

To Judge a Book by its Cover: Religio-Cultural Myth on the Cover of Iranian War Literature

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Summary

The present study examines two book covers to discover how their telling images and condensed tales of war are related to the books' interior content. We scrutinize A'zam Hosseini's *Da* (2008) and its English translation by Paul Sprachman, *One Woman's War: Da (Mother)* (2014). Since *Da* has been standing in Iranian best sellers list for a decade, it is considered as a paragon of popular national literature. Given the proclivity of books' designers to exploit marketing strategies on the covers, the study reflects on how they harness the power of those strategies for the greatest ideological gain. We demonstrate how designers utilise paratextual elements as external and commercial mediators of the inside text, thereby conjuring up founding myths of individual and national Iranian identity. It is concluded, against the famous old saying, that a book is designed to be judged by its cover.

Opsomming

In hierdie studie word twee boekomslae ondersoek om te bepaal hoe die betekenisvolle beelde en verkorte oorlogsverhale op die omslae met die boeke se inhoud verband hou. Ons stel ondersoek in na *Da* deur A'zam Hosseini (2008) en die Engelse vertaling daarvan deur Paul Sprachman, *One Woman's War: Da (Mother)* (2014). *Da* beklee al amper 'n dekade lank 'n posisie op Irannese topverkoperslyste en word beskou as 'n uitstekende voorbeeld van populêre nasionale literatuur. Boekontwerpers het 'n voorliefde daarvoor om bemarkingstrategieë op die omslae van boeke aan te wend. In die lig hiervan stel hierdie studie ondersoek in na die wyse waarop die ontwerpers van hierdie twee boeke bemarkingstrategieë vir ideologiese gewin inspan. Die artikel toon spesifiek hoe die ontwerpers semiotiese, paratekstuele elemente aanwend as eksterne en kommersiële bemiddelaars van die binnetekste, en daardeur die stigtingsmities van individuele en nasionale Irannese identiteite oproep. Die gevolgtrekking is dat 'n boek wel ontwerp word om op sy baadjie getakseer te word.

Da Book Covers as Paratexts

Book covers' "paratextual elements", employing Gerard Genette's term (1997: 4), can either enhance or inhibit a book's popularity. Paratexts –

JLS/TLW 36(2), June/Junie 2020

ISSN 0256-4718/Online 1753-5387

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DOI: 10.1080/02564718.2020.1787708

UNISA



printing and literary conventions – connect “the world of publishing [with] the world of the text” (Macksey 1997: xvii) and influence its “reception” (Genette 1997: 1). The “peritext” and “epitext” are two major categories of Genettean paratextuality. The peritext includes those liminal devices around or within the text, furnished by the author or publisher. It comprises elements such as covers, titles and subtitles, authorial names, dedications, epilogues, prefaces, epigraphs and intertitles (Macksey 1997: xviii). The epitext incorporates those devices and conventions outside the text. It is further sub-categorised as “public epitext”, facilitated through and across media (interviews, reviews and conversations) and “private epitext” (authorial correspondence and diaries) (ibid.: xviii; Genette 1997: 5). Bookbinding style, typeface, cover illustrations, front and back covers, spines, titles, blurbs, and colours on books are paratextual examples, contributing to literary products’ appeal, as well as to texts’ critical acceptance. A book’s paratextual elements, particularly its cover, as well as its surrounding discourses, such as the media, invoke myths central to a particular culture and serve as “semiotic vehicles”, conveying ideological effects.

In analysing paratexts of Sayyida¹ A’zam Hosseini’s *Da*, we reveal how the Iraq-Iran War and its ideologies are negotiated on the government-sponsored and national bestseller’s book cover and its translation. The study reasons, well-designed textual and pictorial messages are deployed on these books, with particular ideological effects, aiming to strengthen, transform or reverse some aspects of dominant patriarchal Iranian and Shi’itic discourses. We examine some of those effects ranging from reinforcing or subverting stereotypical representations of feminine roles and the construction of a feminine ethnic identity to the commodification of national and religious identity. Whether the images rehearse patriarchal ideals’ old meanings, or experiment with new ones for conventional symbols, is what the study attempts to reveal.

Furthermore, the study employs Roland Barthes’ semiotic theory for three reasons. First, to explore how “myth as semiological schema” is conjured by the books’ certain paratextual elements, we utilise a Barthesian reading of signs (Barthes 1972: 112). Second, for Barthes, mythology is both related to semiology and ideology (ibid: 111). Third, the books’ reception has been manipulated for ideological and political ends, especially through the media. Although scholars have acknowledged “the potential power of book cover semiotics”, little research has engaged in book covers’ pictorial analysis (Johnson-Woods 2013: 90). Due to this gap, the study’s novelty resides in its exploration of the way the book covers function as both marketing and myth-making tools. Barthes’ understanding of myth offers the medium through which ideology and identity are revealed. The paper attends to Barthesian semiotics to decode those textual and pictorial elements, displaying Iranian-

1. Sayyida is an honorific attribution for a female descendant of Prophet Muhammad.

Islamic identity. In their condensed, deliberately designed representations of the Iraq-Iran War (1980-1988), the book covers of *Da* and its translation *One Woman's War: Da (Mother)*, before communication of their narratives, provide a precise introduction to political, ethnographic and religious ideologies, dominating Iranian current society.

Moreover, the covers' narrow space displays myth's idiosyncratic predilection "to work with poor, incomplete images, where the meaning is already relieved of its fat, and ready for a signification" (Barthes 1972: 125). The covers' images elicit the most suggestive myths of Shi'itic Islam, which the Iranian government deploys to sustain the masses' zeal for ideological and political ends. The early Islamic narrative account of Karbala is a prominent example of such employment of basic myths on the books. The third Shi'itic religious leader, Imam Hussain travelled to Karbala to invite people to Prophet Muhammad's version of Islam and to reform the decadent Islamic practices of his time, which eventually led to his martyrdom and that of his family members and companions on Ashura Day (Muharram's 10th day). He is known in Islam as "the prince of martyrs", *Sayyid Al-Shohada*. Likewise, Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of Islamic Republic of Iran always attempted to maintain the spirit of sacred defence, martyrdom and the example of Imam Hussain's epic struggle against injustice especially in wartime. During war, he asserted, "Today, is Ashura Day. Today, Iran is Karbala. O Imam Hussain's followers! Be prepared" (2008[1988]: 11).

Following this religious ideological stance, the prevailing socio-cultural and political structure in Shi'itic Iran utilises the ideologically charged word *shahids* (martyrs) instead of war casualties or victims. The promise of a heaven-bound destiny for a martyr constitutes the deep-rooted religious myth in Iran. This myth, or "a second-order semiological system", in Barthes' term (1972: 128), is understood as one of Iran's dominant ideologies. Martyrdom is particularly valued in Islam because of its long-established tradition of sacrificial devotion to religious belief. The term "martyr" etymologically derives from the ancient Greek *martys*, meaning "witness". In Quranic term, martyrdom or *shahadat*, also signifies "witnessing and testimony". Therefore, *shahid* is not only ascribed to a person killed in war. By his/her noble sacrifice for faith, a *shahid* bears witness to the truth. Furthermore, in Iran, authorities often refer to the Iraq-Iran War as "Sacred Defence", attributing to it an exalted otherworldly, spiritual and religious aura. The reason behind this designation is that the soldiers sacrificed their lives in defence of their country, rather than waging war against other nations.

The study also applies Genette's "architextuality" to locate the book within its related genres. Architext is a set of categories, including genre, thematics, mode, and form which ascertains the nature of any text. Architext is "a certain number of empirical genres that [...] are apparently phenomena of culture and history [with] thematic element, formal or linguistic description" (Genette 1992: 64-65). *Da*, as a biography, mingles features that are thematic (the

development of a genuine individual), modal (a retrospective homodiegetic narration), and formal (in prose). It embodies both ideological and thematic novelties (Ghandeharion & Mousavi 2019). Mojtaba Rahmandust, a member of Iranian Academy of Arts and the illustrious contemporary Iranian translator, children's writer, poet and essayist believes that *Da* epitomises "Iran's Modern Novel" and "Iran's oral history", simultaneously incorporating all fiction-writing elements (Ahl-i). He asserts that this Persian representation of narrator-hero(in) challenges the literary genre of memoir-novel (Barkhi). He argues, an important aspect of Sacred Defence genre is a factual description of events and characters, which Western novels lack (Roman-i). Rahmandust contends, whereas all Western fiction elements are accredited in Iran's Modern Novel, Sacred Defence works should not be evaluated with Western aesthetic criteria (ibid). They must be understood as the national and international transmitter of Islamic Revolution and Sacred Defence's ideology, based on documentation and literary merit (ibid).

Da captures an important era in Iran's contemporary history. Categorised as war literature and retitled by the Iranian government as Sacred Defence narrative, i.e., official narratives about the Iraq-Iran War and its aftermath, *Da* was published by state-sponsored Sureh Mehr Publication. The book provides an eyewitness account of the War's oral history, narrated by Sayyida Zahra Hosseini and authored by Sayyida A'zam Hosseini (hereafter, Zahra Hosseini and A'zam Hosseini, respectively). Coincidentally, the narrator and author have identical last names, but they are not related by blood. *One Woman's War: Da (Mother)*, published by Mazda Publishers, is its English translation by Paul Sprachman. The memoir, composed of three parts, is the story of Zahra Hosseini whose Kurdish family took refuge in Iran after being expelled from Iraq by Saddam Hussein regime. The first part details Zahra's childhood in Iraq, her family's immigration to Iran, and their struggles to adjust to Khorramshahr, a port city at the confluence of Karun and Arvand-Rud rivers in Khuzistan province. The second and core part details Zahra's experiences during the first three weeks of the Iraq-Iran War. With the eruption of war, Zahra, just a seventeen-year-old girl, volunteered with her sister, Leila, to wash and shroud the corpses for burial. She also became involved in nursing wounded civilians and soldiers, assisting in supplies delivery to the frontline, collecting the dead's body parts, and participating as a combatant in Khorramshahr's defence. The final part details Zahra's recovery from shrapnel wounds received in action and her married life. The book provides a first-hand account of a woman's experience of war, as a fighter and defender.

The books' paratextual elements, such as the covers' images and designs, tend to obscure or supplant women's individual identities with another, larger, quasi-mythical Iranian identity; even the author's name is quite literally minimised or erased for both ideological and commercial interests. Moreover, the entire industry involved in a book's printing and distribution, such as publishers, translators and media coverage, can influence the book's

reception, displacing its message with other messages for ideological or political gain. This study critically foregrounds the book covers' pivotal role in naturalising myths as well as comparing and contrasting the ideological agenda on the covers with the books' inside narratives.

Da and its Translation: (De)-Stereotyping Feminine Identity

Front Covers

A book's front cover can guarantee a work's success by enticing its potential readers. It displays the work's title and subtitle, the author's/translator's/preface writer's names, publisher's logo and address, a dedication, an epigraph, an illustration, edition and reprint number, a genre indication and price (Genette 1997: 24). The front cover conveys the book's idea to readers and guides their decision-making processes. Transferring a plethora of signs, the title *Da* reveals ideological layers of an ethnic minority group embedded, too, in the narrative (Figure 1). The idea of approaching the war through a feminine lens is crystallised in the title's matrilineal significance, attesting to a notable change within the genre historically dominated by men. The title establishes an aura of gratitude for all mothers whose sons have been martyred during the Iraq-Iran War. Zahra Hosseini also highlights the sacrificial role of her mother, Shahpasand, in the preface (Hosseini 2008: 14). As the title implies, Hosseini portrays Iranian mothers as the nation's true custodians (ibid). The title also refers to, and honours motherland (cited in "*Da*"; Farhangnamih-i).

The title "*Da*" reveals its ideological mission through feminine identity. Refraining from mentioning a particular woman, the title becomes a broader "signifier used to make a mythic claim" (Dickinson & Anderson 2004: 272) about Iranian women. Correspondingly, the Iranian mothers' image, who now talk and fight, seems to be natural. Mothers accustomed to singing lullabies and telling stories at bedtime to comfort their children, withdrawing themselves from the society's larger concerns, now transform into women who subvert clichés of conventional femininity. The title's archetypal name justifies the narrator's inclination to address Iranian women's collective identity. Concomitant with an "iconic representation" of a feminine discourse and identity embedded within the cover's illustrations, the book's title conjures the warrior spirit of Bakhtiari women. Since ancient times, Iranian women from the Zagros Mountains region have participated in all societal activities, even battles. The most famous was Yūtāb, an army commander of Bakhtiari women, who fought to death against Alexander the Great (Shahriari 2013). Simultaneously, the title subverts the canon of Sacred Defence texts. By not evoking any war connotations, the title maximises the likelihood of

drawing a larger audience, even those who recoil from “clichéd” titles of war texts (Nanquette 2013: 949).

Meanwhile, the book’s unusual title arouses Persian readers’ curiosity, embodying “mother” in Luri and Kurdish dialects (Zan-i). Zahra Hosseini is an Iranian Kurd whose parents originally came from a rural district in Dehloran city of Ilam Province (2008: 18). Thus, the title seems to be even more subversive, validating a minority language in Iran. Furthermore, the title reveals Shi’i Kurd minority’s patriotism, protecting Iran’s territorial and ethno-linguistic identity. The title summons myths of all those nations whose tongues share a common ancestry with the Persian language. The provenance of “Da” can be traced to two Old Iranian languages, Avestan and Old Persian, indicating the name’s authenticity (see Fortson IV 2010: 227-247). Mainly through evidences of the Southwest Iranian Old Persian in Achaemenid royal inscriptions and the East Iranian Avestan of Zoroastrian Scriptures, the verbal suffix “dā-” can be retrieved (Dehkhoda 1985: 2). Middle Iranian Pahlavi or Middle Persian (ca. 3rd century BCE to 10th century AD) used “day, dadar” (Russell 1987: 154), or “datar and dahik” (Razvi 1991: 178), for “creator”. Pahlavi transcriptions of Zoroastrian texts employed “dādvah”, “dādār” or “dātar” for “maker” (Boyce 1996: 195-196). Meanwhile, the suffix “dat” is present in Arsacid monarchs and still preserved in Modern Persian terminations of Khurdād, Murdād and Mihrdād, named after Zoroastrian deities “Haurvatāt” and “Ameretāt”, the divine beings, representing “[t]he spirit of Perfection and Well-Being”, and “[t]he spirit of Immortality” respectively (Nigosian 1993: 31; Ludwig 2016: 85-86).

These findings are consistent with distinctions between the word’s denotative and connotative meanings. The suffix “dā” in “*Khudā*” (God’s name in Modern Persian) and “Mazdā”, and the prefix “dā” in “Dādār” is relevant to “Da” (Mother in South-western Iranian dialects) (Zan-i). The reappearance of “Da”, not in a compound but as an independent word, to designate “mother” or “earthly creator” among Kurds and Lurs, the two original Aryan races (ibid), confers enough authentication on “the major power of myth: its recurrence” (Barthes 1972: 134). At the connotative level, “the active intervention of ideologies in and on discourse” transpires (Hall 1999: 512). It can thus be inferred, women are assigned God’s attributes, and like God, are “givers of life through their spirit, actions, words and deeds” (Blackwell 2004: 18). Similarly, during the war, Zahra as one of Khorramshahr’s young adult female defenders challenged stereotypical gender roles. The narrator defied men’s allegory as the nation’s guardians, going so far as to reposition her subjectivity in terms of “military defence strategising” (Saeidi 2013: 294).

During the siege of Khorramshahr, Zahra’s dedication and perseverance have challenged stereotypes. Devoted to her faith, Zahra participated in washing, shrouding, and burial of *shahids* (Hosseini 2008: 83-176-286, 316-361, 485-486). She provided security for the cemetery, curbing rabid dogs’

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danger. She collected the wounded and the killed in the city and engaged actively in rescue and relief efforts (ibid: Chapters 9-15, 19-24, 27-31, 35). She volunteered at any time to go to the front-line and conceived both men and women as equal warriors (ibid: 172-252, 330-401, 423-508). She spoke unequivocally to military commanders in the war room, charging Iran's President Bani-Sadr, guilty of treachery (ibid: 431-439, 571-576). By publishing still unproven allegations of governmental misconduct, she infuriated *Takavaran* (commandos). Because of these subversive activities, Zahra and several young adult female defenders were branded as *Munāfiqīn* (Hypocrites). They were threatened with execution and field trial in retaliation, being sent to Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps for interrogation (ibid: 571-576, 584-599). Zahra counteracted sinister efforts of the enemy's fifth column (ibid: 341-343, 345). The narrator propagated her disbelief in the leftist Kumoleh, and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (ibid: 456-459). Based on logical reasoning, the narrator attempted to refute fallacious arguments of the Marxist *Sazman-i Mujahidin-i Khalq-i Iran* (People's Holy Warriors Organisation, aka MKO) (ibid: 643). She talked about Khorram-shahr resistance to then Hujjat al-Islam Sayyid Ali Khamenei, now Iran's Supreme Leader, Hassan Ayat, Sayyid Abdul-Hamid Dialameh, and Hujjat al-Islam Muhammad-Ali Montazeri, representatives of Iran's first parliament known as National Council Assembly (ibid: 619).

Furthermore, the time of *Da's*'s first publication provides a leading clue to interpret the image on its front cover. *Da* was published for the first time in October 2008 during Principlist/Neo-conservative Ahmadinejad's first term of presidency (2005-2009). The woman's blurred picture, which is of "no autonomous identity", not only evokes vestiges of collective identity but also compensates for the conservative interpretation of the Islamic dress code (Figure 1). It implies "the signifieds exist not in the text itself, but extratextually, in the myths, countermyths, and ideology of their culture" (Fiske 1990: 97). The veiled woman's image recalls strict codes of conduct concomitant with then-President Ahmadinejad's hard-line policies on dress-code violations. Women from all religious and ethnic groups in Iran are required to observe Islamic modest dress code in public (i.e., no tight, revealing or provocative clothing), as a fundamental tenet of Islam since the 1979 Iranian Revolution. However, during Ahmadinejad's presidency, *Gasht-i Irshād* (Guidance Patrol) enforced sartorial strategies on women with inappropriate hijab more intensely (Moruri). The image can, hence, summon the compulsory female dress code in Iran and because the woman's face is not distinct, the image conjures lack of female identity. The stereotypical and one-dimensional portrayal of the woman is intertwined with patriarchal ideology, which places women in a subordinate position to men; thereby women's heroism is to be confined just inside the book. Meanwhile, it explicates "struggles for social power paralleled by semiotic struggles for meanings" (Fiske 1990: 97). Hence, the effect of patriarchal power, as well as

feminine voice are connoted or indexed through various types of “semiotic systems” on the covers.

Figure 1 *Da's* Book Cover



However, there is always another side to interpretations. The veiled woman on the cover does not only impose images of inferiority. Since the woman's image appears on English cover, the veiled image could be a marketing strategy to invite readers to the Iranian woman's sanctuary. Additionally, there are loads of books with cover images of a veiled woman in Iran where publishers, by no means, equate the veil with suppression and inferiority. Besides, this woman's image looms large on the cover, suggesting women's important role in Iranian lives or even their heroism. This interpretation revives the ethnic mythology of the Lurs in Western Iran. In Luristan, woman was considered as the goddess of life and art, based on ancient documents of five thousand years ago, as disc-headed bronze pins, portraying the Mother-goddess, symbol of life and fertility (Shahriari 2013; Muscarella 1981).

Even if the illustrators who have generated this bloodstained figure on the book may not have been conscious of its history, the image dates back to ancient mythology. All liquid oblations – honey, wine and milk – used in sacrificial rituals in celebration of the spirits, gods, and the dead are “images of blood, the most precious offering of all liquids” (Cirlot 1971: 29). The Arabic proverb – “Blood has flowed, the danger is past” (ibid: 29) – reflects the same idea regarding war: the offering soothes the powers and peace shall embrace the country. Correspondingly, the front cover's blurry picture seems

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to reflect the clouded border between life and death (Thorgeirsdottir 2010: 171-172, 178-180). The idea finds more significance in the woman's image as the origin of both birth and death (Schott 2010: 28). Zahra also manifests this seemingly self-contradiction: "death" in shrouding and burying corpses and "birth" in joining rescue forces. On grounds of the inextricable connection between "blood and name", other possibilities can be assumed. The red – signifying blood – is one of the three colours, along with green and white, of the Iranian flag. The whiteness of the background and the greenness of plants, however now covered in blood, are united to make the national flag. Because the flag colours represent national identity, the blood-red colour serves as a criterion for the recognition of Iranian identity. Thus, Iranian identity is vividly associated with defending the land; preserving such an identity and protecting national integrity is only possible by shedding blood to guard the borders.

Moreover, *Da*'s English translation claims to challenge the alleged marginal position of Iranian female combatants. The book is translated by Paul Sprachman in 2014, the Vice Director of the Undergraduate Studies Centre for Middle Eastern Studies at Rutgers University. Having worked on the translation for four years, Sprachman anticipated, English *Da* would foreground women's underestimated role in the Iraq-Iran War (Iranian). The translated *Da* is entitled *One Woman's War*, assuming some resonating familiarity with English speakers (Figure 2). In *One Woman's War* (2011), Eileen Younghusband depicts her life as an eighteen-year-old woman, facing World War II's harsh realities. The book was the winner of the prestigious People's Book Prize 2012/2013 for non-fiction. Furthermore, Natalija Nogulich's *One Woman's War* (2012) portrays tragic events in a Balkan mountain village during the American Civil War. The latter is recommended by David Mamet, the Pulitzer Prize-winning American playwright.

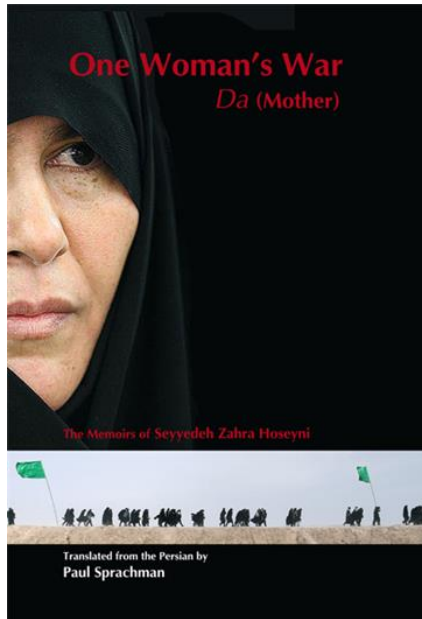


Figure 2 *One Woman's War: Da (Mother)*'s Front Cover

The English translation's title deals far less with ideology than genre, and at the outset may exclude the significant role played by an Iranian woman during the Iraq-Iran War. The Persian title has also been relegated to a subtitle role, indicating that the conscious ideology embedded in the term "Da" has been reduced to a secondary role. However, to transmit the ideology of the cryptically laden word "Da" to target audiences, the term "mother" appears in parentheses.

Meanwhile, English *Da*'s front cover simultaneously manifests contradictory combinations of reinforcing national identity while subverting individual identity.

Functioning within ideological boundaries and associated with the propagation of national and religious identity, the English cover conjures images of *Rahian-e Noor* Caravan (Passengers of Light pilgrimage), picturing a line of women holding green flags moving from left to right along a horizontal stripe near the front cover's bottom (Figure 2). As a state-sponsored program, pilgrimage to former war zones is under the supervision of Foundation for Preservation of Works and Dissemination of Sacred Defence Values, based on information on Rahianenoor Website. The families of war-casualties have initiated these pilgrimages to commemorate the memory of their loved ones or their own experience. *Da* discloses, likewise, the narrator's and her mother's enthusiasm to visit Khorramshahr two years after its Liberation (Hosseini 2008: 675-683). Today, across the world, the urge to visit battlefields has emerged as a popular tourist activity known as "battlefield tourism" (Prideaux 2007: 17). It plays an important role in the documentation of nations' cultural and military heritage. Visiting battlefields in Iran significantly resembles religious pilgrimage rituals, regarding the voluntariness of Sacred Defence and the holiness of battlefield sites (Vafadari 2014: 758). The visit to former front-lines has now taken on a form of dialogue with the past and the preservation of Iraq-Iran War's oral history.

Yet, the English cover may furnish a perspective on Iranian women's marginalisation. The cover, which should have been designed to create an awe-inspiring view of Iranian female soldiers, mirrors a half-finished picture of an Iranian woman. Reflecting a picture of Muslim Iranian woman is supremely important, considering how in the West, Muslim women's memoirs are highly in demand, especially memoirs celebrating the Iraq-Iran War and Islamic Revolution. These memoirs are scarce compared to memoirs highlighting a woman's plight in an Islamic society where Islam, Islamic practices, and the Iraq-Iran War are disparaged. It features the half-face portrait of the middle-aged, ferocious Zahra Hosseini (Figure 2), a photographic sign that foreign audiences misinterpret its embedded ideology. Hosseini, not able to identify with the photograph, believes, the picture depicts a desperate, fierce woman (Purfurushtarín). She aspires to be the representative of woman as a whole so that her character's strong points can be portrayed. Having given credence to a notion of "heroic masculinity", the cover designer(s) have apparently minimised her femininity and projected instead her masculine characteristics, once conspicuous especially during the war. Her biography demonstrates, she would gather the splashed brain of a dead body, carry M-1 rifle and grenades, fire mortars at the stronghold garrison penetrated by Iraqi forces, load G3 and RPG anti-tank rocket launchers and fire bullets at Iraqis at the Customs Building. However, as Persian women are always deemed to be beautiful, tame figures and maternal paragons not warriors, *Da's* narrator appears critical of a fierce woman's depiction on the book. She is against the patriarchal ideology, considering female soldiers as more manlike and not beautiful. Though she approves of the religious ideology of the Holy War against evil rooted in the event of Karbala and Imam Hussain's martyrdom, she does not desire to be marginalised as a woman. Thus, while reinforcing the dominant ideology in her war narration, she simultaneously subverts it by not allowing a visual disfigurement of Iranian women. She is not satisfied with Sprachman's statements either, that the picture portrays a tolerant and resolute woman able to resist difficulties (Purfurushtarín). To be fair, in all her social appearances in mass media, she hides her feminine side beneath a black veil; she is never dressed in bright colours.

In a "public epitext", *Da's* narrator constructs a different public persona. She no longer displays masculine personality traits, such as her endurance of physical and mental ordeals, for which she was once admired. She projected a feminine identity on the live Ramadan 2009 *Mah-i Asal* (Honeymoon) program. A popular talk show on Iran's state TV, the program was hosted by Ehsan Alikhani and screened before Iftār on Channel 3. The program covered narratives of ordinary people who took extraordinary measures during crisis. Attending as a guest in the program, her eyes filled with tears while narrating the events. Her vulnerability was unimaginable by the host and the audience, because through most of the memoir, her masculine personality traits were

idealised (Taheri 2009). However, she related it to the typical feminine quality of affection, not allowing disrespect to corpses lying at high risk of being devoured by hungry dogs. She herself buried her father's and brother's bodies as a manifestation of her feminine attributes. While recounting her father's and brother's burial and remembering Hazrat Zainab's plight, she sheds tears again. Zainab, Imam Hussain's sister, is the Ashura Uprising's ensign during the event of Karbala, and myth of her resistance and patience has been reproduced in Sacred Defence narratives.

Moreover, the study suggests English *Da*'s cover is still stuck in coercive power relations because Mazda Publishers did not mention the author's name on the cover. With the author's name's omission from the cover, the author's rights have been violated and the book's literary status has been vitiated, *Da*'s author argues (I'tiraz-i). Hosseini asserts, Sprachman's name's insertion on the book "introduces him as the work's creator" (ibid). By the first indication of the "textual Otherness" (Howard 1999: 89), the translator establishes his authority to impede the artist's name to enter into "the processes of aesthetic institutionalization and commodification" (Randall 2001: 228). He prevents "the construction of identity through discourse", disqualifying "the appropriation of the authority-to-speak" (ibid: 58). Selecting a genre not befitting their gender, female war authors are still vulnerable to the male war discourse. A'zam Hosseini argues, since the release of *Da*'s first edition, the author's name has been omitted in a number of print runs. Instead, Zahra Hosseini's name has been mentioned as the book's creator (Abbasnejad 2014: 54). *Da*'s author claims, all these issues follow the policy of *Howzeh-ye Honari* and Sureh Mehr's officials who have not recognised war literature authors' rights, precluding their supervision of and opinions about the works (ibid).

Disregarding the author's rights is partly justified because war literature is highly associated with religious ideology in Iran; thus, indicating the author's name plays no role in the terrestrial world because God's satisfaction is privileged over the writer's name and resisting fame's temptation will be answered in other ways by Divine Providence and Allah. Despite the author's rights infraction, Mohsen Mo'meni, *Howzeh-ye Honari*'s head, obliged the translation centre to hold an unveiling ceremony for the book (*Da bidun-i*). Mo'meni, thus, disregarded Sprachman's illegal act for omitting the author's name on English *Da* (ibid). By refusing to recognise her position as a female war writer, *Howzeh-ye Honari* followed in the translator's footsteps, committing a "misappropriation of cultural experience" (Randall 2001: 56). Despite the author's absence from English *Da*'s unveiling ceremony, *Fakkih*, a cultural, social and political monthly magazine, published a photograph of the author in an unveiling ceremony without any caption (Figure 3) (Abbasnejad 2014: 52-55). Covering the author's objections about her rights' violation, the magazine showed her picture at Persian *Da*'s unveiling ceremony in 2008 (Runamayi-i).

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Figure 3 *Fakkh* Magazine reads "An Author's Objection"



Commented [A2]: Figure 4 (Put description in again) Actually figure 3 and 4 are one entry, one figure. It is four pages of the same magazine, *Fakkh*.

However, Sa'edah Hosseini, *Howzeh-ye Honari* translation centre's director, absolved Suresh Mehr from blame and obligation. She redirected the blame to the American publisher, announcing Mazda's agreement to amend the mistake in the second edition (Hafz-i). She asserted, Sprachman

considered it as a normal procedure to insert the translator's name on a book instead of the author's, under American copyright laws (ibid). However, Sprachman does not consider this act as the author's rights infringement: "the role of A'zam Hosseini as the creator of the book's written form" is less important than "that of Zahra Hosseini as the one who has lived the book" (Ruy-i). He argues, due to lack of space on the book, the author's name is omitted but her name is mentioned on the title page (ibid). However, translation is not only the transference of a text into another language but also into a different cultural background and publishing system, hence Sprachman's arguments somehow make sense.

Meanwhile, the reprint number on the front cover is a reliable witness to the books' popularity (Mandal 2007: 16). Gone through its 158th edition, *Da* now enjoys high popularity among Persian readers (*Da* hanooz). Furthermore, Muhammad Hamzehzadeh, Sureh Mehr's previous director, believes that the reprint number, along with an author's name and the cover design, allure a customer seeing a book in a bookstore window (Dulati). However, he claims, the model can be changed for some books and authors, and the strategy of displaying "the reprint number" on the cover can be replaced with the label of "sold over a million copies" (ibid).

The Back Cover and Spine

The back cover as another advertising space exhibits elements as price, blurb, barcode, ISBN, reviewers' quotes and mention of other titles by the same publisher (Haslam 2006: 161). The back cover can thus narrate the book's and its publisher's story. Likewise, on *Da*'s back cover, Sureh Mehr as the select publisher of 2008-2009 is inscribed (Figure 1). It is also written *Da* won the 2009 Iran's Book of the Year Awards in the "History" genre and the 2009 Jalal Al-i Ahmad Literary Awards in the "Documentation and Historiography" category (Figure 1). Sureh Mehr has welcomed Mostafa Rahmandust's suggestion, regarding the awards' insertion on the cover. Rahmandust claims a book becomes only accredited by its publisher's reputation in Iran, whereas the awards' insertion is privileged over the publisher's label (Guzarish-i). He recommends, conforming to the "medialisation" of literature, emblems of prestigious awards as Jalal Al-i Ahmad, Shahid Ghanipur Literary Awards, and Book of the Year Awards be inserted on a book (ibid).

The blurb on the back cover also offers incentives to spur book sales. Leaving the reader with an immediate impression, "like a trailer for a movie", the blurb provides an evocative synopsis of a book's content (Jewell & Jones 2013: 23). The blurb on *Da*'s back cover reveals the subject and informs of an old man's splashed brain, corpses, and killed women to convey the overall tone of a war narrative (Figure 1). Nevertheless, the blurb does not reveal

whether the narrating character is a man or woman, further augmenting the suspense and participating in women's marginalisation on the other hand.

The spine, "a tell-tale abbreviation" (Genette 1997: 65), is another marketing tool for the reader's attraction, as the book's only visible part on bookstore shelves. Attention-grabbing colours and font make the spine stand out on a bookstore shelf. It displays the book's title plus subtitle, author's name and publisher's logo. Similarly, *Da's* designers, to exert a visual impact upon book browsers, have used a red spine (Figure 1). Red is a quick, low-cost means of persuasion, as the colour thought to "'advance' toward the viewer" (Graham 2005: 195). The colour also gives a genre hint (Frishman, Ridgway & Hane 2015: 107), as red symbolises "blood, wounds, death-throes" (Cirlot 1971: 53). The desired effect is maximised by the contrast between the font's colour and the spine's background (Frishman, Ridgway & Hane 2015: 107). Similarly, the font's boldness and blackness on *Da's* spine creates visual weight. Moreover, black is symbolically associated with the feminine (Cirlot 1971: 60), having close connection with proper funeral attires for both Iranian men and women. That is how red and black intertwine to signify the myth of war and its consequential mourning for martyrs.

Conclusion

On the basis of critical evaluation of *Da's* and *One Woman's War: Da (Mother)*'s book covers and their surrounding discourses, the study acknowledges Barthes' assertion on "principle of myth" and how "it transforms history into nature" (1972: 128). In attempting to convey a particular war history, the books' paratextual elements turn toward the mythical, converting the book's war-related content into Barthesian "naturalized" and "depoliticized" meanings. Considering the book covers' goal, which is to be full-length mirrors of Iranian society in the post Iraq-Iran war era, this study offers a thorough justification to regard paratextual elements as myth since they are attuned to their time's dominant ideology. Barthesian semiotics reveals the power of mythical thoughts on the books and their challenge of cultural stereotypes. The images, colors, cover designs, and titles of these books go beyond their face value and develop a "semiotic value". The ideological and aesthetic weight assigned to paratextual elements on these books, leads potential readers to decipher the books' message, summarising their entire contents. Consequently, paratexts and their political, ideological, mythological and commercial power manipulate reading experiences. Hence, one may conclude, the study's findings leave an impression against the famous old saying: "Do not judge a book by its cover".

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Commented [A3]: The highlighted references are those that their authors are missing. That is why they are alphabetically ordered according to their titles. You did not order them alphabetically, but according to date, therefore confusion between authors dates and your date-titles

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