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Literary Heroization for the Cause of National Liberation

Abstract

Moḥammad Ḥoseyn Roknzādeh-Ādamiyat's short novel *Dalirān-e tangestāni* (publ. 1931/1934) relates the story of warriors from Tangestān, located in the southwestern Iranian province of Bushehr, and their fight against the British in and shortly after World War I. From the time of its publication the novel met unfavorable criticism with regard to its artistic value but was applauded for conveying patriotic spirit. This article argues that the novel is based on and structured by the idea of heroization of the local protagonists, which ultimately served the nationalist policies of the Rezā Shāh period (1925–1941). In Roknzādeh-Ādamiyat's introduction his novel is presented as a device of remembrance: just as remembrance of history forms the basis of a nation's coherence, its self-esteem is augmented by the recorded memory of its heroes and their deeds. The protagonists of the novel are singled out for their heroic characteristics through the elaboration of specific motifs, e.g. individual bravery and the readiness for self-sacrifice. In the process of nation building, heroes also function as a link between the individual and the community; this article isolates the characteristics that are chosen in the novel to offer a model of identification to the imagined (Iranian) reader, and demonstrates how the contextualization of the heroes makes their integrative functions more visible.

Keywords: early Persian novel, heroization, nationalism

Moḥammad Ḥoseyn Roknzādeh-Ādamiyat's short novel *Dalirān-e tangestāni* first appeared as a serial in the daily newspaper *Kushesh* in 1310^{sh}/1931¹ and was published as a book in 1313/1934.² The novel is about the fight of the local people of Tangestān (a coastal county of the South-Iranian province of Bushehr) against the occupation by and overall influence of the European powers, particularly the British, in and shortly after World War I.³ The locals' struggle against the

¹ The novel was published in 41 issues of the newspaper starting from no. 220 (S.M. 'A. Jamālzādeh, *Taqriḏ va enteqād*, [in:] M.Ḥ. Roknzādeh-Ādamiyat, *Dalirān-e tangestāni*, Tehrān 1327/1948, p. 9). About the newspaper *Kushesh* cf. M. Ṣadr Hāshemi, *Tārikh-e jarāyed va majallāt-e Irān*, vol. 4, Isfahān 1363/1984, pp. 146–148 (no. 933).

² As I am working with the fourth edition, hereafter, the work will be cited as M.Ḥ. Roknzādeh-Ādamiyat, *Dalirān-e tangestāni*, Tehrān 1327/1948.

³ The novel figures in most histories of modern Persian literature, cf. F. Machalski, *Historyczna powieść perska. Materiały do studiów nad współczesną literaturą Iranu*, Kraków 1952, p. 136; B. Alavi,

British has also been fictionalized in Simin Dāneshvar's bestselling novel *Savushun* (1969). *Savushun* is about a comparable situation in Fars during World War II but Dāneshvar's novel is set in civilian surroundings rather than on the battlefield.⁴

At the time of its publication, *Dalirān-e tangestāni* was the only historical novel to focus on events that had happened in the recent past while other historical novels of the period – Moḥammad Bāqer Mirzā Khosravi's *Shams va Toghrā* (publ. 1909), Sheykh Musā Naṣri's *Eshq va Salṭanat* (publ. 1919–1923) or 'Abdolloḥoseyn San'atizādeh's *Dāmgoṣtarān* (publ. 1925) – relate stories set in distant, Pre-Islamic or medieval centuries.⁵

The book edition of *Dalirān-e Tangestāni* is accompanied by a bulky section of paratexts (59 of 218 pages) which comprise a paragraph by Shokrollāh Ṣafavi, the editor of the newspaper *Kushesh*, approving remarks by the author and literary scholar Sa'id Nafisi, a long article with laudatory and critical comments (*Taqriḏ va Enteqād*) by Moḥammad 'Ali Jamālzādeh and the "Preface" (*Dibācheh*) by Roknzādeh-Ādamiyat himself.⁶

The first part of Roknzādeh-Ādamiyat's *Dibācheh* contains several encyclopedic paragraphs with information about towns, villages, and prominent buildings of the region that are mentioned in the novel.⁷ The connection between the locations and the characters of the novel is made by introducing the three protagonists with the local reference given in their names (*nisba*): Ra'is 'Ali Delvāri, Sheykh Ḥoseyn Khān Chāh Kutāhi and Zā'er Kheẓr Khān Ahrami.⁸ The author gives a synopsis of the historical events that are fictionalized in the novel with special emphasis on the role of the German agent Wilhelm Wassmuss (Waßmuß) and his collaboration with the local chiefs. He particularly turns against allegations that the local chiefs supported Wassmuss because they received money from him, and argues in favor of the genuine aspirations of the locals and a marginalization of Wassmuss's influence.

Jamālzādeh, in his review, covers a wide range of subjects. He applauds the patriotic fervor of the novel while at the same time is disapproving of its literary shortcomings: "[...] it is neither a full history nor a true historical novel [...]" (*na tārikh-e tamām va na romān-e tārikhi-ye ḥaqiqi-st*),⁹ it lacks "literary coloring", the author should have "made the inner world of the characters [...] more evident [...]"

Geschichte und Entwicklung der modernen persischen Literatur, Berlin 1964, pp. 156 ff.; V. Kubíčková, *Persian Literature of the 20th Century*, [in:] *History of Iranian Literature*, ed. J. Rypka, Dordrecht 1968, p. 407; H. Mir 'Abedini, *Šad sāl dāstān-nevisi dar Irān*, vol. 1, Tehrān 1383/2004, pp. 43 ff. (with extensive citations from Jamālzādeh's review in the introduction to *Dalirān-e Tangestāni*).

⁴ S. Dāneshvar, *Savushun*, Tehrān 1349/1970; English translations: S. Daneshvar, *Savushun. A novel about modern Iran*, trans. M.R. Ghanoonparvar, Washington 1990; S. Daneshvar, *A Persian Requiem*, trans. R. Zand, London 1991.

⁵ Cf. Ch. Balaÿ, *La genèse du roman persan moderne*, Tehrān 1998; C.V. Pedersen, *The Rise of the Persian Novel. From the Constitutional Revolution to Reẓā Shāh, 1910–1927*, Wiesbaden 2016, ch. 3.

⁶ Ṣafavi: M.H. Roknzādeh-Ādamiyat, *Dalirān-e tangestāni*, Tehrān 1327/1948, pp. 4–6; Nafisi: *ibid.*, pp. 7–8; Jamālzādeh: *ibid.*, pp. 9–43 [hereafter cited as: S.M.A. Jamālzādeh, *Taqriḏ... , op. cit.*]; M.H. Roknzādeh-Ādamiyat, *op. cit.*, pp. 44–58.

⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 44–48.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 51. Delvār, Chāh Kutāh and Ahram are villages in the province of Bushehr.

⁹ S.M.'A. Jamālzādeh, *Taqriḏ va enteqād... , 1948*, p. 16.

and should have imagined a small world for the protagonists of the book [...]”.¹⁰ Moreover, he repeats the guidelines he had drafted ten years earlier (1921) in the well-known “Preface” to his collection of stories *Yeki bud-o yeki nabud* (*Once upon a Time*) about what the function of the Persian novel should be, particularly about the role of the novel as a store for linguistic as well as sociological and ethnographic information.¹¹

Jamālzādeh’s review set the tone for the critiques to come, particularly highlighting the ideological assets and criticizing the literary shortcomings of the work. Alavi summarizes his evaluation with a harsh verdict:

He [Ādamiyyat] wants to fill people with enthusiasm about the selfless warriors of the nomadic tribes of Tangestan who would otherwise have remained unknown, and he wants to inspire people with courage and intensify the struggle against foreign intrusion, but unfortunately he lacks the artistic talent to fulfil such an important task.¹²

The most detailed analysis is presented by Christophe Balaÿ in his study on early modern Persian prose literature.¹³ Balaÿ also refers to the flaws of the novel in terms of artistic composition which result in unease when assigning it to a particular prose genre: “Is it a document of history? Is it history? Or a figuration of history in a story...?”¹⁴ The main shortcoming, in Balaÿ’s view, is the total lack of a sentimental intrigue which would transform the narrative into a “veritable novel”.¹⁵ However, he attests to “the fundamental dialectics of the novelistic structure stretched between the two contradictory poles of the general and the particular”¹⁶ to the textual composition. In other words, it is the technique of individualizing a complex historical situation by setting up a configuration of characters that lends a novelistic quality to *Dalirān-e tangestāni*.

The present article is less concerned with evaluating the aspects of literary quality or genre. Rather, it will focus on a central feature that interconnects the main function of the novel with its structure and the representation of its characters, which I contend to be the heroization of the South-Iranian fighters for the cause of national independence. Heroization can be defined as a process where, through the participation of various political, social, and cultural actors, “a character acquires the focal position of a community”.¹⁷ Roknzādeh-Ādamiyyat is an actor in the cultural field and participates in the heroization of historical figures that would have gone unnoticed otherwise. The paper examines what the

¹⁰ S. M.‘A. Jamālzādeh, *op. cit.*, 1948, p. 17.

¹¹ S. M.‘A. Jamālzādeh, *Yeki bud-o yeki nabud*, Tehrān 1320/1941, pp. 3–17.

¹² B. Alavi, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

¹³ Ch. Balaÿ, *op. cit.*, pp. 316–320 (structural synopsis) and passim in the analytical chapters.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 320.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 361.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 319.

¹⁷ „Vorgänge der Zuschreibung, an denen jeweils unterschiedliche Akteure beteiligt sind und durch die eine Figur zum gestalthaften Fokus einer Gemeinschaft wird”. R. von den Hoff, R.G. Asch, A. Aurnhammer, C. Bahr, U. Bröckling, M. Butter, A. Friedrich, A. Gelz, B. Korte, J. Leonhard, S. Lethbridge, M. Mommertz, D. Neutatz, T. Schlechtriemen, G. Schreier, T. Seedorf, *Das Heroische in der neueren kulturhistorischen Forschung: Ein kritischer Bericht*, [in:] H-Soz-Kult, 28.07.2015, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/forum/2015-07-001> (access: 17.06.2019), p. 4.

prevalent motifs, themes, and narrative techniques to bring about the heroization of its protagonists are.

In an early article, Anna Krasnowolska studied the heroes of the *Shāhnāmeḥ* and identified the differences between the myth and the epic.¹⁸ The comparative approach should not be overstretched but some parallels between the medieval epic and the modern novel will become apparent. Moreover, *Dalirān-e tangestānī* is about political, i.e. national, heroes. According to Bernhard Giesen, “[h]eroes are triumphant embodiments of collective identity”.¹⁹ They can be considered incarnations of abstract ideas and the ideals of a nation, and form an integrative link between the individual and the community.²⁰ The function of heroization hence reflects the “poles of the general and the particular” mentioned by Balaḡ as a distinctive feature of the novel. In this study, special emphasis is placed on the question of how the individual protagonists are linked to the national community.

I will incorporate the accompanying texts into the analysis. Both the critical article by Jamāl-zādeh, and the explanatory paragraphs written by Rokn-zādeh-Ādamiyat himself, have been included in the book version and remained in the reprints. They can therefore be considered as a constituent part of the novel that corroborates its message.

The Author and His Work: a Short Introduction

Dalirān-e tangestānī was the first book published by Moḥammad Ḥoseyn Rokn-zādeh-Ādamiyat (1278–1352^{sh}/1899–1973) and it remained his only fictional work. In his introduction to the novel, he announces a “second volume” to the book dealing with the events in the province of Fārs during World War I. In this second volume, he assures us, he will “relate what happened in more detail and add no non-spoken words whatsoever”.²¹ Two years later (1312/1933), he published *Fārs va jang-e beyn-ol-melal*,²² a history book more comprehensive than the novel and void of any apparent traces of fictionalization. His *magnum opus*, however, is a biographical dictionary of the authors and poets of Fārs in four volumes (*Dāneshmandān va sokhansarāyān-e Fārs*).²³ Whether it was Jamāl-zādeh’s critical remarks about his literary achievement that made Rokn-zādeh-Ādamiyat turn his back on fiction writing, or his own reluctance to write anything except what he deemed to be the plain truth, we do not know. From his short comments on his writing style we understand that he feels uncomfortable with fiction in terms of adding “non-spoken words”. Contrary to Jamāl-zādeh who in his

¹⁸ A. Krasnowolska, *The Heroes of the Iranian Epic Tale*, „Folia Orientalia” 1987, no. 24, pp. 173–189.

¹⁹ B. Giesen, *Triumph and Trauma*, Boulder 2004, p. 17.

²⁰ Cf. R. von den Hoff *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 69 (Jörn Leonhard, *Identitätsbildung und Nation bzw. nationale Mythen*).

²¹ M.Ḥ. Rokn-zādeh-Ādamiyat, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

²² M.Ḥ. Rokn-zādeh-Ādamiyat, *Fārs va jang-e beyn-ol-melal*, Tehrān 1312/1933.

²³ M.Ḥ. Rokn-zādeh-Ādamiyat, *Dāneshmandān va sokhansarāyān-e Fārs*, Teherān 1337–1340, 1958–1961.

“Preface” to *Yeki bud-o yeki nabud*²⁴ presented European novels as role models for Persian prose fiction, he refuses to follow the rules of creative writing, although not completely:

But it shall not remain concealed that this book, unlike most European fictions (*afsānehhā-ye orupā'i*), does not contain any redundancies, additions or issues other than the truth. Rather, what has been written is exactly the truth (*'eyn-e ḥaqīqat*) and does not even hold one word of exaggeration. Only in the case of some talks and visits among the characters that may not have occurred in this way [...], the author has written them in this manner for the sake of the cohesion of the topics (*etteṣāl-e maṭāleb*).²⁵

The author makes a good point in describing his role as someone to lend coherence to the topics of his work. Before focusing on the glue he employs to bind the different thematic issues of the novel, I will give a synopsis of its content and structure.

In 15 short chapters and through little more than 150 pages, the novel unfolds within the historical framework of the port city of Bushehr and its immediate surroundings during the years 1915–1922. Against the backdrop of World War I, and the enforced involvement of Iran into the war, the narrative focuses on the struggle of some local notables and their followers against the British and the struggle of Iran’s liberation from foreign occupation. Four characters are given special attention. Three of these protagonists are prominent tribal khāns who are finally killed: Ra’is ‘Ali, who is introduced right in the beginning of the novel, Sheykh Ḥoseyn Khān, and Zā’er Kheẓr Khān. The fourth main character, the protagonist of chapters 6–9, is Seyyed Mahdi Behbahāni. An upright but non-belligerent patriot, who was imprisoned by the British and freed through the intervention of a respected local tradesman, he escapes from the battleground towards the end of chapter 9. His story peters out in a long footnote that relates his further fate until his (natural) death in 1327/1948.²⁶ On the contrary, the tragic deaths of the three khāns each forms a narrative climax in chapters 10, 14, and 15 respectively. Having fought against the enemy with death-defying courage, they all finally fall victim to betrayal and are killed by Iranian compatriots. Apart from these four, the novel is populated with a host of minor characters, most of them mentioned by name and representing historical figures. In addition to the detailed knowledge the author displays about the local history and geographical area of Bushehr, he underpins the historical setting by inserting documentary evidence: hearsay of personal friends, citations from letters and newspapers, a manuscript of a speech – a whole chapter is dedicated to the speech of Sheykh Ḥoseyn Khān, of which the author claims to possess the original manuscript²⁷ – photographs, accurate dates and locations. The story of his own family, who left Bushehr when it was on the point of being occupied by the British in 1915, is enclosed in chapter 3.²⁸ The

²⁴ S.M.‘A. Jamāl-zādeh, *op. cit.*, 1320/1941, pp. 3–17.

²⁵ M.Ḥ. Rokn-zādeh-Ādamiyat, *op. cit.*, 1327/1948, p. 54.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 164 ff. The news of his death was added to the fourth edition as “new marginal note” (*ḥāshiyeh-ye jadid*).

²⁷ *Ibidem*, ch. 13, here p. 188, footnote 1.

²⁸ Ch. Balaÿ, *op. cit.*, p. 453.

abundance of documentary material contributes to the above-mentioned generic instability of the novel.

As Balaÿ observes, *Dalirān-e tangestāni* lacks a proper plot (“quasi absence d’intrigue”²⁹). The narrative, although very much centered on scenes and direct discourse (whether monologue or dialogue), remains static, and instead of developing a story line covering the seven years of related time, it rather makes a statement, i.e. a statement on the heroic nature of the Iranians. Among the features Alavi mentions in favor of the novel are the central role the remote southern area in which it is set plays, the pervading atmosphere of fervent patriotism, and the heroism of its protagonists.³⁰ But these features are not isolated elements to compensate for literary shortcomings. I will argue that the artistic deficiencies of the novel stated by all its critics, are rather a corollary of the author’s intention to contribute to the heroic narrative providing the basis of Iranian nationalism and the nation state.

There can be no doubt that eventually the story is devoted to singing the praise of Rezā Shah Pahlavi, who is – as Sardār Sepah, Commander of the Army, the title and function he obtained in 1921 – the hero of political independence. His praise is sung in several parts of the last chapter of the novel:

The bright star of the Commander of the Army has risen on the horizon of Mazandaran and has changed the heart-rending previous conditions of Iran with one courageous movement. (narrator, p. 204)³¹

“Long live the Commander of the Army who has truly brought Iran and the Iranians back to life again.” (Zā’er Kheẓr Khān in a conversation with his murderer to-be, p. 211)

“O God, bestow the victory upon the Commander of the Army and destroy his enemies who are the enemies of Iran, wield his sword and fill his heart with love of the homeland and make his hopes come true.” (Zā’er Kheẓr Khān, p. 213)

The future Rezā Shāh Pahlavi is the vanishing point of the narrative – a distantly present hero, the incarnated promise that the sacrifices made in the battlefield will not be in vain. In my following analysis, I will focus on the strategies of how the three central characters of the novel, Ra’is ‘Alī Khān, Sheykh Ḥoseyn Khān, and Zā’er Kheẓr Khān are made into heroes. The most important prerequisite for heroization is that the person has to be remembered.

Remembrance

The heroization of an individual is closely linked to strategies by which the individuals and their heroic actions and character are remembered by a community. Common consensus on who is to be remembered as a hero and what the

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 320.

³⁰ B. Alavi, *op. cit.*, pp. 156 ff.

³¹ Hereafter, references to the actual novel are given in the text and relate to M.Ḥ. Roknzādeh-Ādamiyat, *op. cit.*, 1327/1948. The introductory articles of *Dalirān-e tangestāni* and research literature will be referred to in the footnotes.

constituent elements of his/her heroization are, also forms part of the foundations of a nation. The collective memorization of heroes, whether in narratives, memoirs or other media, has an important function in the nation-building process.³²

The motif of recording the deeds of the upright Tangestāni fighters and keeping their memory alive, is present in all the paratexts preceding the novel. It is treated with particular attention in Jamālzādeh's long "Laudatory and critical remarks". He calls the book an "instruction for bravery, courage, and national zeal", (*dastur-e shahāmat va shojā'at va gheyrat-e melli*)³³ and blames the Iranian people for how they have treated their historical inheritance ever since ancient times. He deplores what could be called a lack of democratization of heroism in Iran, stating that the names of the kings "have outshined any other name, and maybe this is why our history lacks the masterly-achievements of individual bravery and courage".³⁴ Moreover, Jamālzādeh criticizes the absence of Iranian historiography altogether: whereas the history of the Achaemenids, "the greatest and most powerful kings of Iran" has only been preserved in "some inscriptions [...], the Greek, from then on, made particular efforts to keep records of the events".³⁵ As a result,

[...] after 25 centuries, what we Iranians know about the important events of the first period of our own history which was the most glorious era of Iranian history, we owe almost entirely to our ancient foes, i.e. the Greek historiographers.³⁶

Differences in how the two peoples treated their historical heritage is illustrated by a long digression into ancient Greco-Persian history and the example of the Battle of Thermopyles. Greek historiography has recorded not only great events but also the names of involved individuals, thus preserving them until today. The choice of this particular historical event is interesting. The narrative of the Battle of the Thermopylae combines a set of motifs suitable to form an archetypical heroic plot: the battle of a few ("300" Spartan warriors)³⁷ against an enemy far superior in numbers; the conscious acceptance of death for the sake of achieving grand objectives; and the detrimental effect of treason within the Greeks' own ranks. More explicitly than the other authors who contributed to the introductory part of the novel, Jamālzādeh refers to the issue of heroism and to the fact that the heroic deed will only have an effect when put into words and preserved in writing.

³² Cf. Hoff *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 69–73 (Jörn Leonhard, *Identitätsbildung und Nation bzw. nationale Mythen*).

³³ S.M. A. Jamālzādeh, *op. cit.*, 1327/1948, p. 9.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 33.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 34.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ "300" the supposed number of the Spartan warriors, is the title of a graphic novel by Frank Miller and a 2006 film directed by Zack Snyder, followed by the 2014 sequel "300: Rise of an Empire" directed by Noam Murrow. For the historical and political reception and instrumentalization of the Battle of Thermopylae cf. A. Albertz, *Exemplarisches Heldentum: Die Rezeptionsgeschichte der Schlacht an den Thermopylen von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, München 2006.

The Few against the Many

Regarding how the battles of the Tangestānis against the British evolved, the narrator does not tire of pointing out the military imbalance between the opposed fighting forces. In his introduction, Roknzādeh-Ādamiyat tells about a young Tangestāni fighter who, with 400 musketeers, holds a fortress against a body of 8000 British soldiers armed with cannons.³⁸ In the novel, the British send four armored warships with 5000 soldiers (including Indian combatants) to attack Delvār, a coastal village in the south of Bushehr that disposes of no more than 100 musketeers (p. 90).³⁹ In one particular armed confrontation, two Iranian warriors, Ra'is 'Ali and Khālu Ḥoseyn, deceive the English in order to make them disembark because ashore “every one of us is enough for a hundred of them” (p. 92). Later in the novel, the battles of a few Tangestānis against thousands of enemies are repeatedly mentioned (pp. 163 f., 169, 184, 209). The same ratio applies to the numbers of fallen soldiers, specified with numbers like 72 Iranians and 800 British⁴⁰ or even 7 Tangestāni fighters vs. 550 British (p. 104).

The low numbers of soldiers on the Iranian side contributes to the imagination of individual bravery, an idea enhanced by the description of single combats and the poor technical equipment of the Iranians. The technical superiority of the British is not denied at all but used in reverse as a token to underline the fearless struggle and the ingenuity of the Iranians who use their guns, after running out of bullets, as mazes or construct an air defense device out of a simple rifle (pp. 171–176). The following passage may illustrate a standard scenario:

Ra'is 'Ali could no longer accept to stay in the ambush, he got bored and said to Sām: “I don't intend to stay sitting in the corner like a woman any longer, I'll throw myself into the enemy lines.” Having said that, he left the ambush and like a fierce lion or a wounded dragon he manly attacked the countless regiments of the enemy. Holding a rifle in his right and a large dagger in his left hand, he shot until the rifle ran out of bullets. Then he threw the rifle away and got busy with the dagger. The Indians, although armed to the teeth, fled from him as sheep run away from a bloodthirsty panther. (pp. 171 f.)⁴¹

Faced with logistic, technical and quantitative superiority of their opponents, the Iranian fighters resort to noble character assets that entail triumphant victories in the battle and guarantee the victorious outcome of the great fight for national independence. But the true heroes of *Dalirān-e tangestāni* are those who combine belligerent audacity with readiness to self-sacrifice.

³⁸ M.Ḥ. Roknzādeh-Ādamiyat, *op. cit.*, 1327/1948; *Dibācheh*, p. 48.

³⁹ Hereafter, references to the proper novel will be given in the text and refer to M.Ḥ. Roknzādeh-Ādamiyat, *ibidem*.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*; *Dibācheh*, p. 49.

⁴¹ This paragraph also bares witness to the “masculine” character of the novel that matches, similar to the “masculinisation” of the epic story observed by A. Krasnowolska, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

Self-sacrifice

To sacrifice one's own life in order to achieve the idealistic ultimate goal, may be considered the enhancement and intensification of the heroic ideal. In the end, none of the three protagonists singled out from the host of characters in *Dalirān-e tangestāni*, survives the plot. The main characters of the novel having displayed death-defying courage throughout their actions, will not live to reap the fruits of their struggle for national independence. However, Ra'is 'Ali, Sheykh Ḥoseyn Khān, and Zā'er Kheẓr Khān do not die in the military confrontation and or at the hands of the foreign occupiers but fall victim to malicious Iranian traitors.⁴² Although the shared motif of suffering ignoble deaths may stain their immaculate appearances, the image of their invincibility in the battlefield remains intact. In the cases of Ra'is 'Ali and Sheykh Ḥoseyn Khān, the victims foresee their own deaths. Ra'is 'Ali, from his hiding place has overheard a conversation that involves his assassination.

Quietly and with a terrifying smile, he came out of his hideout and said in a loud voice: "Now I am sure that I will finally be killed at the hands of my compatriots! To be killed does not mean anything to me but [to die] at the hands of my compatriots is truly hard. This person will ambush me tonight, I'll have to be careful because I do not want to be killed by an Iranian. In any case, it seems that only a few hours of my life are left." (p. 168)

Although Ra'is 'Ali's reaction appears a bit confused, he calmly accepts the fact that his life will soon come to an end. The motif of the forecast death is further elaborated in the case of Sheykh Ḥoseyn Khān. In a dream, he sees his deceased friend Ra'is 'Ali sitting in a garden and announcing their imminent, eternal reunion. Sheykh Ḥoseyn Khān has no hesitation in considering his looming death a fact which he accepts as calmly as Ra'is 'Ali did before him (pp. 184 f.). He even hastens the prediction to be fulfilled in that he does not defend himself:

Since he was not inclined to fight with his compatriots and kill them but, due to his national spirit and his innate zeal (*ta'aṣṣob-e melli va gheyrat-e feṭri*), rather wanted to be killed as soon as possible [...] Sheykh Ḥoseyn Khān and his sons did not even defend themselves in this battle and stood waiting for their deaths. (p. 201)

Whereas the fundamental motif and the final purpose of the fighting is a political one, the way the protagonists know about and acquiesce to their own deaths, adds a religious aspect to the issue of heroism. By combining the two elements, i.e. the certain and consciously accepted death, and the political and military backdrop of the scene, the line between combative national heroism and martyrdom is blurred. Although there is no explicit reference to the Shiite drama of Kerbela, the competent reader may recall fundamental constituents of the religious passion. Motifs like fighting a hopeless battle and the death of family members reverberate the Shiite founding drama but are turned into a successful story in the modern context. The ideal attitude of the Iranian fighters consists of *fedākāri* and

⁴² Interestingly enough, the assassinated heroes of the *Shahnameh* like Iraj, Siāvash and Esfandiār, all die at the hands of relatives or friends, cf. *ibidem*, p. 182.

jān-feshāni, [will to] self-sacrifice and devotion: “Such a violent war and such a serious will to self-sacrifice have rarely been witnessed before,” (p. 177) or, as Sheykh Ḥoseyn Khān puts it in a long speech to his followers after he had dreamt about his impending death: “Today is [...] the time for full self-sacrifice and true devotion (*fedākāri-ye kāmēl va jān-feshāni-ye ḥaqiqi*).” (p. 198).

While an integrative perception of the national and religious concepts is not unfamiliar nowadays, the open religious coloring of the national cause is rare in the early Pahlavi era. *Dalirān-e tangestāni*, however, in the way it sketches its heroes and the imagination of the nation, is an example of the close association between Iran and Islam.

What Nation?

The novel *Dalirān-e tangestāni*, oscillating like a docu-fiction⁴³ between fiction and historiography, has Iranian nationalism as its leitmotif and the promotion of nationalism as its main function. As mentioned above, heroes in the process of nation building, function as the connecting link between the individual and the community: They epitomize “abstract ideas about the people and the nation” and play a decisive part “as role models in the symbolic integration of the national community”.⁴⁴ In our case, it is interesting to observe what the main character traits of the three protagonists as shaped in their fictional representation are. Which characteristics are singled out in order to offer a model of identification to the imagined (Iranian) readers? And how does the contextualization of the heroes with other characters make their model and integrative functions more visible? These questions will be examined in a bottom-up approach starting from the individual characters and proceeding to the level of the nation.

In the case of the three protagonists, courage and contempt for death, together with honor and patriotism, form an indissoluble unity called *javānmardi* (“chivalry”). Honor and a noble spirit are exemplified in generous gestures towards the enemy: After a victory was gained against the British, Ra’is ‘Ali allows the two British captives to be released and sent back to their troops (p. 113). The above mentioned indifference of the heroes towards technical achievements, suggests that modernization and progress do not figure prominently in the concept of the imagined nation. The absolute focus on courage and integrity of character rather points to a national image constructed around a moral. In the case of the three protagonists, courage and contempt for death, together with honor and patriotism, form an indissoluble unity called *javānmardi* (“chivalry”). Honor and a noble spirit are exemplified in generous gestures towards the enemy: After a victory was gained against the British, Ra’is ‘Ali allows the two British captives to be released and sent back to their troops (p. 113). The above mentioned indifference of the

⁴³ Ch. Balaý, *op. cit.*, in the analysis of the chronotope in the novel, observes “une façon cinématographique” (p. 424) and states that the author employs cinematic rather than novelistic techniques (cf. p. 433).

⁴⁴ Hoff *et. al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 69 (Jörn Leonhard, *Identitätsbildung und Nation bzw. nationale Mythen*).

heroes towards technical achievements, suggests that modernization and progress do not figure prominently in the concept of the imagined nation. The absolute focus on courage and integrity of character rather points to a national image constructed around a moral basis.

The camp of the antagonists is manned by some British officials and, more important than them, by Iranian traitors of the national cause. Among the colonial civil servants, Herbert G. Chick, the vice consul of Bushehr as from 1906⁴⁵ is given particular attention in the novel (chapter 7). Chick represents the educated imperialist official: he is fluent in Persian, quotes Sa‘di and Ḥāfeẓ and even speaks with a Bushehr accent (pp. 136 and 127).⁴⁶ He participates in distinguished Persian culture but, by virtue of his political function, makes detrimental use of it.

The Iranian antagonists collaborate with the occupying forces as translators, spies, minor employees or security forces, and combatants for imperialist interests. They are sometimes portrayed as stupid and brute (the tobacco chewing head of the local police in chapter 6 and 7) and sometimes as deceitful and cunning (chapter 15). They are “idolaters of the foreigners” (*ajnabi parast*) and “a source of shame” (*māye-ye sharmsāri*) (p. 191). The murderers of Ra’is ‘Ali, Sheykh Ḥoseyn Khān, and Zā‘er Kheẓr Khān are recruited from within their ranks. They kill in a cowardly way and because of selfish reasons including short-sighted, sometimes backward, motivations like an old family feud (p. 167). The clash in terms of manners and spirit between the protagonists/heroes and their immediate antagonists becomes particularly clear in a scene about how Zā‘er Kheẓr Khān hosts his imminent murderers in the most generous way (chapter 15). The dichotomous cast of characters in the novel⁴⁷ underlines the inclusive and exclusive mechanisms at work in the process of nation building. Against the backdrop of the thoroughly negative representation of the British and their Iranian collaborators, the heroic image of the protagonist becomes even more distinct. The Iranian antagonists collaborate with the occupying forces as translators, spies, minor employees or security forces, and combatants for imperialist interests. They are sometimes portrayed as stupid and brute (the tobacco chewing head of the local police in chapter 6 and 7) and sometimes as deceitful and cunning (chapter 15). They are “idolaters of the foreigners” (*ajnabi parast*) and “a source of shame” (*māye-ye sharmsāri*) (p. 191). The murderers of Ra’is ‘Ali, Sheykh Ḥoseyn Khān,

⁴⁵ H.G. Chick worked for the Levant consular service, first as vice consul in Bushehr, from 1921 to 1930 in Shiraz. He later compiled a voluminous *Chronical of the Carmelites in Persia*, published anonymously in 1939. In the new edition of the work by Rudi Matthee (2012), Chick is stated as the author with biographical information in the introduction, cf. H.G. Chick (ed.), *A Chronical of the Carmelites in Persia: The Safavids and the Papal Mission of the 17th and 18th Centuries*, introd. R. Matthee, London 2012, pp. xff; cf. also C.J. Edmonds, *East and west of Zagros. Travel, war and politics in Persia and Iraq 1913–1921*, ed. and introd. Y. Richard, Leiden 2010, chapter *Life in Bushehr*, pp. 33–48.

⁴⁶ H.G. Chick attended the Students’ Interpreter course at Cambridge University and was a student of Edward G. Browne from 1903 to 1905. Cf. H.G. Chick (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. x.

⁴⁷ This point is also stressed in M.-R. Ghanoonparvar, *In a Persian mirror. Images of the West and Westerners in Iranian fiction*, Austin 1993, pp. 63 ff.

and Zā'er Kheẓr Khān are recruited from within their ranks. They kill in a cowardly way and because of selfish reasons including short-sighted, sometimes backward, motivations like an old family feud (p. 167). The clash in terms of manners and spirit between the protagonists/heroes and their immediate antagonists becomes particularly clear in a scene about how Zā'er Kheẓr Khān hosts his imminent murderers in the most generous way (chapter 15). The dichotomous cast of characters in the novel underlines the inclusive and exclusive mechanisms at work in the process of nation building. Against the backdrop of the thoroughly negative representation of the British and their Iranian collaborators, the heroic image of the protagonist becomes even more distinct.

The liminal space in between the two extreme positions is occupied by a few characters who realize what the rightful cause is but do not act accordingly because of erroneous allegiances or a weakness of character. One of these anti-heroes is a British officer fatally wounded who, on his deathbed in the Iranian camp, dictates a letter to his general. Chapter 5, almost entirely dedicated to the citation of this letter, is entitled "The fairness of the enemy" (*Enṣāf-e došman*). The letter lists the positive features of the Iranian people, accusing the British of making common cause with the Russians in order to destroy Iran (pp. 107 f.). It is interesting to note that the dying British officer who is the most positive character in the liminal space, between the heroes and antagonists, shares with the heroes a deep religiosity. He calls on Jesus and Mary,⁴⁸ accuses those who ordered him to go to war against Iran of being unbelievers, and repents of not having observed Christian principles (p. 109).

On the Iranian side, Aḥmad Khān Daryābegi,⁴⁹ the Governor of Bushehr and the Southern Ports, plays the hybrid role of the antihero. In a short biographical excursion, his past achievements as Governor of Bushehr are listed. Through his later operations, however, he is clearly associated with the enemy:

Daryābegi although he had some inglorious features, altogether [...] was not a bad governor to the Southern Ports. [...] But now that he serves his last period as governor, Daryābegi has grown old and does not show his former courage and bravery towards the English. He has become completely submissive and a tool in their hands. (p. 157)

But Aḥmad Khān Daryābegi does not only side with the enemy because of senile decay, like them and in contrast to the generous heroes, he is also greedy (*Daryābegi-ye pīr va ḥariṣ*, p. 172).

The individual features described above, are reflected in the level of the national community. A concise list of what is perceived as national features figures in the letter written by the above-mentioned British officer on his deathbed: During the period that I have been traveling throughout the Persian Gulf and mixed with Iranians I have known them as noble people, hospitable, emotional and sensitive (*mardomāni najīb, mehmān-navāz, bā 'ātefeh va ḥassās*). [...] They will not hesitate to give their lives for anyone who is

⁴⁸ So in fact he might be Irish, like a sympathetic character MacMahon in Simin Dāneshvar's novel *Savushun*; cf. *ibidem*, pp. 64–70.

⁴⁹ For the title cf. G. Nashat, *Daryābegi*, [in:] *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 7, 1993, p. 83, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/daryabeygi> (access: 17.06.2019).

well-disposed towards them but whoever is hostile, they do not regard human. However, when he forsakes enmity they will reach out in affection and forget the past. (p. 108)

On the national level, we also find Iran and Islam closely associated. Sheykh Ḥoseyn Khān hears “the cry for help from Islam and the heart-rending lament of Mother Homeland (*mām-e vaṭan*)” (p. 196). “Long live Iran, may Islam be everlasting” (*zende bād Irān, pāyande bād Eslām*, p. 172) is the battle cry of Ra’īs ‘Ali and his lot.

Bravery and “a spirit of audacity” (*ruh-e shahāmat*) are part of the natural disposition of the Iranians embodied in historical figures like “Ardashir Bābakān, [Khosrou] Anushirvan, Ya’qub b. Leys Ṣaffāri, and Nāder Shāh” (p. 212). Of the situation in and after World War I,

every Iranian of pure race (*pāk-nežād*) is obliged to defend his homeland and to stand up with audacity against the enemy. Whoever does not believe in this and does not act accordingly, is not [to be considered] human and even lower than animals like cats and dogs. [...] If you see a handful of people who do not believe in this and join the foreigners and have sold the blood of their compatriots, be sure that they are not of the pure Iranian race. (p. 118)

The mechanisms that exclude people from the nation operate along the lines defined in terms of heroic features. The exclusion from the nation does not make the “traitors” part of the enemy (as they are on the individual level) but pushes them beyond the borders of humanity.

Although are the main antagonists in the novel, other Europeans, belong to the same collective that is incompatible with Iranian nature: They are “all alike, just foreigners (*ajnabi*)” (p. 138). They are advanced “in industries and in building killing devices” but apart from that “their morals and manners are worse than that of the African savages” (p. 96). Western civilization consists of mercilessness, brutality and heartlessness (*bi-rahmi, shaqāvat, bi-‘āṭefi*, p. 96).

The part of the antihero on the collective level is assigned to the Indians. The Indian soldiers form part of the occupying forces but are not taken seriously by the Tangestāni fighters: “Those slender, pepper-eating Indians do not even have the strength and courage of our ten-year-old children” (p. 94). As India has fallen prey to the British aggressors, however, the Indian ought to be spared in the battle: “Shoot and kill the English but if possible do not aim at the innocent Indians” (p. 95).

Conclusion

Dalirān-e tangestāni is a text shaped by the author’s intention to contribute to the nation-building project of the Rezā Shāh era. Through the novel, the fight of the local tribal chiefs against the British occupying forces in the remote area of Tangestān passes into the collective memory of Iranians. As to the image of the nation conveyed in the novel, it reflects a close connection between Iran and Islam and propagates a morally founded nationalism directed against foreign intrusion. The narrative focuses on the heroization of three Iranian chieftains who

give their lives for the national cause. The process of heroization in the national context requires both the heroes to be singled out from the masses by specific deeds and features, and the opportunity for people to identify with them. The largely antithetic set of characters makes the heroes stand out clearly. The integration of the individual and collective is brought about by the analogous structure of their representation: The threefold categories of hero, antagonist and – less prominent – antihero, are maintained both on the individual and collective level. The offer chance for identification contained in these analogous structures turns Iran into a heroic nation.

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