From religious performances to martial themes: Discourses of Shi’a musical eulogies, war and politics in Iran

Abstract

This paper deconstructs how religious musical eulogies, as the most important discursive practices of Shi’a rituals (Ghaffari 2019), were used as ‘war songs’ serving to construct the Iranian national identity during the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran war. These musical practices (in)formed the wider ideological and persuasive rhetoric of Iranians. In this paper, I analyse the textual and musical features of the audio-recorded versions of ten well-known war songs. The Discourse-Historical Approach (Reisigl and Wodak 2016) is used to analyse the discursive strategies and persuasive rhetorical tools within the lyrics. I draw on Machin (2010), Machin and Richardson (2012) and van Leeuwen (1999) to analyse various features of voice and the modality of sounds. This paper concludes that, by reflecting the power of religious discourse in the non-religious and highly nationalistic occasion of war, Iranian war songs were inspired by the religious eulogies in encouraging the Iranian nation to attend the war fronts.

Keywords: War songs, religious eulogies, Iranian identity, Shi’a rituals, discourse-historical approach, discursive strategies, multimodal analysis, modality of sounds, voice qualities, rhythm, pitch

1. Introduction

Some of the most outstanding and enduring music of the twentieth century was written during wars, e.g. the Second World War (Winkler 2013, 11). War songs are inspiring songs to encourage soldiers, to ridicule the enemy and to arouse patriotism, while appealing against what was perceived as external threats (Ghaffari 2016). Some war-related songs address events directly related to the war or the home front (Bush, 2006), but most of them reflect the general mood of the country as patriotism is at an all-time high during a specific time. In this paper, I analyse the textual and musical features of the audio-recorded versions of ten well-known war
songs during the 1980-1988 Iraq-Iran war to investigate how religious eulogies, as the most important discursive practices of Shi’a Muslim rituals (Ghaffari 2019), are used as ‘war songs’ that serve to encourage Iranians to attend war fronts and to (in)form the wider ideological and persuasive rhetoric of Iranian politicians.

There is considerable literature on the relationship between songs, music and politics (Hesmondhalgh and Negus 2002; Lorraine 2006), examining, for instance, how ‘given the right historical circumstances, cultural conditions and aesthetic qualities’, music’s political power can inspire individuals and groups of people ‘to form more effective political communities’ (Pedelty and Weglarz 2013, xi). Focusing on music and conflict (Carr-Wilcoxon 2010; Pettan 1998, 2010; Grant and Stone-Davis 2013), particularly protest politics (Lynskey 2010; Fast and Pegley 2012; Way 2012, 2013, 2015), it can be summarised that music commodities play a prominent role in giving voice to minority voices (Frith and Street 1992; Street 2012; Billig 2000), overt vs. covert forms of violence (Gray 2010; Fast and Pegley 2012), articulating nationalism (Bohlman 2003) and constructing national identity by ‘promoting various types of national projects’ (Shekhovtsov 2013, 330). In fact, ‘music as a communicative medium’ has the ability to ‘minimise within-group conflict or, to put it another way, to collaboratively establish a degree of social equilibrium’ (Cross in McKerrell 2015, 4).

This paper considers the musical aspect of war songs ‘as a communicative element’ (Way and McKerrell 2017, 2) embedded within the multiple modes of religious discourse of eulogies such as lyrics, performers’ gestures, etc, to ‘articulate ideological discourses’ in the nationalistic occasion of war. Considering music as a discourse (Van Leeuwen 2012), analysing Iranian war songs will tell us about the socio-political values of ‘identities and behaviours that lie deeper in a song’ (Machin 2010, 81).

2. War, religious eulogies and identity
On September 22, 1980, more than a year after the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran, the Iraq-Iran war began with Iraq’s attack on Iran. This war ended eight years later, on August 20, 1988, leaving at least 300,000 Iranian soldiers dead and more than 500,000 injured out of a total population of almost 60 million (Khosronejad 2012). It seems evident that the origins of the long and bloody Iran-Iraq war were based on Iraq’s desire for an extension of its geographical border around the boundaries of the Arvand River and neighbouring zones, by means of military siege (Adib-Moghadam 2007; King 2007). Reports of the Iran-Iraq war illustrate that the Iranian society was not prepared or equipped for such a war and did not know how to respond for several weeks (Khosronejad 2012, 4). Therefore, emphasising the religious differences between the two Muslim nations and ‘reawakening [of] Shi’ite [vs. Sunni] collective sensibilities’ (Chelkowski and Dabashi 1999, 272), became one of the primary means of generating a ‘self-sacrificial consciousness’ (ibid), in order to convince Iranian people to voluntarily mobilise and participate in the war.

Iranian media, at first, referred to this conflict as the Imposed War, but, later on, made a switch in referring to it as the Sacred Defence, i.e. fighting on the fronts became a sacred and religious duty of every faithful man to defend their Shi’a religious beliefs and to protect the revolutionary ideological principles. This idea of calling the war a ‘Sacred Defence’ is rooted in Shi’a ideology of Muharram commemorations, which are the annual public displays of mass mourning for the death of Shi’a third Imam, Imam Hossein, and his comrades who decided to sacrifice their lives as martyrs to protect the Shi’a religion in the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD.¹

¹ To simplify, in the year 680, the conflict between the second Umayyad caliph, Yazid and the Shi’a opposition led to the historic rebellion of the Imam Hossein. According to Shi’a narrative, in a desert named Karbala in southern Iraq, the Imam and a small group of his family members and companions were surrounded by Yazid’s army of thousands of soldiers. At the end of ten days of negotiation between Imam and Yazid, the Battle of Karbala took place during which Imam Hossein and all of his seventy male comrades and companions were killed mercilessly. (See Aghaie 2004, 8–10 and Fakhr-Rohani 2014, 228–234)
Since 1501, when Shi’ism (Shi’a) began to be promoted as the official religion of Iran by the Safavid dynasty (Latifpour 2001), narrating the brutal story of Karbala and mourning for Imam Hossein’s martyrdom, led to the phenomenon that the unique ritual of remembering this battle and Imam’s martyrdom within Muharram commemorations became the core of Shi’a religious beliefs and rituals (Hesam-Mazaheri 2006), and a distinctive religious identity for (Iranian) Shi’as within the (neighbouring) Muslim community. Muharram commemorations were among ‘the most important means of promoting religious and political legitimacy’ (Aghaie 2004, 45) till the Pahlavis (1925-1979), who promoted their monarchy as ‘a country free of clerical influence, nomadic uprisings and ethnic differences’ (Khosravi-Nik 2015, 12), attempted to weaken the social and political influence of the Muharram commemorations. The Pahlavi leaders were concerned that ‘Shi’a rituals had the potential to challenge the nationalist ideology and modernisation program promoted by the state’ (Aghaie 2004, 154). Historians argue that one of the most important factors contributing to the Pahlavi Kings’ crisis of legitimacy was their failure in participating effectively in this Shi’a ritual (Aghaie 2004; Yann 1995).

By sponsoring the Muharram commemorations rituals and increasing the number of these events, ‘the government of the Islamic Republic, which came into power in 1979, has followed yet another path’ in influencing the salient socio-political aspects of these rituals; ‘transforming this ritual into a vehicle for a single identity accompanied by a “revolutionary” movement led by the state’ (Aghaie 2004, 67). Until the start of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980, the revolutionaries had perfected the method of infusing religious programming with revolutionary content, and political programming with religious rhetoric (ibid). With possible U.S.A

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2 Iran’s conversion to Shi’ism at the beginning of the sixteenth century created a political and cultural split between that country and the rest of the Muslim world (with the Sunni majority) which continues to tie an imagined national identity based on Shi’a religion to Iran (Yann 1995).
intervention in the war and no allies to help Iranians, ‘Sacred Defence’ was gradually strengthened during these eight years of war, leading religion to become a dynamic element of Iranians’ political identity constructions and cultural memory. This paper intends to explore how war songs were used to set the effective Shi’a tone, declaring that all the Iranians must be ‘ready and willing to become martyrs just as Imam Hossein and his followers (did) at Karbala’ (Fischer 1980, 235).

3. Approach to analysis

In this paper, I provide musical and textual analysis of ten war songs to elaborate how the Iran-Iraq war put religious rituals, especially Muharram commemorations, into a new context; arguing that they are strongly influenced by, and contribute to, the Muharram commemorations ritual and its religious discourse to encourage Iranian people and soldiers to voluntarily participate in war. Since 1983, the War News Council repeatedly selected specific war songs for broadcast via Iranian television and radio. Some of these war songs were performed live at the war fronts of Iran and some of them were recorded to be played on TV and radio. Not as a musicologist, but broadly engaging with these songs within the complex discourse of society (see Moore 2013), I categorise these war songs within a hybrid genre which consists of (religious) lyrics and music. Therefore, multimodal analysis is needed to generate and interpret their meanings through the poetic texts, oratory and musical qualities and religious and socio-political content, which all play a role as shared public knowledge and experience in articulating ideological discourse (Machin 2013).

Multimodal analysis has its origins in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Halliday’s (1978) functional grammar, arguing that linguistic and visual choices reveal broader

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3 The dataset is based on the war songs that are broadcasted (and published) most in the Iranian media (see Ghaffari 2019).
4 This council was in charge of choosing ‘all the programmes that should be shown on Iranian National and International Television regarding the Iran-Iraq War and other related subjects’ (Khosronejad 2012, 25).
ideologies and discourses articulated in texts and other communicative modes (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001). In his book *Speech, Music, Sound*, van Leeuwen (1999) identifies six major domains of sound which contribute to communicating ideas, meanings and attitudes. Focusing on these semiotic affordances (meaning potentials), Machin (2010, 2013) also examines how music operates through cultural references and within multimodal texts. Through an analysis of melody, arrangements, sound qualities, rhythms and lyrics, Machin and Richardson (2012) analyse two pieces of music associated with two pre-1945 European fascist movements to identify how sounds communicate specific values and attitudes, such as discipline and unity. Multimodal analysis has also been employed in analysing video games (Machin and van Leeuwen 2005), sectarian YouTube videos (McKerrell 2015), political popular music videos (Way 2018) and reality television programmes (Eriksson 2015). Considering the musical aspect of the war song performances, I draw on Machin (2010), Machin and Richardson (2012) and van Leeuwen (1999) to analyse various features of voice and the modality of sounds; for instance, how sound qualities and arrangements of musical instruments can ‘act to convey meaning potentials’ (Machin and Richardson 2012, 329–333).

For the textual analysis of lyrics, I mainly draw on Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA), which has become ‘a firmly established programmatic approach to analysing language use in society’ (Blommaert 2005, 3). More specifically, I choose the Discourse-Historical Approach (henceforth DHA) in CDA (Reisigl and Wodak 2016), since the investigation of (national/cultural) collective memory and its different discursive manifestations has become crucial for the DHA (cf. Krzyzanowski 2016; Wodak et al. 2009; de Cillia et al. 1999). According to Wodak (2001, 65), the DHA tries to ‘integrate a large quantity of available knowledge about the historical sources and the background of the social and political fields in which discursive events are embedded’ (ibid).
Applying the DHA enables me to analyse these war songs and detect the discursive strategies of identity construction within the historical context of religion in Iran. When it comes to operationalization of textual analyses, the DHA proposes three interrelated dimensions of analysis to be addressed recursively (Reisigl and Wodak 2009, 93): (1) having identified the specific contents or topics of a specific discourse, (2) discursive strategies such as referential and predicational strategies are investigated. Referential strategies (i.e. character/actor descriptions) and predicational strategies (i.e. action attributions) pertain to linguistic construction of social characters/actors, objects or events and the actions, qualities and attributions that are associated with them (Reisigl and Wodak 2016). Then (3), linguistic means (as types) and the specific, context-dependent linguistic realizations (as tokens) are examined (ibid). By analysing the musical and textual aspects of these war songs, I discuss how the Iran-Iraq war and the Battle of Karbala analogy led to a direct connection to the faith and the religious belief of the soldiers; reflecting on the power of religious discourse in the (non-religious) highly nationalistic occasion of war.

4. Analysis

This section demonstrates how performing war songs, similarly, to performing religious eulogies within Muharram commemorations, plays a crucial role in recalling and (re)presenting the potential collective memory of the Iranian community members.

4.1 Musical analysis of war songs

Muharram commemorations as a genre entails that the participants embody the particular act of praying as a religious ritual practice within their particular interactive function.\(^5\) Every year, from the first to the tenth day of the month of Muharram,\(^6\) the ritual starts at night (usually after sunset) by gathering in mosques or temporary tents (Persian: tekye)\(^7\), and people pray by

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\(^5\) Drawing on Pernot (2006, 240) prayer can be defined as ‘a speech that a person addresses to a divinity’.

\(^6\) Muharram is the first month of the Arabic calendar.

\(^7\) It is worth mentioning that mosques and tekye are divided by walls into two sections for women and men to pray and participate separately in the religious rituals.
listening to eulogies, singing them all together and expressing their mourning by crying and beating their hands to their chests or heads (Ghaffari 2019). Eulogies are rhythmic and sorrowful songs that in Iran are generally taken from the regional music songs of different parts of the country. Religious eulogies are destined to make, boost and guide an affectionate bond among the people and the Prophet’s household. This bond will help people to strengthen the roots of religion, develop their faith and upraise the good and spirituality. This section demonstrates how the performers of these war songs follow the standards set by past eulogy performers to perform in the same particular ritualized ways as religious eulogies.

As with religious eulogies, war song performers follow the same path in leading as a main speaker, standing and singing among a group of soldiers gathering around. The speaker/performers’ voices are foregrounded by reading the lyrics in a rhythmic way while projecting the verses loudly and clearly. Meanwhile, by using the call-response pattern, soldiers repeat some parts of the verses or chant the names of Shi’a saints (e.g. Imam Hossein) as the accompanying backgrounded support. As van Leeuwen states (1998, 36), this ‘call-response’ pattern confirms an interaction between the singer as ‘a real or symbolic leader’ and soldiers as ‘a real or symbolic community’, like the congregation or the choir. Eulogies are usually performed in Persian by eulogy performers who have good voices, with a great deal of improvisation on the part of a specially trained speaker. Within this war songs, creativity in preaching and singing in almost dramatic and theatrical fashion is salient to invoke people’s emotions and tears. For instance, as the most well-known war song performer in Iran, Ahangaran claims that he learned how to express the ambience of the battlefields by attending the Iranian war fronts through the eight years of the Iran-Iraq war and witnessing the beliefs and feelings of the Iranian soldiers (see Ahangaran 2011).

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8 I consider the term performing as a ‘cover term for verbal art as action, the situated doing of artistic oral forms’ (Bauman 1993, 182).
To imitate the religious eulogy performers, war song performers’ body language, voice quality and rhythms of articulation also affect the meaning of lyrics that are generated through the performing context. According to Machin and Richardson (2012, 335), pitch ‘relates to how high or low a sound is; for instance, a scream would be a high note and thunder a low note’. Machin and Richardson argue (ibid, 335–339) that the meaning of pitch is rich in metaphorical associations, as, for instance, high notes can be the emotional expression of effort or excitement. Van Leeuwen (1999, 103) explains that ‘melodies can be characterized as ascending, moving upwards in pitch, or descending, moving downwards’ (ibid). In the case of descending, van Leeuwen continues that the music, such as hymns, gives a sense of relaxation to the listener. Cooke (1959, 103) has also suggested that classical composers have used high pitch to suggest ‘up and away due to its energy’ and low pitch to suggest ‘closer, down and relaxation’. Religious eulogies follow a more descending pitch than war songs which brings a more mourning and sorrowful mood to the Muharram rituals, while the performers of these war songs use an ascending pitch to set a more active and dynamic mood for soldiers in the battlefields.

Among the three voice qualities of Tension, Breathiness and Loud/Soft, for the purpose of analysing these war songs, I particularly focus on the latter, Loud/Soft. War song performers mostly use a high degree of loudness and wider pitch range to sound more assertive and forceful to inculcate power, status or danger. Softness, in contrast, can suggest intimacy and confidentiality, although softness can also mean weakness (Machin and Richardson 2012, 341). Within these ten war songs, part of the particular meaning and emotional effect of war songs is taken from the vibrant emotional atmosphere of religious eulogies of Muharram commemorations; performers’ voice changes to a mourning tone as soldiers start to cry, mourn, and perform symbolic self-flagellation such as beating on their chests or heads. War song
performers also use softness in their voice while singing verses which implies intimacy between soldiers and God/holy figures of Shi’a.

In terms of using musical instruments, in these war songs, drummers beat basic martial rhythms to accompany the performer in creating the emotional mode of the Karbala battlefield. While drumming is mostly backgrounded in this ritual, in battlefields it is a sign of the arrival of new groups of soldiers. According to Wolf (2000, 82), drumming is left rather open to interpretation as, ‘unlike singing and reciting, drumming derives little semantic import from verbal texts’, mostly manifesting in the ways that rhythms are attributed to exploring the emotional meanings of the religious texts of eulogies. Considering drumming and other musical instruments, Shi’a elites worried that the audience might be emotionally more attracted and moved by the musical rhythms and ecstasy than by the (spiritual) meanings of the eulogies’ verses (Zahedi 2009). Lack of other musical instruments except drums might also effectively reflect on living a rough life on the battlefields with the least entertainment facilities.

4.2 Textual analysis of lyrics
Religious and historic analogies are deemed very powerful because Muharram commemorations have traditionally been the most central symbolic event to Shi’a rituals and beliefs, and it deeply relates to a shared national/historical memory of Iranian people. According to DHA, the first level of analysis focuses on the semantic macro-areas or topics, in order to identify the main discourses within the overall theme of the dataset at hand; discourse about the analogy of the Karbala Battle to Iran’s war fronts and the discourse on representing Us, the rightful Shi’a Iranians, vs Them, the infidel Iraqis. The former illustrates Iranian soldiers’ excitement to join the war fronts, their willingness to become martyrs which stems from their disappointment with their current life. The analysis hereby demonstrates how the imagery of war songs, composed by semantic and interpretive frames of national (Iranian) and religious (Shi’a) ideologies displays the state’s need to essentially construct martyrdom as the
only correct ideology in which to shape public memory and people’s reflections on the experience of war.

In the Islamic world (as in both languages of Persian and Arabic), the word *shahid* is equivalent to the Greek concept of martyr and witness, defining individuals who ‘died for their faith’ (Hatina 2014, 3), and their religious beliefs and values. Thus, martyrdom, in Islam, is the sacrifice of life in the service of God, which is considered as the noblest cause. Therefore, martyrdom is not only a title or a religious term for those who died during the process of war, but it is a sacred state of perfection for the spirit of a martyr which attests to his or her faith (Cook 2007). According to Iranian revolutionary ideology, ‘Shahadat (martyrdom) is not an accident... [it] is a grade, a level, a rank... The martyr’s entire essence becomes holy when he sacrifices his entire being for a holy cause’ (Shari’ati 1986, 245); therefore, this position could not simply be desired and reached by everybody. Accordingly, as the Iranian government remembers each fallen soldier in the Iran-Iraq war as *martyrs for Islam*, these war songs start by describing Iranian soldiers’ excitement and bravery in joining the battlefields, and their willingness for martyrdom. Here are some examples:9

(1) O’ forerunner! Slow down that I can catch up, I’m in love with Karbala as you are!
(2) Farewell dear brother, I am in the mood of Karbala.
(3) We have come from a faraway distance and left our households.

This excitement is illustrated by the repetitive use of verbs implying departure such as ‘saying farewell’ and ‘goodbye’ which suggests the determination of Iranian soldiers in leaving to war fronts, a noun such as ‘forerunner’ and the request imperative of ‘slow down’ connotes the haste, thrill and excitement of soldiers in joining the army of Iran. One of the main reasons behind the sheer excitement of Iranian soldiers in leaving their hometowns and dying in the battlefields is expressed through referential and predicational strategies by despising this

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9 Examples are the chosen verses from the texts of these ten war songs.
(earthly) materialistic life. Nouns which refer to the semantic field of ‘contempt’, such as ‘humiliation’ and ‘disgrace’, are employed to describe Iranian soldiers’ feelings, in case they fail to defend their country in the Iran-Iraq war and continue living their current life:

(4) I have let go of the worldly people, set myself free from this prison, looked down on anything but God, I am in the mood of Karbala.

(5) This life is poison for me, humiliation will mark my forehead with disgrace until the end of time if I can’t join (Imam) Hossein.

The metaphoric use of ‘prison’ within these verses also implies the ‘material boundaries’ of Iranian soldiers’ current life that has no privilege but bringing shame to them in front of the nation. Predications of ‘arise above’, ‘joining Hossein’ and ‘serving God’, metaphorically point to ‘martyrdom’ as a motivation for the soldiers to fight the temptations of their own soul and ‘free’ themselves from the prison of life and shameful feelings and reach the desired feeling of ‘honour’. Meanwhile, the frequent interdiscursive use of the Karbala narrative is used as a persuasive tool, allowing performers to describe the routine and normal lives of Iranians as trifling and unremarkable and push them to look up to the Shi’a saints’ bravery who were ready to be ‘martyred’ at the Battle of Karbala.

According to Shi’a narratives, the Battle of Karbala took place in Karbala, where a small army of seventy-five comrades of Imam Hossein confronted the Yazid’s army of thousands with the ‘honourable’ wish of dying for their Shi’a religion. To Shi’as, the heroism of Imam Hossein and his followers in the Karbala Battle demonstrates them as the truthful winners of this battle. Similarly, Iran found itself alone and unprepared in fighting against Iraq and its (powerful) Western allies, defending ‘the honour of Shi’a religion’. Therefore, the Islamic elites present a glorious past in order to assimilate the contemporary collective memory of Iranians, in which the war against Iraqis offers the Iranian Shi’as the chance to compensate for the guilt of the Shi’a community for not being able to help Imam Hossein during his battle
against the (non-Shi’a) followers of Yazid in the Battle of Karbala. In this discourse, Iranian soldiers are presented as a part of Imam Hossein’s army in Karbala, where God would immunise them against enemies and bless them with victory since (Shi’a) history considers Imam Hossein and his army as the truthful winners of the Karbala Battle:

(6) O’ brother, Hossein is alone, amidst the army of the enemy, you could hear his call.
(7) Among all these men who is going to answer Hossein’s call, I’ll join him, I’m in the mood for Karbala.
(8) Dear Master of Martyrs (i.e. Imam Hossein), we are passionately walking through your path.
(9) Imam Hossein is our leader now, so we are blessed by God’s mercy. Get ready soldiers! Get ready!

By making references to the well-known historic event of Karbala, the Karbala symbolic interpretation is comprehended as a conceptual reference point in giving meaning to these war songs. This process of giving meaning gradually evolved so that all explicit indications of a desire to conquer Iraq (as Iran’s enemy in the war) faded and were replaced with the idea of a spiritual visit for Iranian soldiers to the land of Karbala in Iraq. As such, employing the PATH metaphor assists these war song performers to avoid debating any territorial issues while keeping the spiritual mode of these songs for Shi’a Iranian soldiers in line with the regime’s religious revolutionary ideologies:

(10) I have heard your call, I have chosen your path Brother. O’ travelers to Karbala, I have joined you too.
(11) You have crossed over us in the field of dignity, I have chosen Karbala’s path just like you.
(12) They are ready to take devil’s arrows in their chests, their feet are covered with blisters in the path of Karbala.

Drawing on Semino (2008, 7), the PATH metaphor illustrates a ‘PATH image schema’, which consists of two different locations, i.e. Iran as the source and Karbala (in Iraq) as the
destination and a direction of a path between these two locations. This PATH metaphor builds a metaphoric scenario that narrates the ‘dramatic’ storylines of the Battle of Karbala and a successful outcome for Iranian soldiers; as ‘travelers’, Iranians started their journey in Iran, reached Iran’s frontlines and then, relying on the spiritual support of Shi’a saints and God, ‘victoriously’ passed the Iranian borders (which implies Iraqis’ defeat) and reached their historic wish of visiting Imam Hossein in Karbala, Iraq. Predications such as soldiers’ ‘feet are covered in blisters’ and they are ‘taking devil’s arrow in their chests’, refer to the possible difficulties that the soldiers might encounter during this journey. Using appeals/requests for forgiveness implies that remembrance of the war and involvement in its sufferings are not the exclusive privilege of those who have served as soldiers. They belong to all members of society; martyr’s families, veterans, the young, and the old:

(13) The land of Karbala will be our rendezvous. Pray for me mother.

(14) Oh mother, if I close my eyes on life, don’t cry for my bloodied death, Mother! I have the excitement of meeting God.

(15) Mother, be patient with these sorrows, be like a role-model to other women.

(16) Put a green flag on the house, Mother! Put on decoration lights as I have in the excitement of meeting God.

These verses clearly demonstrate that during the eight years of war, these war songs encouraged Iranians to celebrate the death of their youth as martyrs of Islam rather than to mourn them. The repetitive use of negative imperatives such as ‘Don’t cry mother!’ and the positive imperative of ‘put on decoration lights’ assist the war song performers to amplify the idea of celebrating the death of each fallen soldier as a martyr who reaches the ultimate Shi’a goal of sacrificial redemption and piety.

5. Conclusion
The eight years following the 1979 Islamic Revolution were a major turning point in the history of Iran when Iranians found themselves fighting alone against Iraq and its (Western) allies, fighting for the survival of Iran and its Islamic revolution. The analysis of the war songs clearly illustrates how evoking the collective memory of Iranians on Shi’a history of the Karbala event helped the Islamic elites to prepare the nation for responding to the crisis of death, mourning and memorialisation created by the eight years of the Iraq-Iran war. The state used war songs, in much the same way as other inspiring war songs and poetries (see Lakoff 2000, 231), to ‘nurture intra-group solidarity’ (Richardson 2017, 90) and to provide moral and livelihood values that did not merely influence the lives of Iranian soldiers but defined who they were. The repetition of the values that have roots in Shi’a beliefs through war songs implied continuity with past conflicts, which had allegedly happened in the Land of Karbala in Iraq to Shi’a saints.

These war songs helped families and veterans to express their grief and inspired them to imitate the courageous attitudes of Shi’a Imam’s household by celebrating rather than mourning the death of their youth, believing them to be martyrs entering heaven. Moreover, drawing on the historical narratives of Shi’as assisted the Iranian leaders to legitimise their Shi’a identity in encouraging the Iranian nation to contribute to war: ‘Us’ being the rightful Shi’a followers of Imam Hossein, and, accordingly, the rightful soldiers of Islam fighting for the sake of God.\footnote{It is salient to notice that, in the Iran-Iraq battlefields, Iraqi soldiers were also Muslims.} This leads to the analysis of how the social characters’ exclusion from, or inclusion in, ‘the linguistic representations can serve different social or political purposes on the side of speakers’ (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 47). Within the war eulogies, the de-legitimation of Iraqis as ‘Other’ is represented through backgrounding: i.e. there are a few partial references to the out-group of Iraqi soldiers. The enemy is merely suggested, like a shadow, hardly represented as a visible force at all. This change was part of a general political-
cultural emphasis on the national singularity of Iran, thus perceiving Western imperialists as the main enemies and Sunnis as their political allies. This persuasive strategy is underpinned by diverse linguistic realisations within the war songs.

In sum, ‘it is not just lyrics which lend songs their meanings’ (Way and McKerrell 2017, 8), the way these war songs are performed and marketed plays an important role in how they are received (Way 2016); the meanings of these war songs are generated and interpreted through performing the lyrics, the oratory and musical qualities and religious and socio-political context of the Iranian nation in war. Performing war songs as a genre is not just seeing every song as ‘a text following predetermined linguistic and musical features’ (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 119) but they can be mixed and rendered anew in creative ways to contribute to the common social values of the community.

References


