shehadat*, and how we can make ourselves closer to it.

For the youth with whom I was spending my time, self-formation is not only a relationship with one-self, knowing one-self better and becoming a morally improved being. It also concerns transformation of selfish material desires into selflessness towards the others and orienting the purpose of one's life towards the benefit of the society, thus becoming a better member of it. For a religious person, this experience is inseparable from the “prescriptions of God” who knows what the best is for his creations. I asked Mona, 23, who was a member of the *heyat*, how *az-khod-gozashtegi* looked practically in her life:

There are many students who are only students. They only read books. In addition to studying, I also work in the *heyat*, ok. This is one way of *az-khod-gozashtegi*. I reduce the time, for example, which my classmates dedicate to studying, for the sake of God, and I come to *the heyat* and work; for example, we organize excursions, ok. All these works take my time, my energy. It could be one of the ways of *az-khod-gozashtegi*. Yet still, we say it is not that what *the shohada* were doing.

Then she gave me some examples. Mona told how one *shahid*, who was a commander of his division, was cleaning shoes of his soldiers when they were sleeping. It was an example of devotion and humbleness despite his high status.

Many of the students whom I interviewed had a favorite *shahid*. They were choosing him after knowing about his behavior either from watching films and reading the books about him and his testimony, or hearing about it from someone else including their mothers. Sometimes they were simply fascinated by his photograph. This is how Mehri, in her early twenties, an active *basiji* and one of the helpers in organizing and managing the pilgrimages, chose a *shahid*:

Once we went to the graveyard of *the shohada*. Once when we were passing by, I saw that above the grave of one of *the shohada* his father was sitting there. His father was very old and talked with several people. Then, when I looked at the face of this *shahid* I felt his face was very similar to mine. His face was very similar to mine. Also his father was sitting there... I liked it very much...Not so many family members are coming to visit the graveyard of *the shohada*. For this reason I chose him. So sometimes I go there.

Some of my interviewees chose or started liking a *shahid* after finding similarities, or common life experiences between *the shohada* and themselves. Mehri saw the similarity of the faces. The fact that the father was still alive and she could communicate with them, apparently, was also important to Mehri when she was making her choice. Sometimes the students firstly chose a *shahid*, and then started looking for the information about him, like Mehri. Mozghan, for instance, started liking one *shahid* when she learned that he studied history like she did.

Often during the events organized in the university and dedicated to *the shohada*, *basiji* students organize a lottery to choose a personal *shahid*. After picking up a *shahid*, a student starts “getting acquainted with him”, reading his testimony and books about him, visiting his grave and mother.

Very often a personal or favorite *shahid* was one of *the shohada-ye shakhes* rather than a relative like Afsaneh, who told that it was difficult for her to relate herself to *the shohada* among

her relatives. The pictures and names of the *shohada-ye shakhes* are well known, there are lots of books and films made about them which their heroisms or miracles circulating from media to people and from people to people.

The relation established with *the shahid* is an intimate one. For Mohsen *the shahid* was a friend, for Mona an elder brother. Sometimes he was approached to help with trouble. When Mohadeseh, 24, finished the university in Qazvin, she went back home to her town and stayed with her parents. Everybody wanted her to get married, and she had few *khastegars* (men who come to propose). None of the proposals were approved. One of them she remembered very well:

The same issue of *khastegari* [marriage proposal] that because of my height he didn't choose me — it affected me that he said “no.” ... We Iranians... Girls are the ones who say “no.” It happens very rarely that the boy says “no” when you are introduced. [...] They came, saw me — the boy approved; his mother, because of my height, didn't approve it...

The boy who went with his mother to Mohadeseh's home to propose knew about Mohadeseh from the others, but had never seen her before. Mohadeseh was rejected by his mother because of her short height. She just accepted it and acted as if nothing happened:

Today my mother and my sister don't know that I was very upset because of this. I told it to you because you are my friend, but I didn't tell to my mother and my sister that I was very sad. And my family didn't know I liked him. And I went... I didn't know with whom to share it. I went to the cemetery of *the shohada* and I shared it with *the shohada*...

Mohadeseh chose her *shahid* attracted by his “kind” and “enlightened” face, and like Mohsen, started treating him as a friend with whom she could share her heart problems and created a very intimate relationship with him. For *the* young girls, often the grave was a connection point with their *shahid* when they were feeling lonely or wanted to share their life issues (*dardodel kardan*) and feel peace of mind (*aramesh*).

By establishing an intimate relationship with a *shahid*, one seeks to acquire particular modes of behavior and attitudes approaching their surroundings, events and people. It could be a character, such as patience, or a behavior feature, like Mohsen mentioned, respect to his wife, which he

learned from *the shohada*. Some students, although having a personal *shahid*, combine a desired profile from several *shahidan*. Vahideh, a *basiji* organizing pilgrims, believed there is what to learn from each *shahid*; therefore, she stressed the importance of their testimonies as a way to know a *shahid*.

Eventually, they try to know their *shahid* better, collect the memories about them which later become incorporated into their daily lives. The *shahid* becomes one of the mediators for their self-formation. One also tries to study well, respect their parents and be pious Muslims — which often means observing *mahram-namahram* relations, prescriptions for *namaz* and *vozu* (ablution). A pious Shi'a participate in religious events such as celebrations of the birth of their Prophet, *the aimeh*, commemorations of their death, *Etekaf*,<sup>16</sup> go to pilgrimages etc. Forming themselves in this manner, they create their moral ethical self simultaneously training and instilling inner condition (Mittermaier 2012:251).

Mourning (*azadari*) is the main form of Shi'a commemoration ceremonies; especially, during the decade of *Moharram* commemorating the battle of Karbala<sup>17</sup> which is accompanied by expressive physical moves such as chest-beating and crying in emotionally intense and passionate mode. Mona shared with me her thoughts during *azadari* when *maddah* (a narrator of religious texts in a particular lamenting mode) told the events of Karbala. The lights were turned off, and people started crying. Firstly, she felt ashamed while comparing her deeds with the deeds of *ahle-beyt* (the Prophet's family), then she started asking herself:

Is God present in my life? [...] Where is the place of God in my life? Am I pious? Do I have faith? Have I become that what I was supposed to become? After all these hardships that *ahle-beyt* experienced on that side, our *shohada* experienced on this side. Now all these things landed on me. What do I do now?

<sup>16</sup> Etekaf (or Itikaf) is a "pious practice" when one must stay several days in a mosque, fast, pray, recite the Quran and other activities prescribed in the mosque (Spuler 1997:280)

<sup>17</sup> A description of one of Moharram evenings in the heyats among women could be found in Flakerud's (2004) article "Shia-Muslim Women as Ritual Performers in Iran."

A mourner cries both because of mourning for a death of exceptionally good people — *the aimeh*, and out of shame which exceeds beyond the shame and guilt of their absence during the battle of Karbala (Dabashi 2011:84) and shifts to their lives.

Later Mona showed me pictures of the events they organized and how creatively they were decorating the stage and walls. These decorations during *the azadari* are used to stimulate the mourner and evoke his feelings (Flaskerud 2010:220). Once, during the decade of *Moharram* in *husseiniyeh*<sup>18</sup>, they decorated the wall with figures of palms with green leaves, with the names of *shahidan* on them. From those leaves, there were falling down drops of their blood. Below the palms there was a wide black area which on the last evening dedicated to the martyrdom of Hussein was covered by the red ribbon as a sign of a river full of *the shohada's* blood. *The shohada* were inseparable from the commemoration ceremony of *the aimeh* members.

For Mahmood (2001:844), all skills that body acquires through practices and trainings is experience of the body. Shame which arises while mourning, in her terms (ibid), could be understood as an experience dedicated to self-formation. Remembering the narratives of Karbala carries not only moral debt from the past (Booth 2006) and puts it on the individual's "moral agenda" (Poole 2008:278), but also embodies shame. As Mahmood (2001:843) claims, even though simulated in the beginning, repeatedly conducted set of corporal moves with proper attitude could reorientate and direct the individual's emotions, interests and inclinations, and eventually turn into his/her natural dispositions.

In addition, some of the students choose to listen to the *maddahis* instead of listening to the popular music.<sup>19</sup> They have them in their mobile phones, sometimes set them as their ringtones.

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<sup>18</sup> A building for various religious practices different from mosque by its prescribed rules for behavior inside it.

<sup>19</sup> There is a difference between *maddah*, *nouheh* and *rouzeh-khan*. During the *Moharram*, the main role *has rouzeh-khan* (see Flaskerud 2004). *Maddah* is a popular name for the performer of this genre, often accompanying speeches.

Thus, they construct moral selves (Hirschkind 2001) getting into particular mode in Shi'a piety constantly remembering the narratives of Karbala, Fatima and other imams. Some *maddahis* also include popular motifs from the War such as nameless martyrs (*shohada-ye gomnam*). Thoughts and reflection on their lives and their values, make them self-aware and prevent them from emotions leading to inclination for a sin or a necessity to materiality, form durable moral dispositions and keep them in certain mood. Cultivation of memory of *the aimeh* together with memory of *the shohada*, as a moral subjectivity, and their self-cultivation affects each other reciprocally and unfolds mutually (Winchester 2008:1755)<sup>20</sup>. Cultivating memory becomes their self-formation, a means of their *khod-sazi* and vice versa.

Furthermore, a learned profile of a *shahid* influence the self-reflection of these youth. A particular meaning of selfhood, as Deeb (in Sayed 2006:173) writes, is formed by a tradition which is discursive and situated in time. Seeking for the highest level of *khod-sazi*, they raise a question how to reach martyrdom since its "gates" were not closed after the War. Identifying themselves with *the shahidan*, who being in their age and even younger were in the battle fields dying for the others, i. e., for them, these young people question themselves what to do with their lives, how to serve the country and the society. By establishing the connection with *a shahid*, a figure from the past, they portray themselves in the future. Therefore, in order to know more about *the shohada* and about the history of the country, or just satisfy their own curiosity, these young students choose to go to the tour of *the Rahiyane Nur*.

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<sup>20</sup> Winchester (2008:1755) writes that "embodied practices and moral subjectivities operate through a relational and mutual process that unfolds over time." Here I assume a duty to remember as a moral subjectivity.

## 4. “THE PASSENGERS OF LIGHT”

### 4.1. The Landscape of Memory

When Mozhgan’s classmates invited her to join *the Rahiyane Nur* trip, she replied to them: “*Na baba*, we’ll go there, but what we are going to do there? Just an empty soil field and that kind of stuff. There is no fun.” Then Mozhgan still studied in the university. Since then she has already been on this pilgrimage for 3 times and now she wants to go there with her husband, not with her classmates.

For almost the entire year, except a two months break, there are organized tours with programs and activities to the War battlefields. This tour, which is called *Rahiyane Nur* — “The Passengers of Light” — is organized to the two regions of the country neighboring with Iraq which are located in the West and in the South of Iran, but the tour to the South is bigger and more popular. The battle sites in the South during the War were also strategically more important and more famous for their names of operations and the amount of martyrs (Pelletiere 1992:117).

*Rahiyane Nur* is known as the biggest and one of the most expensive “cultural programs” of the country, as I was told by *ravis*. They are the ones who explain the war conditions and narrate the war stories to the visitors in the busses or in the battle fields and often are the war veterans themselves. According to Khosronejad (2012:9), large financial and ideological investments of the state are evident.<sup>21</sup> One *ravi* claimed that this program shows the ability of the country to mobilize people. According to his estimations, from week to week they lead approximately 2 million people.

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<sup>21</sup> For students, trip price is very low. They pay rather symbolic fee which would be not enough even to cover the price of the ticket by bus, accommodation and meal all day is provided.

Indeed, the number of pilgrims coming every day is impressive. The caravans come in several buses with school pupils, university students, with martyrs or war veterans' family members. People who come are not only pilgrims. War veterans and school pupils from other regions and provinces come to volunteer in this program as helpers in the organization of the activities and services during the visits of pilgrims.

The caravan with which I went was organized only for sisters with participants from 5 or 6 universities of the province of Qazvin, and it alone consisted of 7 busses with approximately 40 people in each. One evening in Shalamcheh, which is the most visited and most important site of the tour, I participated in the evening prayer, one of the famous *ravi* talks together with people from the caravans from at least five different provinces of Iran; participants were saying that there were about 2,000 people.

For the pilgrims, this trip lasts approximately five days: almost one day is needed to reach the area and to go back, and the other three days the visitors spend visiting the sites and participating in various activities. Engaging into it takes some efforts, patience and adjustment to the conditions. Firstly, most of the time the travelers spend in the bus; even in the area itself there are long 1-3 hours distances between the sites and it is possible to visit only 2 or 3 of them a day. Therefore, in one trip, it is impossible to visit all sites and to see all battlefields.

Secondly, this Southern war area is located in a semi-desert; it is usually hot and requires endurance walking, or sitting long hours on the warm sand and listening to the talks or holding *azadari* ceremonies while being exposed to the sun and thirst; moreover, women usually wear a black chador what requires from them to be even more tolerant than the men can be. A huge number of pilgrims also means long lines and crowded spaces for toilet and ablution for *namaz*, and sometimes lack of (hot) water in the places where they are staying. In addition, waking up early in

the morning, and spending all day travelling between the sites and holding *azadari* ceremonies, the pilgrims reach their accommodation place late, and so the next day continue the trip being tired.

There are approximately 15 sites open for the “Passengers of light” in the Southern War area. Some of them are museums of *the shohada*, their cemeteries, or shrines. Among the other sites is the *me’raje shohada*<sup>22</sup> — the place to which newly found *shahid*’s remains are brought and later from there sent to different parts of the country. There is also a *razmayeshgah* (“maneuver location”), which is located in the mountains. There is shown to the visitors a play related to the War and today’s politics, especially, international policy, with visual, sound and fire effects interplaying with each other. However, the majority of the sites are the actual battlefields where Iranian soldiers were fighting and dying in the war with Iraq. In these sites, I could feel the boundaries of the present and the past had blurred. It appeared that the students there transcended the time from the very first step when they entered through the gates with a Quran and soldiers’ tags hanging above their heads as *the shohada* did.<sup>23</sup> There are still old tanks and other war vehicles remaining (rusty and sometimes broken, some without wheels, some have not been touched for the last thirty years), big guns, barbed wire and signs prohibiting pilgrims from entering some fields aside from the path since the mines are still there. In front of some exposed objects there is a sign showing the picture of the object taken thirty years ago.

In this sad and disturbing panorama, the pilgrims, some of them taking off their shoes out of respect to the holy ground, and sometimes by singing of *maddah*, start walking. They pass the pictures of Iranian soldiers going on the same path towards the place of a battle from which many of these soldiers would not come back (Figure 1).

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<sup>22</sup> “Me’raj” refers to the Mohammad’s trip to the heaven described in the Quran.

<sup>23</sup> There is a tradition to kiss the Quran held by somebody else and go through under it when leaving somewhere or going to a journey as a sign and intention that the leaving one will come back.



Figure 1. Walking in the site of Fatholmobin. The poster with a soldier says: “The Pilgrimage Site of *the Shohada* of Fatholmobin.” From my personal archive.

After reaching the location, the pilgrims would sit down and listen to a *ravi* telling about the war, the events that took place there and his memories. While walking down the path, I could not only see still images from the past, signs with different sentences referring to the *Sacred Defense*, behavior and *the shohada*, but also hear and see documentaries shown on big screens somewhere in the field. They were from the famous *Ravayat-e Fath*, filmed and directed by shahid Avini during actual battles of the War. There are loudspeakers along the path through which pilgrims are exposed to the War sounds with the voices of the soldiers, sounds of shooting, and somebody with a terrified voice screaming “Allah!” Therefore, these “passengers” embody interaction with the past (Murakami 2014:339) feeling it with all possible senses. They refuse to drink water while going and mourning, recalling *the shohada*, who also did not drink.

As pilgrims *remember*, soldiers were even pouring out the water in the name of Hussein. The images, to which travelers are exposed, play a crucial role in the transmission of memory and creating practices of remembering which are undividable from their material representation (Küchler and Maller 1991:7). However, transmission — which involves all the senses of the body and corporal experience — becomes an embodied transmission. The pilgrims have a chance to transcend not only the time, but their own self-consciousness, becoming as I call it “mini-martyrs” with the help of things given to the visitors by the organizers of the caravan. Sometimes before the trip, sometimes during the trip pilgrims were receiving things which reminded them of particular moments or events which took place in those battlefields helping to recreate the situation there or to be in a *shahid*’s shoes. It included martyrs’ tags, as well as *chafiyeh* - the famous scarf which, although being used in the War as a very practical thing, became the symbol of the *Sacred Defense*.<sup>24</sup> I saw the scarfs on every pilgrim’s neck or head. They used it for sweeping away tears, covering their faces from dust. They also moistened it with water and used to cover their heads, thus protecting themselves from the heat in this semi-desert. Moreover, in this “mini-martyr’s” kit there could also be found a canteen, an oil lamp, the picture of the supreme leader, *tasbih* and *mohr* in a small pocket-shape bag, *sarband*, in order to remember what a *shahid* was like, that he always had a *mohr* in his pocket, or with what zeal *the shohada* were passing through the threshold to the battle field under the holy Quran.

During my trip, these souvenirs operated as small reminders. Usually they were given before arriving at a site and were somehow related to it. Before the first stop, we received the tags. They were recalling the *shohada-ye gomnam*. In the site which we visited there was a recently built

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<sup>24</sup> The supreme leader of Iran always has a *chafiyeh* on his neck. As the story tells, when asked why he is always with *chafiyeh*, he replied: “We are always ready!” *We are always ready* and *we stayed until the end* are popular slogans attributed to the culture of the *Sacred Defense*.

a monument for these martyrs with their graves inside. Before arriving at the famous martyrs' cemetery in Hoveyzeh, a site known for dramatic war events, each pilgrims was given a letter from a brother *shahid* with his “address” on it, i. e., indicating in which cemetery, in which row, and in which grave he was buried. In Figure 2 we see students with green *sarbands*, distributed at the stop of Shalamcheh. The text on them says “Ya Zahra.” *Sarbands* were distributed in order to remember, Arezu, my companion in the trip explained, that *Ya Zahra* was not only the code name of the operation Karbala 5 in Shalamcheh, but also that *the shahidan* there reached out to the saint Fatima.



Figure 2. At Shalamcheh, getting ready for the *ravi*'s talk. From my personal archive.

In addition, these souvenirs can be accompanied with texts or other readings for the trip. The “mini-martyr's kit” can be different from time to time, but it is always something related to the *Sacred Defense*. A part of the texts accompanying the given things are written by the organizing

*basij* students themselves, so they differ from university to university. However, when there are organized caravans with several universities from the same province, a bigger part of the program in the busses — including the given material — and writings are the same. Although the organizing students prepare a package for the pilgrim students, a part of the distributed material is prepared by the organization administering the tour and it is the same for everyone. The pilgrim is not able to recognize the origin of the given souvenir. In addition to all these presents, distributed in the bus, there are several small books about *the shohada* available to read during the trip which are quite read by the students.

The pilgrims are constantly kept in the state of remembering even when they are not in a battlefield anymore, from the moment they get off the bus to the moment they come back to it. Even in the bus, they sing popular songs related to *the shohada*, *the aimeh* and the motherland. Among these songs, one is as old as the war itself, and was used for inspiring soldiers' spirit: "Hey, Army of the master of the time [the Imam of the time] be ready, be ready!" This song was broadcast in its original recording for the last thirty years on TV, while these students were growing up. In addition, pilgrims, receive poetical messages on their phone encouraging them to think again about the visited site, God, and *the shohada*. Even after the program of the day, they are brought to their accommodation which resembles a war camp with the sounds from the battlefields."

## 4.2. Spiritual Experience

The word used for a pilgrimage — *ziyarat* — also might refer simply to "visiting." However, the excursion of *Rahiyane Nur* for these pilgrims is among the most famous Iranian Shi'a pilgrimage sites such as Mashhad and Karbala. This pilgrimage is an example of the vast religious mobilization, in Taylor's (2006) term, where people are being persuaded into religious activities

that organize and alter their social imaginary, senses of legitimacy and other important aspects in their lives.

This mobilization employs both communicative and cultural memory. Communicative memory, according to Assmann (2006) extends to several last generations. Through orally shared experience among people it becomes embodied memory. Furthermore, it appeals to national memory of the pilgrims reminding them about the commitments to the past and being indebted to it (Poole 2008:276). In order to bridge the generations, to keep them coming, *Rahiyane Nur* sites combine the “untouched by a hand” element with the new one by building exhibitions or additional trenches which attract the young ones. The exhibition of the material artefacts of the War frozen in time attracts lots of young people, who have no intention to engage into organized activities and talks, as well.

Cultural memory, as Assmann (2006) notes, has a broader range and can extend to the mythical past which is institutionalized and made transmittable. However, it can connect people only addressed to the subjects who can recognize themselves in it (Poole 2008:282); therefore, presenting the trip and war narratives in a religious setting wrapped into Shi’a narratives or religious color and mystic elements which for some people are part of their social imaginary can attract masses of them. According to two *ravis* who were also war veterans, the practice of visiting the battle places developed after the war: being a space where events of extreme importance happened and becoming a “depository for memories” (Natzmer 2002:169), it was visited by people and incorporated in their practices. The family members of martyrs, war veterans or fighters, and those who stayed alive after the War, were going and visiting those battlefields and there sharing their memories of war, telling where and how things happened. The *ravis* made a distinction between the time they were narrating to the families coming on their own initiative and when *the Rahiyane Nur* started, and they became trained for this occupation. According to them, this

pilgrimage as a standardized institutionalized practice exists no more than 15 years. Meanwhile, in the official website of the tour,<sup>25</sup> this trip is represented as continuous gradually developing pilgrimage which started immediately after the war and gradually making no distinction between the practices of commemoration between and after it became systemized and standardized. Therefore, success of this tour of attracting mass of people, lies in the state's ability to involve practices that are lived and emerged from necessity to commemorate and absorb this remembrance to their ideology (Castell and Climo 2002:4), thus, allowing to make impact on Iranian identity formation.

The experience of the tour is centered on the discourse of spirituality and is embedded into religious context; therefore, commemorative practices there are shaped by religious ones. A part of the tour is related not only to the narratives about the War, transmission of memories, but also to the religious knowledge. In the busses, pilgrims are accompanied not only by *ravis*, but also by *sheikhs* and *maddahs*, and become involved into discussions about religious practices like ablution, *hejab*, listen to the recitations of Quran, *maddahis* all along the trip and have a chance to ask questions related to their faith or life. While some of travelers do not listen and are not interested into these talks at all, others come to find the answers to the questions they have, and together with a tour to the battlefields to have a tour to themselves. These pilgrims, usually, are those ones who are repeatedly coming to the pilgrimage, having experience of the impact of the tour to their lives after the first trip. Some of them even prefer to go to *Rahiyane Nur* with a caravan not with their families because of the concentration of spirituality experienced in the tour. However, one going to this pilgrimage has to be “invited.” Like imams who at first have to wish — *talabidan* — a person to pay a visit to them in their *emamzadehs* (Dabashi 2011:45), the martyrs also should send

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<sup>25</sup>The official site of the Rahiyane Nur. <http://www.rahianenoor.com/vsda%5Eln1lkt47,1.k5hk4.html>. Retrieved May 28, 2015.

a *davatnameh* — invitation letter to a pilgrim — or else one would not be able to enter the holy grand.

Almost every visit to a battlefield is accompanied by certain ceremonies and narratives. Before or after walking down the path leading to the place for the talk and sitting down there, pilgrims invest a great deal of time and attention to take ablution and say *namaz* which are one of the highlighted topics during the pilgrimage. Usually, in the talk place, *ravis* tell about the War, the conditions of it and historical circumstances of the time. There could be several *ravis* talking after one another and also *maddah* who starts singing his elegiac songs-narratives along *ravi's* speech which gradually turns into more emotional grieving talk accompanied with his signs of crying and lamenting voice evoking the response from the public sitting on the sand with the heads let down, the body bent and almost completely covering their face to hide the tears and finally starting the *azadari* ceremony – commemoration for Hussein. The bodily senses of the interaction with the location, such as sounds and touch of sand as “non-semantic vehicles” (in Lambek’s (1996:251-252) term), become attached to narratives. When these senses are repeatedly experienced, senses recall these narratives as memories; they are more vivid and felt more intensively. Maybe this is the reason why my interviewees were saying that they experienced the trip better when they were coming back for the second or for the third time, and one of the reasons why Mozghan kept coming back.

The Karbala paradigm and the martyrdom of Hussein, “the prince of Martyrs” (Shirazi 2012:101), provides visual imagery for commemoration of the War events (Khosronejad 2012:6-7). Very often the stories about particular soldiers’ operations and how they reached *shehadat*, bearing in mind that they were an army of volunteers without proper war equipment, are narrated in terms or with allusions to the battle of Karbala, for example saying that the conditions of the soldiers who were martyred by Iraqis were “like in Karbala.” The geographical location of a

battlefield is also narrated in this context counting the distance from Karbala; therefore, Shalamcheh, which is notable as a battlefield in which died a significant number of Iranians and is considered being one of the closest sites to it, becomes a most influential place remembered by pilgrims as evoking deepest feelings, condition of repentance, and closeness to *the aimeh*.

Mohsen was telling me that Sholomcheh for him was a paradise; while Mona was feeling that God was everywhere in all of the sites. This is the place where everyone can relate himself to his favorite Imam, or Fatima — they all are interrelated in the stories of martyrs' experience, and the boundaries between the popular Shi'a narratives and the War narratives, as well as individual stories of the *shohada* with miraculous elements and interventions of the *aimeh*, are blurred.

Further, the relation between the narratives of the War and *aimeh* is reciprocal. The battle of Karbala provides imagery and language for the commemoration and narration of the War (Khosronejad 2012:6). It operates as semantic memory (Assmann 2006:2) which is learned and memorized experience. The memory of the War which is experienced in the battlefields through the senses of the pilgrim's functions as episodic memory (ibid). These two memory mechanisms in this particular spatio-temporal context operate together, and the episodic memory of the War provides perceptual imagery for Hussein's fight.

#### **4.3. Establishing the Connection with *the Shohada***

One of the practices of pilgrims in this tour, I observed, was establishing the connection with *the aimeh* and, especially, martyrs, who already answered to them by the invitation to the trip, indicating that the presence of the pilgrim had a purpose. Moreover, a pilgrim was encouraged to do it by the narrators and through the short flyers given to them during the trip, in which the narrator often talked in the first person, from the perspective of a martyr and invited for a dialogue,

expressing the feeling of *deltangi* (missing) for the conversation partner. Here students could also be “given” a martyr with whom they could establish a connection.

The space, as a sacral area, and as a place where the martyrs are present, and even the sand itself functions as mediator in establishing the connection with martyrs or *the aimeh* as well as achieved stage of cleanness, emptiness or calmness (*aramesh*) after the *azadari* ceremony. However, the established connection which is expressed by love (*eshgh*) is premised on the perception and comprehension of a martyr’s hardship and his experience during the War. Emergence of this love, I would suggest, is partially induced through the mechanism of the narrative.

#### 4.4. The Narratives

Mozhgan continued telling me about her experience:

I really became in love with them. I mean, it influenced me so much, that when I came back home from the *Rahiyane Nur*, I really was feeling so sad because of them, I was sitting, and constantly crying. I was staying in a room alone and crying, because, for example... Why did they brought this calamity to those martyrs?

I consider, what Moshgan learned in the trip and remembered as narratives which she had internalized.

Miraculous stories about the martyrs (how they were finding the way, giving correct orders in impossible conditions, helping others by approaching *the aimeh*, or dying in the way they had predicted) are interwoven with the stories about the daily conditions of the War, with the Shi’a narratives, and connected to *azadari* ceremonies. The narratives of martyrdom of Karbala and *the aimeh* were internalized by pilgrims through their senses and particular body movements

(Hirschkind 2001)<sup>26</sup> practiced during the *azadari* for many years and attached to deep embodied painful emotions. These narratives became personal memory of a pilgrim, what Landsberg (2004) calls prosthetic memory. The pilgrim was “remembering” every time *the maddah* (who sometimes is also *maddah-ravi*) started narrating. The stories about *shahidan* mediated and followed by emotion converging with the memory of the sufferings of *the aimeh* became internalized as well.

The mechanism of narrative, I suggest, creates coherence between miraculous elements and the earthly stories of the War (Roof 1993:199) making the stories about the war martyrs, who witnessed direct intervention of *the aimeh* in their lives, transmittable, acceptable and reproducible. Performed within a ritual, all narratives are represented as truth and accepted as such because within the religious frame they become a part of the sanctified discourse (Rappaport 1999:297) which belongs to the state. Consequently, although *ravis* tell their own memories, when they are trained how to tell and which emotions to transmit, these narratives, I believe, also become “co-authors” of the state discourse (Wertsch 2012:175) and transmit the values of the state.

#### 4.5. Transformation of the Pilgrim

*Prepare yourself! To piety, modesty, hejab... and know that your sorrow today on the sand... is obtained by giving your  
Hand and feet to your brothers on the mines*

From the Letter to the Sister from her Brother Shahid

These commemoration activities-rituals, according to Meyer (2006:22)<sup>27</sup> are sensational forms. They provide a practitioner with means of entry to the transcendental while, at the same

<sup>26</sup> Hirschkind (2001) in his studies of the ethics of listening of Quranic texts argues, that narratives are internalized, the texts are expressed as one’s own memory since the performance of knowledge of narratives is accompanied with their emotional peculiarities, particular kinesthetic, and gestural body movements.

<sup>27</sup> Meyer (2006:9) defines sensational forms as “relatively fixed, authorized modes of invoking, and organizing access to the transcendental, thereby creating and sustaining links between religious practitioners in the context of particular organization.”

time strengthening his connection with a religious organization and function as a part of the “sensory regime” (ibid) of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Through this sensory regime, the state channels the discourse of transformation. For instance, my tour started with the slogan “*noghteye sare khat*” (a dot at the end of the line). Often in small flyers attached to given things, one was encouraged to think about one’s own life, to put a dot at the end of line, if he/she wants to start living like *the shohada* did.

Experiencing *Rahiyane Nur* as a trip to a spiritual place and positioned to transcend the time and the space, pilgrims appear in a liminal position. Detaching themselves from the material (*madi*) space, entering the spiritual (*ma’navi*) one and afterwards returning to the material space again, the pilgrims pass through a transformative ritual in terms of Turner (1974:203) which provide them access to the sacred source.

Many of whom I interviewed talked about this trip as about an experience in their life which changed their behavior back at home. I will call it a transformative experience. Various authors define personal transformation in terms of “self-consciousness”, “self-awareness”, “person-becoming” or “self-renewing” (Murakami 2014:341). However, I explain it not only as an inner state, but also as its extension to individual’s physical world and social interactions.

These changes were related mainly to two areas of their lives: 1) perceiving the hardship of the War, the sufferings of the martyrs, thus, leading the establishment of a new relationship with a martyr or cultivating the relationship with a particular martyr even more; 2) changing their lifestyle, especially, observing better Islamic prescriptions, or “behavior” (*ahlagh*), which is one of the dominant discourses in the Islamic Republic of Iran, such as observing *mahram-namahram* rules (rules among those who are allowed to get married or not), always taking ablution or praying on time. “In the beginning I wasn’t *chadori*”, Mahdijeh, 20, said to me who was one of the girls telling me about their life changes after the *Rahiyane Nur* and the decision to start wearing the full *hejab*,

i. e., with the *chador*. “I was *mantoyi* [with a long dress covering arms and hips]. I even let the hair out. But I went there for the first time, I was moved. I put on the *chador* and now I observe the *hejab* very well. Because of *the shohada*.”

Some pilgrims defined this trip as an energetic charge, which changed their daily approach to the *madiat* (materiality) and necessity to it. But this charge did not last forever, it ended up when they “forget.” Therefore, *Arezu*, whom was already there for her ninth time, goes there every year to “recharge” it. As a ritual, this trip also asks some preparation, since the transformative effect of a ritual depends not only on “the mode of its transmission”, but also on the extent of preparedness of the receiver (Rappaport 1999:448). The more you prepare, the more you receive out of it — that is one of the reasons why I was asked to read something about Imam Reza before going to him to Mashahad. Some of the travelers do nothing, but some of them even fast. Detachment from the *madi* world and becoming more *ma’navi*, is a step in *khod-sazi* towards *az khod-gozashtegi*. Sometimes while staying alone and trying to connect to *the shohada*, *the aimeh*, to God, or just to “become empty”, pilgrims would think of reaching the state which martyrs reached — martyrdom, or *az khod-gozashtegi*:

Why aren’t we like them? Why don’t we try to reach what they reached that we could so easily abandon our lives, or, for example, follow some of their behavior features?..

This is what Mehri was thinking during *the azadari* held in *the Rahiyane Nur*. Like some other young girls, she wanted to reach the stage of martyrdom. Mozhgan changed her opinion about *the shohada* as well:

I myself, have never thought about it that when they went [to fight] because of us, because of our *bihejabih*a [not wearing *hejab*] they gave their lives, now we have to have our *hejab*, to live as real Muslims. Not that only on the surface we would call ourselves Muslims, Shi’as; no — it should be real.

Remembering *the shohada* after returning from the trip, for instance, sending them *salavat* (salutation) after *namaz*, can function as a transformative power, and cultivating the relationship

with a martyr assures prolongation of this memory. Remembering *the shohada*, girls may start wearing the chador or stop seeing their boyfriends, as it is required by the Islamic code of conduct. Therefore, these youth may come back from this trip as better citizens of an Islamic Republic.

## 5. A DUTY TO REMEMBER

### 5.1. The Ethics and Practices of Remembering

Remembering has several dimensions; however, as Misztal (2004:78) claims, the ethical aspect is more important than the historical one. For Iranians with whom I was spending my time, the practices of remembering, the engagement with the narrative of the War, establishment of a relationship with the martyrs, I argue, depend on a particular understanding of the ethics of remembering — of a perception of what it means “to remember”, similar to the Lambek’s (1996:248) term of “moral practice.” It refers to contextual understanding of the importance of the past defined by the moral norms present in the society, and the interests of an individual who sees himself as a continuation of it.

Ethical remembering for my interviewees, I would conclude, encompassed several aspects. Firstly, one ought to know the history, i. e. the historical circumstances. Moreover, this knowing did not simply mean “being acquainted” with it. “To know” rather meant that history must be perceived and experienced. I learned the vocabulary of war from my interviewees, both from those who were in *the Rahiyane Nur*, and those who were not. I still do not know how these tools are called in my language because I never cared about it even while learning my country’s history. It should be well understood what it means to talk about particular geographical locations of the War; One should know how gas was used in the war functions to be able to say “there was a gas attack.” For many of the youth, going to *the Rahiyane Nur* means understanding the reality and the truth of

the War.<sup>28</sup> There was a young female *ravi* on my bus to the South. Although she was a certified *ravi*, who finished a special school, spent hours talking with *the janbazan* and listening to their memories of the War, went on special tours to the War areas in order to learn geographical and climatic peculiarities of the territory, she only told stories when she was on the bus. Other *ravis* would tell stories of the War when listeners were sitting on the sand and facing the landscape of a battlefield. She told me, she did not give herself a permission to narrate there without perceiving what it meant to fight there. Although her certificate allowed her to do it, her moral obligations restricted her.

Secondly, remembering means circulating the memories. “Memories are objects, not acts”, says Lambek (1996:238). To remember means to look for memories, to search, to ask someone who was an eye-witness to the War or has a martyr in his/her family for his/her memory, to tell a memory about someone who was with you in the War, to share the memories with others, to distribute them to others, to tell a friend a new memory heard. Not asking from a person who was in the War to tell a memory would be disrespectful. Interestingly, talking to the mothers of *the shahidan* and a writer-memory collector, I learned that this tradition to share memories existed already during the War. Soldiers were coming back home from the battlefields, sometimes only for a short break, and visiting the families of their co-soldiers — especially the mothers who have a very high status in Iranian culture — and telling the memories-stories about their lost sons. They were also sharing photographs accompanied with these stories, giving to a *shahid*’s mother a photograph she had not.

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<sup>28</sup> One of discourses present in Islam is understanding and separating what reality (*vaghiyat*) and what truth (*haghighat*) are. It also refers to the battle of Karbala and Zaynab, Hussein’s sister, who witnessed and told about the true events in Karbala (Deeb 2005:270).

The students who establish relationships with *the shohada* frequently visit their mothers. Often they are looking for a mother who is not known yet or a *shahid* who is young and not so famous; then they call her and ask for an appointment. “We go there to show that we are not that poor-spirited (*namard*) that would forget it”, says Mona, one of the student co-ordinators of these meetings. Mona’s example illustrates the meaning of the commitment to the past by maintaining the relationship with those whom you acknowledge and who acknowledge you sharing the past (Lambek 1996:239). There is no need for a special occasion to meet the mothers: sometimes they just go to visit after the mother’s recovery from an operation. Going to a mother for a first time means “going to get acquainted with a *shahid*.” The mother is usually asked small details about her son, and, the most importantly, she is asked to tell her memories. The mothers also tell their dreams about their sons. These dreams are narrated in the same manner as memories from daily life, so there is no distinction between a memory from daily life and from a memory of a dream. A dream for *the shahid*’s mother might be just an indicator of time dividing it into the time “before” and “after” *shehadat* because *the shahid* is always alive, just the space and the form of interaction with him is different. One of the ways to treat these dreams, is to see them as active memory expressed by the act of narration which later replaces dream and becomes remembered (Lambek 1996:242).

Moreover, these stories and dreams must be shared and narrated. Often my interviewees were indicating that they learned the story they told me from their friends. Sharing memories also include the engagement with pictures from the War with *the shohada*. When I was shown photographs with a martyr, even where he was dead, I often heard from these youth an interesting story about the person in the picture which sometimes for me did not appear relevant to the content of the picture. In Jedlowski’s (2001:32-33) opinion, narration of memories is employed not for the representation of the past, but for the individual’s effort to accept it within the present discourse.

Memory telling is more than an act of transmission of collective memory through storytelling from generation to generation (Bellehumeur et al. 2011:199). This act creates a community, since it includes repetitiveness and interaction among people evoking their emotions (Cappelletto 2003:257). The ties in this kind of communities are created through narration and cultivation of the memories (ibid) accepted as the memory of ours by both sides; therefore they create a community of remembering and remembered ones, as I call it. *The shahid's* mothers find their way to connect themselves to society through the act of telling the memories from the past. They are invited to join the students on their trips or come to their organized events and actively wait for the students to come and visit them.

Third, a remembering member of the community needs to feel when he/she engages with practices for remembering, especially, commemoration. Among the forms of commemoration is mourning, which is considered a pious Shi'a duty and obligation; therefore, it has religious merit (Shirazi 2005:94). Through performance of body (Connerton 1989), one can recognize the act of commemoration. Iranian Shi'a would express it by crying, lamenting or simply by holding hand at his forehead and covering it.

Self-formation of these young students attending religious commemorative ceremonies leads them to embody the modes needed for remembering. They keep reminding themselves about the martyrs every time. They visit their graves and establish the relationship with them; the organizing students make sure a *shahid's* picture is present in every religious ceremony. I found that just hearing mentioning the name of *the shohada*, especially, *shohada-ye gomnam*, in a particular setting (like *razmayeshgah*), would lead these youth to start crying.

This moral-self, endowed with capacities and potential to express particular feelings, partially was formed during the commemorative rituals. Mahmood (in Mittermaier 2012:394) calls these self-formation practices as “ethical practices”. They are attached and fostered to historically

formulated discourse through endowment of the body (ibid). Through specific practices prescribed by these rituals, according to Mahmood (2001), the individual's faculty of judgment is formed and becomes embodied. Through this body, the individual interacts with the state.

Fourth, ethical practices requires him/her to act, in order to “not forget.” A feeling must be accompanied by a particular action which is expressed as a quality of *ahlagh*. Zahra told me, one who cries for *the shohada*, but misbehaves “has forgotten.” Sayedeh, 19, had similar opinion:

Look, those ones who are loyal (*vafadar*) are crying [talking about *azadari*], and after this crying they continue the path of *the shohada*. For example, a girl goes to her home, she observes her *hejab*, wears a *chador*. The girl goes to her home, goes to the street, she does not look at *namahram*, does not let her hair out.

Remembering is not a state — it is an action and a practice. Therefore, a remembering person like Sayedeh observes *mahram-namahram* relations, e.g. religious prescriptions, and what is learned from their moral exemplars — *the shohada* according to “the historically formulated truth” (Mahmood 2005:35) or theological-political representations of the state which depicts itself as the aftermath of following the most righteous path in Islam. For the same reason, Mahdīyeh changed her attitudes and daily practices after *the Rahiyane Nur*. Since through the process of ritualization assuring social control “ritualized body” keeps reproducing “ritualized practices” (Bell 1992:93), the state which is structurally constructed on Shi’a Islam (Kaur 2010:45), articulates the narratives of Shi’ism and the Sacred Defense together.

On the eve of the beginning of the days of *Fatemiyyeh* (the martyrdom of Fatima) which lasts approximately two weeks and are opened and finished with *azadari*, there were brought the coffins of the Sacred Defense martyrs to 13 cities (Etela’at 2015). The poster (Figure 3) inviting to the commemoration of these martyrs contained both motives: the picture of a ceremony of bringing the bodies of the martyrs and calligraphy and motifs particular to the commemoration and *azadari* of Fatima.



Figure 3. A poster on the official *Sepah* board in Qazvin inviting people to the ceremony of commemoration of three *shohada-ye gomnam* held together with the ceremony of Fatima's martyrdom. From my personal archive.

Although Shi'a narratives were used to approach the War (Khosronejad 2012:6-7) and afterwards to engage with its traumatic memory and narrate it, the realities of the war conditions and consequences fitting to the narrative, I suggest, also served to reaffirm Shi'a identity as an inseparable part of Iranian identity.

The state is intervening in all of the practices of remembering, directly or indirectly. Kaur (2010:460) believes that not only the public ceremonies and the practices of remembrance are conducted within an institutional framework, but also the practices concerning everyday life; the oral memory of martyrs was affected by the state agencies. Although Aleida Assmann and Lind Shortt (2012:4) observe that orally transmitted memory can be different from the institutionalized one, both the memories told both by mothers whom I visited, and war veterans whom I met through

the students with whom I went on pilgrimages, were confirming the state narratives. Their memories were embedded in the socialization process which determined how and which of them became communicated. These memories were popular. They were told, and sometimes retold in the same way as they were published in the books. So was is not clear anymore how they were selected. In my pilgrimage to Mashhad, a son of a famous *shahid* was telling memories about his father. I asked one student how he liked the talk. He said, he was disappointed. He liked this *shahid*, but expected something more from the talk than the memories which he read in the book about *the shahid*. *The shahid's* son was a small boy when his father died. His “memories” were stories selected in accordance to political memory, but still carrying the title of “memories” eliminating the difference between the two concepts.

Many practices of the students, not only the Rahiyane Nur, are encouraged by institutions or units related to *the Bonyad-e Shahid* or *the Sepah*. As I learned in the university from an old professor, the teacher of “History of the Sacred Defense” can only be a person who was in the War. In order to teach in the university he must be approved by *the Sepah*. Although the meetings with the mothers are organized by the students, from time to time they are reminded about it by the workers from the office of the affairs of *the shohada* and *isargeran* who keep the connection with the mothers in the town and information about them through *the Bonyad-e Shahid*. The streets having names of the martyrs and containing the word “shahid” usually are considered by people to be the streets in which *the shahidan* were living. Interestingly, two mothers, whom I visited together with the students, lived in the streets with their sons names; however, they moved to their new houses in those streets after the martyrdom of their sons. The questions students ask from the mothers about their sons, or even the chosen *the shahid*, I found, to some of them were introduced when they joined afterschool clubs in schools. Maryam told me that when she started going to the mothers as a member of one of those clubs she was given a questionnaire to fill in

with a shahid's details of life. She was asking the same questions from the mothers when we were going to "get acquainted with a new *shahid*". Her chosen *shahid* was introduced to her by one of the members of that club little by little until he became her favorite one. These youth are instructed how to remember and how to engage to the past practically.

### 5.1.1. Mourning and the State

Emotions and modes attached to commemorating, mainly mourning, function as memories themselves and are transmittable (Cappelletto 2003:256). As much as pain, as a part of "public relationship" transmits social memory (Asad 2003:81-84), pain is transmitted by social memory. At the same time, all these emotions shape and define memories (Assmann 2006:3). Therefore, there is a reciprocal relation between collective and individual pain originating from, as I call it, the recognition of human loss. Therefore, as Khosronejad (2012:9) claims, people need and want these public monuments to *the shohada* and performative commemorations of the Sacred Defense for their grieving. These commemorations are not proceeded without the material basis and disposal of sacralized bodies (Kaur 2010:444) provided by the State. I believe that people need those bodies in these ceremonies as much as they need the monuments and the ceremonies themselves. It can be observed through the practices of mourning.

As I demonstrated, among the practices of remembering, mourning could be expressed both as collective and as a personal act. It might be perceived in twofold way according to the "moral practice": one needs *to mourn* and one needs *to be mourned*. The mourner has a necessity to express his grief, sadness, pain dependently how intimate he/she is to the *shahid*. However these emotions, feelings and modes are their durable dispositions (Hirschkind 2001; Mahmood 2001). The dead one needs to be mourned because this is the shared understanding of the manner to remember, duty

and commitment transmitted as a part of the collective identity (Neal 2005; Gillis 1994). However, linking together the interviews and *maddahis* and one TV show, I would suggest, that there is the third relationship to mourning. In addition to “I” who has a necessity to express his condition, and to commemorate the dead one ethically, the dead one also needs “me” to mourn for him/her. In one of the *maddahis*, for the *shohada-ye gomnam*, which for the first time I heard in the *Golzare Shohada* during the days of *Fatemiye*, *maddah* is singing about a mother in the graveyard<sup>29</sup>:

[The mother crying and talking to the grave of a *shahid-e gomnam*:]  
*You didn't say whether you have anyone? Or a person like me with no occupation?*  
*Oh... Oh... Oh...*  
*Don't you have a mother who would cry for you?*  
*Who would come and lean on your grave on Thursday evenings?*  
*Don't be sad, I am your mother, I always believe in you as well*  
*I won't let you to be alone*  
*I will continue coming to your grave*  
*I won't hide from you — I have a son*  
*Several years I have no news from him...*

This significance of mourning also shows that the mourner feels a necessity to have her own personal and intimate connection to the dead one mediated through material forms, i. e., death body and his grave. *Shohada-ye gomnam* and the discourse related to them function not only as a cultural tool to transmit values (Wertsch 2002) presenting them as the ones who paid the highest price of sacrifice, but also become a connection and at the same time an access point for the state to manipulate the society (Jedlowski 2001) through the variety of monuments, ceremonies and projects related to *the shohada-ye gomnam*.

On the Nouruz eve in Iran, there was a special show on television. Among the guests were two mothers<sup>30</sup> waiting for their sons for over thirty years to come back from the War. This *waiting* implies the fact that they were expecting to see their dead bodies, or, more likely, just their bones

<sup>29</sup> The text and the audio file of the can be found here: <http://farhangi.um.ac.ir/portal/?q=node/18183>

<sup>30</sup> Young Journalist club. Madarane shohada sarparastiyeh shohadaye yatim ohdedar shodan. (The Mothers of Martyrs adopted Orphan Martyrs) <http://www.yjc.ir/fa/news/5160948>. Retrieved 2 June, 2015.

brought from the *meraj-e shohada*. Every new year Iranians remember the dead ones, especially, *the shohada*. But these two mothers were invited because, as it was framed, they “adopted” two “orphans” *shohada-ye gomnam* as their sons. On one hand, this action appears insignificant since it did not generate any important change: the names and the relatives of these martyrs were still unknown; the mothers still did not know what happened to their sons, where they were. However, asked on the TV show how they felt, they replied that this act change gave them the feeling of *aramesh* (peace of mind). This example demonstrates, firstly, the difference between public and private relationship with the grave since the mothers could commemorate and mourn for these unknown martyrs even without “adopting” them. Secondly, it reveals that some people accept the state intervention into their private relations with death through a particular understanding of mourning and, therefore, allows the state to perform as taking care of its subjects both live ones, and dead ones, but present among people, who also need to be taken care of.

## 5.2. Remembering and Forgetting

Furthermore, the process of silencing and selectivity of memories is also a part of the ethical remembering. If the act of remembering is considered as “a moral identity-building act”, as Lambek (1996:249) argues, then forgetting is as well (ibid). Therefore, to remember ethically also means to silence those who have different versions of memory, or as Foucault (in Misztal 2004:77) calls them — “counter-memory.” It would be those who challenge the hegemony of the official representation of the history — the narrative of *the Sacred Defense* and divine nature of the martyrs and martyrdom — and offer different narratives. There are soldiers (*razmandegan*) who fought in the War but do not talk about it publicly.

Some students whom I interviewed, and who had fathers or uncles who fought in the War, said that they do not really talk about the War experience. Amin, 25, heard his father talking about the War just 3 times, while Ameneh, 19, only learned about the War peculiarities in the *Rahiyane Nur*. She told about her experience visiting the battlefields to her father who had fought there, but who had never shared memories about it; she stopped telling as soon as realized that her father was going to cry. This, as Connerton (2009) explains, is “narrative silence” when people might be unable to recount certain narratives and are unwilling to talk because their experience was deeply painful; therefore, a part of the past remain silent.

But there is another group of *razmandegan* who could be approached as “counter-memory.” My interviewees talking about the War and what *the shahid* and *shehadat* mean, mentioned them, but it was not regarded as collective memory:

**Layla:** Those who went [to *jebheh*], became the *shohada*. Those who came back, continued the way of the *shahidan*. Some of them, all in all, started regretting why they went to the *jepheh*.

**I:** Do you know anyone from those who “regret”?

**Layla:** No, this kind of people are not so much discussed in the society that it would be possible to know them. They don't come to say that "I regret now." Some of them went with an aim [personal], not because of the war. But, ok, all of them deserved to be respected.

There are also mothers who do not share their memories with the devotees of *the shohada*. Mehri, who was also visiting the mothers of *the shohada* told me:

There are families, even in the same Qazvin... When we call for an appointment to go and to visit them because of their *shahidan*, they do not accept us because they say they are regretting that they allowed their child to become *a shahid*.

These mothers reject the narratives, thus making themselves excluded from the memory sharing and martyrdom celebrating community. Like the soldiers who do not talk about the war, they are also called regretting ones (*pashimun shode*). Although their existence is known, it does not change the narrative of the *shahadat*. Even if they decided to talk, the understanding of *the shahid* as a perfect model could turn against them, as it was demonstrated in the first chapter by Mehri's understanding of martyrdom.

At the same time, there are *janbazan* who willingly share their memories, work in the State places, support the official narrative, and stay within the community of the remembered and remembering ones. Moreover, they retell their memories many times and memorize them, like one famous *janbaz* whom I interviewed. He spent 48 hours in a morgue, since he was considered dead after the battle and just by accident was spotted still breathing by someone in the morgue. The *janbaz* told me his story precisely mentioning hours and minutes, including the miraculous element and a witness of it. I asked Mohadeseh, my friend who was with me, what she thought about his memory-story. Although she liked it, she said:

When this man was talking I was thinking he had memorized this story because he repeated it so many times from one talk to another; so he was telling from the memory, not that it would affect him. That he always says what was in the newspaper that he was 48 hours *shahid*, this is how I felt.

Since *the janbaz* did not experience his memory implied by the ethics of remembering, Mohadeseh doubted its authenticity.

As Lambek (1996:xvii) suggests, an “authoritative version” of a story does not belong to the owner of the memory. Since every story has its audience, often it is transferred from collective memory to the domain of the power of the state (ibid). Therefore, official narratives of the state keep dominating as history and collective memory. Although official narratives do not present miraculous stories with martyrs as official history, these stories circulate in the form of memories which constitute biographies of the martyrs, and for the youth having an intimate connection with a *shahid* the line between the two — history and memories — is blurred. In addition, disagreeing with the narratives of the state would make it hard for people to commemorate: one needs to forget some part of the past in order to mourn for the memories, or in terms of Assmann (2006:3) to move “to the background” some memories “to shed light on others.”

Keeping remembering traumatic events, as moral duty and ethical reply requires from the witnesses of the War to transmit memory to the next generation (Misztal 2001:78) which is also a highly selective process regarding the problematic questions they should address (Assmann 2006:3). Together with “the culture of the Sacred Defense”, as it is called in Iran by those who are supporting its promotion like *the Bonyad-e Shahid* or some war veterans who are employed by the state or have a respected position in society, the values of the state are also transmitted.

During my fieldwork, I talked with one writer-journalist who had spent in *jebheh* only two or three months but since then he continued his duty of “transmission”. It appeared to me that he was expressing his nostalgia, as if longing for the youth of their generation which past too fast (a third of the Iranian soldiers during the War were only 15-19 years old (Kurzman 2013)). This nostalgia may also influence the selectivity of memories (Dauncey and Tinker 2015:136).

The writer-journalist was working in the municipality of Qazvin. He spent many years collecting memories about the martyrs of the city, interviewing their acquaintances, collecting the pictures and published more than 30 books. During the war, he was working with *the Bonyad-e Shahid*, later started collecting memories after the war when he felt that people are “slowly distancing” themselves from the “aims”, “values” and “results” of *the Sacred Defense*. The writer was explaining to me how one book came about. For his project on the memories of the martyrs’ mothers, called “The Last Goodbye” (*Akherin Veda*’) he worked for two years and interviewed 300 mothers. Out of these stories-memories, he selected 72 as “interesting” and “suitable” for his book. Another book was a picture album of the martyrs with short stories about them. He did not tell me how much time he spent on this project of his, but he identified every single person in every picture. He had a 1000 of them. However, for his book and the photographic exhibition he selected only 50. Eventually, of such huge amount of memories and photographs, the selected ones were representing and agreeing with the popular perception of *the shahid* and reproducing the state image of it.

### 5.3. Being a Good Citizen

Last but not least, the one who remembers attempts to be a good member of the society and builds himself/herself.

A remembering society has a particular face defined by the state. People who participated in the ceremony of bringing the newly found remains of soldiers during the days of *Fatemiye*h, were described in the news as “people upbringing martyrs (*shahidparvar*)”, “supporting the guardian (*velayatmadar*)”, “appreciating people (*ghadrshenas*)”, “by their participation reconfirming the bonds with the ideals of the Revolution” (Etela’at 2015). The image of *the shahid*

and the state's discourse of memory provides for each individual a place to locate himself in the society, assuring that it would function in the way it desires.

Through a variety of posters, speeches and “cultural programs” the state encourages citizens “to remember”, or “to be in the memory of” *the shohada*, as it literally translates from Persian. Emphasizing the community's bonds with the past and underscoring it as a basis of its identity, the state turns the memory of *the shohada* into commitment, obligation (Booth 1999:252) and a duty of a citizen of the Islamic Republic. At the same time, a citizen is the one who “remembers God” since this what *the shohada* — the exemplars of perfect person, Muslims and citizens were doing. It was not only just after the Revolution nation-building was interwoven with the discourse of martyrdom (Varzi:2006). It continues today representing the state as being built on the sacrifice of the martyrs (Marzolph:2003; 2013) . It is emphasized that the country continues to exist because of the endless Iranian zeal of martyrdom, which is a collective action necessary to solve problems identified by the state (Neal 2005:199).

There are several features emphasized more than the others in the representation of the image of *the shahid*. *The shahidan's* quotations, often taken from their testimonies, accompany their pictures and are used in speeches. In the newspaper about the martyrs of the city Qazvin (Khat-e Sorkh 2015), sixty *shohada-ye shakhes* were presented with a sentence from each of them. Sentences were in the imperative mood, sounded like an advice and concerned only several issues, emphasizing the importance of a prayer, God, the supreme leader and resistance (*istadegi*). These martyrs, who invoke the constructed image of *the shahid*, then, are turned into the “public voice” (Bellaheure et al. 2011:199). Through this public voice past events, selected by the elite and presented as important ones, are communicated and transmitted to the society through cultural tools (Wertsch 2002). Therefore, the martyrs, especially the *shohada-ye gomnam* to whom graveyards-monuments are built in the public places including universities (Talebi 2012) are transmitters of

values attached to the attractive images and personalities of theirs. Moreover, in the process of transmission of values and (political) attitudes through martyrs, and representing the images of the state (the supreme leader) together with the sayings of the martyrs, the line between the voice of *the shohada* and the voice of the supreme leader is blurred.

After understanding this particular meaning of “remembering”, phrases such as “lets trust *the shahidan* to our memories, not to the earth”, which I saw on the poster at the entrance of Shalamcheh or “today keeping alive the memory of *the shohada* is not less than *shehadat* itself” (Figure 4) are read differently, pointing at daily life practices embedded in social context; especially, for the youth desiring to reach this stage of *khod-sazi*. Going through the process of *khod-sazi*, a young individual tries to identify the place where he/she stands, with whom to agree and whom to oppose (Taylor in Lambek 1996:249).



Figure 4. On the left of the poster is Imam Khomeini, on the right of the poster the supreme leader of Iran Khamenei. The text says: “Today keeping alive the memory of the shohada is not less than martyrdom itself.” Source: (<http://inews.g19.ir/post>)

Employing commitments and other identifications to define their values and duties (bid), the youth discover that their commitments then are dedicated to the state. While remembering the martyrs, self-realization develops into the active support and reproduction of the state narratives about the enemies, about continuous war (just in a different — psychological — form (Price 2012)), resistance to the culture(s) “blinding” their society and destroying its values, and even about help

to the oppressed ones (Palestinians) perceived as a Muslims duty and appealing to Shi'a sentiment of wronged innocence. As Lambek (1996:139) notes, moral outcome in the present is dependent on the significance of the presented account of the past. How, then, a young person admiring *the shahid*, having a close connection with him and taking the inspiration from him for his/her own projection in the future can fundamentally disagree with the state?

Largely attended commemorations not only of the martyrs of *the Sacred Defense*, but also of new martyrs who died after the War and are still dying, such as *shohada-ye elmi* continue and it reestablishes validity of the state (Kaur 2010:444). As Kaur (ibid) concludes, these “fresh bodies” of the new martyrs and their biographies are needed for renewal of the material basis supporting the state narrative about martyrdom and reconfirmation of its legitimacy of the Islamic Republic, as the right choice for Iran. However, these new martyrs also fulfills another function in the society, since the material base of sacralized bodies and biographies of the dead martyrs is continuously refreshed by the bodies of the martyrs of the War. I suggest to consider it as the actualization of the model of *the shahid*. For these youth the new martyrs open the ways to martyrdom by showing new models of a good citizen dying in the service of his country as far as this model fits the popular perception of *the shahid* as being *sadezist*, kind and noble. When I asked Vahideh what she learned in her life from *the shohada* and how she practically implements it, Vahideh replied:

It might be that we do not act according to it, but... We say to each other, that these *shohada* that are closer to our situation; for example, those who were in the scientific field: they had both their lives, and were active in the scientific field. We are still not that distant from them that we could say ‘no, *shehadat* is hard, we can’t.’ I don’t say now that we are as worthy as they, but at least in the scientific field...

Reaching *shehadat* for the youth might appear as an unattainable project since it requires particular personal qualities and *az-khod-gozashtegi*. For Vahideh and other *basijis*, the martyrs who died in the positions and jobs which seemed like foreseeable future to them, made *shehadat* achievable.

Therefore, the narrative of martyrdom legitimizing the state requires not only sacralized material basis. The perception of martyrdom in its broader context, i. e. a state preceded by self-formation for a higher and noble aim, also functions as an integral element of the narrative of martyrdom. In this manner, this imagery incorporates assassinated Iranian nuclear scientists<sup>31</sup> and positions them within the framework of the *Sacred Defense* narrative (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The official board of *the Sepah* in Qazvin is usually used to announce the events in the city. However, this Poster appear in the end of March during the nuclear talks in Lausanne. It depicts the killed nuclear scholars of Iran (*shohada-ye elmi*) and the attributes of the War. The poster says: “We want from our government men to stand until the last in the field of nuclear battle like during the Sacred Defense. The Committee of Organization of Promotion of Islam of the Province of Qazvin.” From my personal archive.

According to the Wertsch’s (2002) classification, “narrative template” provides a scheme or a structure of the story plot and afterwards can generate “specific narratives” (ibid). *The Sacred Defense* narrative in Iran was generated from the Karbala narrative template. However, the example

<sup>31</sup> *The martyrs of Nuclear Energy*. <http://isargaraneslam.blogfa.com/>. Retrieved 29 May, 2015.

of *the shohada-ye elmi* allows me to consider, that the narrative template could be shifting to some extent from the Karbala paradigm to the Sacred Defense paradigm. In the discourse of the state of Iran, the war is not over. It is now framed as a “soft” (*narm*) War (Price 2012), its form shifted from physical to psychological. This soft war includes resistance to the corrupted West influence and propaganda through the satellite, social media and other means attacking Shi’a values, such as Zaynab’s, Hussein sister’s, *emamzede*h which is located in Syria. It also means fight with the spies of the West who try to intervene into the state affairs. With the shift of the form of war the form of fight and resistance is also shifting; therefore, portraying them within the framework of the Karbala is not so compelling and has less mobilizing effect for the Iranian youth.

## CONCLUSION

In my thesis, I demonstrated how a context-dependent understanding of ethical remembering shapes its practices related to the memory of the Iran-Iraq War. Particularly I focused on the most prominent figure of it — *the shahid* — and how it influences the non-secular Iranian youth who consider him as a moral example and can establish a very intimate connection with him.

The salience of the image of *the shahid* lies in its construction. *The shahid* is created as an absolutely perfect being as a person, and as a member of the society with a pious Shi'a face. In the process of self-formation, he achieves a stage when he is able to leave the most precious things and people in his material life for the sake of God and face death. However, as it is believed in Islam, he stays alive leaving to people the opportunity to connect with him, ask for his intercession with God, and even for intercession with their lives; additionally, he is always in close relations *to the aimeh*.

Incorporated into the religious Shi'a narratives which emphasize Hussein's resistance and sacrifice, and heroic narratives of *the Sacred Defense*, *the shahid* becomes an attractive model for the lives of religious young people and might be taken as an example or inspiration for their self-formation. Even those who reject the divine attributes and miraculous stories about the martyrs of the War may perceive them as heroes and admire their nobility and bravery known from the memories-stories about them. These memories are transmitted through the collective memory which also transmits the feeling of indebtedness for the existence of the young generation, shame for the sacrifice of their lives and a duty to remember. As moral obligation it requires from the individual to engage to various commemorative and remembering activities which are interwoven

with Shi'a religious practices and discourses.

Observing Shi'a prescriptions is a part of self-formation of a pious Iranian and also allusion to the self-formation of *the shohada* who reached the stage of martyrdom. During the mourning which is a pious Shi'a duty the traumatic collective Shi'a memory about *the aimeh* is narrated in a manner as if the narrator is present there in the time of its action and is eye-witnessing it; the events take place here and now and become lived by the listener. Attached to the mode of shame, emotions of grief and sorrow and expressed through particular kinesthetic movements such as chest-beating these narratives not only become internalized, but also turn into a personal embodied memory. At the same time the modes, and emotions accompanying mourning transform into the individual's embodied durable dispositions. This embodied shame and debt resonate (converge) with the shame and indebtedness to the martyrs of the War transmitted through national memory.

The practices of remembering are shaped by ethics of remembrance — by a particular socio-cultural context-dependent perception of moral attitudes towards memory. These ethics define the engagement with the collective memory, the narratives about the War, and the image of *the shahid*. Therefore, mourning as a commemorative activity used to engage with traumatic past events is one of the practices of ethical remembering. It endows bodies with mentioned durable dispositions which form the individual's moral conduct and daily practices. Consequently, the “remembering” bodies with specific dispositions acquired through the ritual Shi'a practices mediate between the individual and the authority of the ritual which is the theocratic state, i.e, the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Further, the ethics of remembering are shaped by the state discourse of memory which incorporates Shi'a and *the Sacred Defense* narratives, and attempts to present them together; different memories of the War are silenced, the practices are institutionalized, and the distinction between the personal and political memory is blurred. In this situation, I argued, the image of *the*

*shahid* for the religious Iranian youth is: 1) a reference point for self-projection into the future; 2) a mediator between themselves and God; 3) mediator between themselves and the society; 4) mediator between themselves and the state. It becomes a transmitter of the state values, as well as a cultural tool, utilized to build the society functioning in the agreement with the norms of an Islamic Republic, which is reciprocally accepted by the youth looking for a space for the self-realization. Therefore, they not only reconfirm the legitimacy of the state, but also actively engage and reproduce its discourses.

Many issues in the phenomenon of martyrdom in post-war Iran remain unaddressed. Due to the limitations, in this paper I did not cover the role of the narrative of martyrdom in the international politics which could be one of the topics for future investigations of this phenomenon. I propose several questions for further considerations.

How does the state legitimize the international policy through the heroic narratives of the War martyrs and reproduce the narrative through actualization of the model of the martyr? How does it construct and present the world with a constant presence of an enemy to the young individual who believes in the state? How is traumatic memory of the War with a significant number of dead teenage soldiers transformed into an inspiring example to go and fight in Palestine or Syria? How does a young individual in Iran wishing to become the highest version of himself/herself one day decide to go there and die? What is the relationship between the individual and this narrative? The tensions emerging here should not be neglected. What does the individual experience, when he/she follow the martyrs as moral exemplars and tries to build a better moral self, but disagrees with the politics of the state?

## Glossary

*Azadari* – mourning.

*Az-khod-gozashtegi* – self-sacrifice, devotion. Literally it means passing through the self; abandoning the self.

*Basiji* – a person belonging to the basij organization which is one of the units of the *Sepah*.

*Emamzadeh* – a shrine in which an Imam or his relatives are buried.

*Esghe* – love.

*Etekef* – is a “pious practice” when one must stay several days in a mosque, fast, pray, recite the Quran and other activities prescribed in the mosque.

*Fatemiye* – the martyrdom of Fatima.

*Chador* – black full length veil. *Chadory* – the one who wears a chador.

*Ghadrshenas* – the one who knows value, appreciates.

*Golzare shohada* – “the rose garden of martyrs.” Here it refers to the cemetery of martyrs in Qazvin.

*Hejab* – the Islamic dress code.

*Heyat* – here: a students’ club organizing religious activities in the Imam Khomeini International University.

*Husseiniye* – an assembly hall especially built for ceremonies commemorating the mourning of martyrdom of Imam Hussein.

*Isarger* (pl. *Isargeran*) – the one who is ready to make a sacrifice. Here it refers to those who voluntarily went to the War both to fight, and to help.

*Istade*gi – resistance. Here it refers to resistance to enemy and protection of values.

*Janbaz* – a war veteran who was wounded during the war.

*Jebheh* – war front.

*Jihad* – holy war. It also refers to efforts for a greater aim.

*Khastegari* – a formal visit of a man to make a marriage proposal.

*Khod-sazi* – self-formation.

*Maddah* – a reciter of eulogies.

*Madiat* – material things, worldly concerns.

*Madi* – material.

*Mahram* –the forbidden one to marry, *namahram* – the allowed one to marry in Islam.

*Manto* – a long women dress covering her body, hands, hips. A person who wears a *manto* is *mantoyi*.

*Ma'navi* – spiritual.

*Me'raje shohada* – the place to which newly found bodies of the war martyrs are brought.

*Moharram* – the first month of the Arabic lunar calendar.

*Mohr* – a small round piece of clay used for praying.

*Namard* – poor-spirited, lacking quality of manliness, coward; as opposed to noble.

*Namaz* – prayer.

*Pashimun shodan* – to regret.

*Rahiyane Nur* – “the Passengers of light.” Here: a tour to the War sites.

*Ravi* – the one who tells memories and historical circumstances of the War.

*Razmandeh* (pl. *Razmandegan*) — a soldier of the War.

*Razmayeshgah* – “maneuver location.” Here the place in the mountains where plays with special audiovisual effects are performed.

*Sadezist* – a person who lives a simple life; does not need expensive things.

*Sadezisti* – simple living.

*Salavat* – a commonly-used salutation invoking God to bless the holy Prophet, his house and his companions.

*Sarband* – a colorful ribbon for a forehead or a helmet with names of Hussein, Fatima or other Shi'a saints.

*Sepah* – The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

*Shahid* – martyr.

*Shahidan* – the plural form of *shahid*.

*Shahidparvar* – growing (nurturing) martyrs.

*Shehadat* – martyrdom.

*Shohada* – the plural form of *shahid*.

*Shohada-ye elmi* – the martyrs who die on the path of science.

*Shohada-ye gomnam* – nameless martyrs. Dead soldiers of the war whose names are unknown.

*Shohada-ye shakhes* – the prominent martyrs.

*Talabidan* – to summon.

*Tasbih* – prayer beads.

*Vafadar* – loyal, faithful.

*Velayatmadar* – supporting the guardian, i.e., the supreme leader; pro-regime.

*Vozu* – ablution.

*Ziyarat* – Pilgrimage. Literally in means “visit.”

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