



***Toy Gun instead of Doll:  
Politicization of Children's Literature in the Declining Public  
Sphere of Iran (1963- 1979)***

***SVF-3901***

**Negin Nourian Dehkordi**

*Master's Thesis in Peace and Conflict Transformation*

*Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education*

*University of Tromsø*

***Spring 2013***



## Abstract

The present research is an attempt to shed light on the process of politicization of children's literature in the shaky public realm of Iran during a historical period between 1963 and 1979. The main purpose has been to show how under the pressure of the absolutist regime of Pahlavi many suppressed conflicts have not had any spaces and realms to be manifested and discussed in public or through the free channels of communication clearly, openly and transparently. Consequently, children's literature has been utilized as a political instrument to give expression to the latent conflicts in the Iranian public realm. Disagreements, contradictions, oppositions in terms of the governmental policy of preemptory socioeconomic development and political underdevelopment, did not have any opportunity to be vocalized in a rational, critical dialogue or in a clear direct debate. Therefore, many of these strangled voices in the Iranian public sphere, or at least parts of demands of dissident intellectuals, have been reflected in the realms like children's literature, which are normally irrelevant to politics. It means that children's literature has been politicized and used instrumentally to criticize the status quo.

It is interesting that institutions like 'the center for the intellectual development of children and adolescents' that were inaugurated in 1965 were, in fact, governmental organizations with no political purpose at all. They opened to function in the same direction with socioeconomic modernization and cultural development specifically according to the capitalist model. However, critics and dissident groups, particularly the leftist and nativist intellectuals, utilized such realms exactly for their political purposes. Thus, it seems that for them children's literature acts as a façade behind its antagonistic features of the political issues like: the growing gap between different economic classes, or between traditional and modern parts of the Iranian society could be expressed in an indirect and unclear way through artistic productions for children.

So in this research it has been described how in the lack of the realms of public debate about disagreements and contradictory interests and ideas, the antagonistic features of the political has penetrated into one of the most innocent realm of communication according to the public institutions of a democratic society, namely, children's literature. By reading two short stories for children by Samad Behrangi, and by using semiotics as a qualitative method of text analysis, an attempt has been made to reveal some of the suppressed struggles and conflicts within the declining public sphere of Iran. It seems that suppressed public demands and latent conflicts in terms of freedom, justice, independence and so on can be uncovered by the semiotic interpretation of these texts and looking beneath the surface of these juvenile literary works in the brittle Iranian public realm (1963- 1979).

**Keywords:** *Politicization, public sphere*



## Acknowledgments

This thesis is an incomplete and unfinished research full of linguistic, theoretical and methodological weaknesses. However, it was absolutely impossible to write it without the constructive guidance of my dear supervisor Jare Weigard, valuable advice of my dear professor in Iran Javad Tabatabaii, endless support of my dear husband, and the tremendous help of all who shared their opinion and time with me generously in doing this research.

Despite all defects and deficiencies, this study is inseparable from my lived experience, my biography and my childhood.

I dedicate this dissertation to all the little fishes in Iran who went to the end of the stream where, contrary to their hopes and desires, was the swamp not the sea.

## Table of contents

<b>Chapter I: Introduction</b> .....	8
1. Preface.....	8- 12
2. Research questions.....	13
3. Problem statement.....	13
4. Relevance to peace studies.....	13- 14
5. Theoretical or conceptual framework and keywords.....	14
6. Method of research.....	14
7. Literature on the subject: a short overview.....	14- 15
<b>Chapter II: Theoretical reflections</b> .....	16
1. Politicization of art: a brief theoretical overview.....	16- 18
2. The notion of the public sphere: a brief theoretical overview.....	18- 21
3. Moving across the political spectrum: from the concept of <i>politics</i> to <i>the concept of the political</i> .....	21- 24
4. Avoiding theoretical stereotypes: politicization of non-political realms in the declining public sphere.....	26- 29
5. Shaky theoretical framework.....	31- 32
Figure 1.....	17
Figure 2.....	25
Figure 3.....	30
Figure 4.....	31
<b>Chapter III: Declining public sphere of Iran: a historical perspective</b> .....	33
1. Fragile public realm: a chronic problem in Iran.....	34- 36

2. The Constitutional Revolution: the establishment of brittle institutions of political public realm.....	36
3. Declining public sphere in Iran (1953- 1963).....	37
4. Continual suppression of the political public realm (1963- 1979).....	37- 38
5. Children’s literature in Iran (1963- 1979): a historical overview.....	38- 39
6. Children’s literature as a political instrument.....	41- 42
Figure 1.....	40

#### **Chapter IV: Methodological reflections..... 43- 44**

1. <i>The pursuit of signs</i> : semiotics as a qualitative method of text analysis.....	44- 46
2. A model of the sign.....	46- 47
3. Semiotics and analysis of structures of a text.....	47- 48
3-1. Syntagmatic analysis and the present units.....	48
3-2. Paradigmatic analysis and absent units.....	49- 50
3-3. Inseparability of paradigmatic and syntagmatic analysis.....	50
4. Semiotics and challenging the literal.....	51
5. Denotation and connotation: first-order and second-order systems.....	52
6. Challenges of corpus construction.....	53- 54
7. Flaws and weaknesses of semiotic analysis.....	55- 56
Figure 1.....	46
Figure 2.....	50

#### **Chapter V: The semiotic analysis of two short stories by Samad Behrangi..... 57**

1. Who was Samad Behrangi?.....	58- 60
2. The little black fish: a semiotic analysis.....	60- 61
2- 1. Structural analysis of the little black fish.....	61- 62
2- 2. A monologue: one speaker and twelve thousand listeners.....	62- 64
2- 3. Syntagmatic analysis of the little black fish.....	65- 68
2- 4. Paradigmatic analysis of the little black fish.....	68- 72
2- 5. Semantic analysis of the little black fish.....	72- 74

3. Twenty four restless hours: a semiotic analysis.....	74- 77
3- 1. Twenty-four restless hours: a first person narrative in the realist style.....	77- 78
3- 2. Latif: the connotations of the name of the main character.....	78- 79
3- 3. Twenty-four Restless Hours: the analysis of polar semantic oppositions.....	79- 83
Figure 1.....	64
Figure 2.....	66
Figure 3.....	67
Figure 4.....	82
<b>Chapter VI: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>84- 86</b>
<b>Appendices: additional pictures.....</b>	<b>87- 95</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>96- 99</b>



# Chapter I

## Introduction

### 1. Preface

It was a cold afternoon near to the time of the sixth parliamentary elections in Iran in 2000. A group of students who were advocates of reformist parties in Mashhad, the second biggest city in the north east of Iran, were distributing leaflets amongst bystanders who passed through Daneshgah Street. Those leaflets consisted of a brief description of the political background of some reformist candidates and a juvenile poem. The name of this poem was “Where are you little Hassan?” The poem was strange neither to the students nor to bystanders. It was strongly reminiscent of the period of upheaval and revolution in 1979. It had its political message as vividly as the memory of the radical changes in the past, and it implied that there was a necessity for reform in the present. Of course, it was only a juvenile poem but it conveyed meanings and messages as political as the introduction of the reformist candidates in that leaflet.

“Where are you little Hassan?” is the poetic story of a beautiful green village which in the spring is unexpectedly attacked by a severe winter. The sun has gone and darkness has come. The green fields have frozen and the herds of cattle have died, but the cowardly people of the village accept this hopeless situation passively and without any objection. Amongst them, however, lives little Hassan who does not surrender to this misery. He decides to climb the snowy mountains to awaken the sun and want it to come back. He gathers a group of children. It is a hard and long way, and only Hassan with great determination and persistence reaches the mountaintop. The story ends with the sun shining on the village and the lifeless body of Hassan on the snowy heights.

This poem is emotionally inspiring and has its aesthetic aspects. A literary critic might point to the strengths and weaknesses of artistic aspects of this story, but looking through the eyes of a social or political researcher other political, cultural and social dimensions of this poem can be revealed. It means that this poem can have something to say in terms of political and social conditions of Iran. To understand the political or social meanings of this text it can be a big mistake to look at it only from aesthetic or artistic point of view.

In fact, the story of ‘Where are you little Hassan?’ was written by Mohammad Parnian in 1970 under the political hegemony of Pahlavi’s regime, when the government had occupied almost the entire spaces and channels of the public realm. It was within this context that the character of little Hassan was portrayed by the author as a hero, a revolutionary and a martyr. In 2000 this poem still could be used instrumentally for political purposes. It was not, then, only a poetic story for children. It could be an indicator of political meanings and messages, implied in the suppressed political voices that lurk beneath the artistic layers of it.

It is interesting to go back several decades historically now and think of a period during which Iran as the ‘island of stability in the Middle East’ was sinking to the bottom of the revolution. The expression *island of stability* clearly indicates that the Iranian government, at least for those like Jimmy Carter<sup>1</sup> who were listening to the political voices of official tribunes, ensured a considerable degree of stability. At the same time juvenile poems like “Where are you little Hassan?” were created and utilized to manifest the suffocated political demands in the crumbling public sphere of Iran. So could the politics be limited to the narrow realm of governmental spaces or its legal institutions? Was it enough to listen to the official speakers of politics to hear the political voices in the public realm of Iran? The Iranian revolution in 1979 cried out that it was not.

In fact, the first step of this research was taken in order to understand the meaning of politics in non-democratic societies like Iran, to cast a new light on the realms that may seem irrelevant to politics according to the patterns of democratic societies, but can have political dimensions within a different context.

Understanding the political messages and meanings expressed in the declining public realm of societies of this type is extremely complicated. Particularly when the focus is on the linguistic manifestation of politics, namely those political messages that are expressed through language. The difficulty in receiving the political messages in the public sphere is due largely to the narrow channels of communication in the public sphere and the lack of institutions and organizations which can give feedback to the government and establish and strengthen the link between public demands and the political system. In this condition, there is a major problem regarding where and in which realms politics can be found. How can the political voices be heard? Or in what sense can the meaning of politics be described to cover the hidden aspects of political issues in such societies?

---

<sup>1</sup> The Democrat president of the United States (1977- 1981)

Since listening to the political voices in non-democratic societies are difficult, particularly if politics are understood in relation to the public sphere, there is a necessity to penetrate beneath the surface of social, political and cultural phenomena. It means that, the researcher should not limit herself to the apparent events, activities, and occurrences which can be seen before her eyes. It does not mean that such obvious social, political or cultural phenomena are not important and the researcher can be inattentive to them. But it means that she should go beyond the surface of the social and political events to have access to the latent political meanings and messages they may convey. Searching for these hidden meanings indicates that every social, cultural or political phenomenon can act as a sign which can potentially carry political meaning. It is because of this specific condition in the declining public realm of a non-democratic society that semiology can act as a useful method to reveal strangled political voices and latent public demands.

Therefore, it can be simplistic and superficial analysis to do any political or social research in a non-democratic society like Iran according to the topic or label that has been attached to the activities, institutions, cultural productions or any other social or political phenomena. In societies like Iran, for instance, the title of children's literature can be only a fake topic for expressing the radical Marxist tendencies, and a juvenile poem may function as a leftist manifesto. In Iran a Takbir or 'Allāhu Akbar' which can be translated as the 'God is the greatest' can be totally irrelevant to its religious apparent meaning and utilized as a political motto, as it has been used frequently so far. In Iran the strong criticism of discrimination against women and their inferiority in a patriarchal society do not manifest through strikes or through legal institutions which have been established for this purpose, instead, the Iranian women show their disapproval of status quo through how they dress, through their strong will to participate in public life despite all limitations and obstacles through achieving higher academic education. So semiology can be a very useful method to set aside predefined social patterns and behaviors to reveal political meanings which is behind the attached labels and tags.

In order to clarify why semiology can be a useful method to uncover hidden parts of politics in a non-democratic society, making a comparison between a democratic and a non-democratic society can be illustrative and helpful. In a democratic society there is a connection between the legal institutions of the political realm and society. While the governmental system is a main participant in the political public sphere, it is at the same time the supporter of the non-governmental organizations in the public arena. So the political messages that are sent from governmental and formal institutions are more transparent, rational, and to a great extent, can give expression to challenges and conflicts within the society. But in a non-democratic society like Iran there is a historical gap between the government and society. In the absence of the powerful channels of communication in the public sphere only the governmental and official political messages can be expressed with relative ease and without fear of suppression.

However, due to the inseparability of politics from public life, even in such a non-democratic society it would be a superficial and simplistic outlook to reduce the political dialogue to the voices that have been raised from official and governmental tribunes. Nevertheless, the political communication in such crumbling public realms will be more complicated, irrational, ambiguous and lacks transparency. Topics and subjects which are directly and obviously related to politics cannot be proposed and expressed easily and openly in the public sphere. Latent conflicts cannot be manifested clearly, directly and transparently through the narrow channels of the public realm of a non-democratic society. So understanding politics and hearing the political voices under this condition will not be a simple task.

A short historical description of the political condition of Iran can clarify this situation to a greater extent. After the Iranian Coup against Mossadegh in 1953 the government put more pressure on the public realm. During the historical period between 1953 and the Iranian Revolution in 1979 Iran was under the control of an absolutist regime. Any kind of political activities in the political public realm was very difficult or almost impossible. There were not legitimate opposing political parties, real competition in elections or any influential media to reflect political demands of the Iranian people and to give feedback to the government. Shaping public opinion in a sense that can create effective political power was almost impossible.<sup>1</sup> In short, the legal institutions of the political public sphere were breakable and fragile in Iran. It was a little chance to debate on the contradictory interests or problematic public issues in a rational critical manner. If there were newspapers, magazines, political parties, elections, parliament, or other organizations of the western democracies they did not work effectively within the Iranian context.

The year 1963 was the outset of “the White Revolution” of the Shah and the people. The “condition of political underdevelopment in Iran between 1963 and 1977 indicates that although the shah helped to modernize the socioeconomic structure, he did little to develop the political system- to permit the formation of pressure groups, open the political arena for various social forces, forge links between the regime and the new classes, preserve the existing links between the regime and the old classes, and broaden the social base of a monarchy that, after all, had survived mainly because of the 1953 military coup”.<sup>2</sup>

It was close to the time where Iran was ‘standing on the threshold of the great civilization’ and the progressive ‘White Revolution’ that ‘The Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Adolescence’ was inaugurated by the queen Farah Diba. Simultaneously, a group of Iranian intellectuals, most of them were critical of governmental decisions and policies, started working in this center to create some cultural productions supposedly for children as their audience.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ferdinand Tonnies, ‘Excerpt from Critique of Public Opinion (1922)’, in *the Public Sphere: Discovering the Public Sphere*, ed. by Jostein Gripsrud, Hallvard Moe, Anders Molander and Graham Murdock, vol. I, London: SAGE Publications, 2011, pp. 53, 54.

<sup>2</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982, p. 435.

However, in fact a considerable part of these productions for children did not address children at all. Children's literature that normally the existence of which "depends on supposed relationships with a particular reading audience namely children"<sup>1</sup> fulfilled another function in the context of Iran. In other words, the main receivers of the messages of such texts were Iranian adults who had been deprived of channels of communication in the declining public sphere.

It may seem peculiar that here in this thesis, the primary concern for dealing with children's literature is not pedagogical, psychological or literary. It is not in terms of the effects of children's literature on a specific age group. Instead, the political function of children's literature will come under scrutiny. The process through which under the particular circumstances of Iran children's literature turned into a political instrument, and revealed latent conflicts in the declining public sphere of Iran and utilized as a medium for transmitting political messages and meanings will be investigated.

As it was mentioned before, semiotics as a method can be very helpful to reveal hidden meanings behind the attached labels of any social, political or cultural phenomena. Here in the specific case of this research, for instance, the text of childish stories in Iran (1963-1979) can be full of signs and indicators which convey parts of suppressed political demands of the Iranian people. Semiology as the qualitative method of text analysis can be utilized to point to some of these latent meanings and messages in some of the texts of children's literature during the certain historical period of this research.

The main questions of this research, then, can be asked in terms of two main concerns of this research:

The first question is: "How can in a declining public sphere of a non-democratic society, non-political realms like children's literature be politicized?"

The second question, which is relevant to the first, and is more empirical is: "How have literary productions for children been utilized instrumentally to give expression to the political demands of dissident groups during the historical period between 1963 and 1979 in Iran? In other words, how has children's literature been utilized as a political instrument to give expression to the public demands of the Iranian people in the declining public sphere of Iran (1963- 1979)?"

---

<sup>1</sup> Karin Lesnik- Oberstein, 'Essentials: What is Children's Literature? What is Childhood?', in *Understanding children's Literature*, p. 15.

## 2. Research questions

- How can in a declining public sphere of a non-democratic society, non-political realms like children's literature be politicized?
- How have literary productions for children been utilized instrumentally to give expression to the political demands of dissident groups during the historical period between 1963 and 1979 in Iran? In other words, how has children's literature been utilized as a political instrument to give expression to the public demands of the Iranian people in the declining public sphere of Iran (1963- 1979)?

## 3. Problem statement

The main concern of this thesis is to reveal the different mechanisms by which some of the political opposing groups can criticize governmental policies under the pressure of an absolutist regime within the declining public sphere. In a non-democratic society like Iran, for instance, during a historical period between 1963 and 1979, some of political dissidents utilized children's literature to give expression to their opposing and revolutionary ideas in the declining public realm of this country. The ambiguous and unclear language of the juvenile literature was used as a political instrument, and children's literature turned into a façade behind it political opposition could escape from censorship of the totalitarian regime of Pahlavi. The process of politicization of children's literature is described through reading and interpreting some popular and well-known texts of children's literature during the historical period of the research. The semiotic method of text analysis will be used to uncover the political messages of the chosen texts.

## 4. Relevance to peace studies<sup>1</sup>

The first motivation of this research is to reveal the importance of the public sphere and having access to the media for communication in this sphere for dealing with conflict peacefully within a nation-state. When a political system loses its touch with the public sphere, puts pressure on the public realm and becomes inattentive to the public opinion the result can be violent conflict.

---

<sup>1</sup> Derived from: Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means*, London: SAGE, 1996.

Secondly, this research is an attempt to illustrate that to understand the political stability of a society and to see the erupting conflict, looking at public sphere and going through informal public spaces like cultural and literary spheres is a key point. In fact, the violence-oriented outlook on the basis of negative peace does not seem enough. Probably when Jimmy Carter the president of US on January 1978 called Iran the island of stability he was regarding Iran from violence-oriented perspective.

Thirdly, the blockage of channels of the public sphere and the lack of democratic media to reflect the public opinion can result in the lack of transparency. Using indirect and complicated mechanisms by actors and agents to give voice to their thoughts and demands has its harmful effects and another motivation of this research is addressing some of these negative effects as well.

And finally, in today's world the name of Iran is intertwined with violence. In this atmosphere the world's perception of Iran is according to an image which is portrayed by the Iranian government and politicians. Another purpose of this research can be introducing a historical period of contemporary Iran and uncovering some parts of public realms of this country that most of the times are not taken into account. It can reveal more hidden and latent part of Iranian history and culture, and it may contribute to a more realistic image of Iran.

## 5. Theoretical or conceptual framework and keywords

The focus would be on the ideas of some philosophers like Hanna Arendt, Jurgen Habermas, Carl Schmitt and Chantal Mouffe. In chapter two, more detailed descriptions are provided about the theoretical framework of this thesis.

*Key words: Politicization, public sphere*

## 6. Method of research

Semiotic or semiology as a qualitative method of text analysis is used to show how political meanings and messages have been conveyed by utilizing children's literature instrumentally. Some short stories for children which have been written by a famous dissident writer, Samad Behrangi, have been chosen and interpreted. In chapter four more methodological reflections are provided.

## 7. Literature on the subject: a short overview

Most of the researches about children's literature in Iran are descriptive which consist of the introduction of the texts and a short biography of the author. Therefore, although some analytical descriptions can be found even in the works of this type, they are not directly relevant to the main concern of this research.

On the other hand, books, articles and other sources in terms of the connection between politics and children's literature are mainly part of the broader study of the subjects such as revolutionary literature, oppositional art or committed literature about the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Studies of this type, however, have not been written particularly about the connection between specific category of literary productions for children and the political meanings which can be conveyed by them. In fact, most of these researches have been carried out about the revolutionary discourse that was created by leftist and nativist intellectuals during the 1960s and 1970s decades.

Despite the descriptions above, however, there are helpful books and article which are directly relevant to this research. Interestingly, many of them are about the works of Samad Behrangy and the political dimensions of his works. Some of them have been utilized in this study. One of the first texts in this regard is 'the world-view of the little black fish' by Manouchehr Hezarkhani, another text is "Samad was immortalized" by Ali Ashraf Darvishian or the book "On the memorial of Samad Behrangy" which has been gathered and edited by Darvishian as well. In terms of Samad Behrangy, in particular, the viewpoints and ideas of writers, journalists and critics like Jalal Al-e-Ahmad, Faraj Sarkoohi, Hamzeh Farahati and Asad Behrangy and many others have been helpful.

The new book which has been relevant to this research is "Samad the structure of a myth" by Mohammad Hadi Mohammadi and Ali Abbasi. Articles like "Children's literature in a revolutionary era" by Niloofar Mahdian or "from the children's book council to the center for the intellectual development of children and adolescents (1963- 1979)" have been utilized too.

The works of Ali Kashefi Khansari and specially Reza Rahgozar about children's literature before and after the Iranian revolution 1979, and researches and articles by Farrokh Sadeghi, have been used as well.



## Chapter II

### Theoretical reflections

This chapter is more relevant to the first question of this research which is:

“How can in a declining public sphere of a non-democratic society, non-political realms like children’s literature be politicized?”

However, since the topic of this research has been started with the expression *politicization of children’s literature*. At first glance, the connection between literature and politics seems an inseparable part of any theoretical discussion in this chapter. On the other hand, there is another concept in the topic too, namely *the public sphere* which needs to be explained as well. It is because, the angle from which the politicization of children’s literature has been studied here, should be described and understood in terms of the conditions of the crumbling public realm.

Since giving a short description of two keywords of the research seems necessary at first, in the following parts, the notion of politicization of art in general has been explained briefly. Then, a quick glance has been taken on the concept of the public sphere.

In the next steps, through thinking of different perceptions of politics and various approaches towards politics and its realms, an attempt has been made to construct a theoretical framework for this research. This framework may also provide an acceptable answer to one of the main questions of this thesis as well.

#### 1. Politicization of art: a brief theoretical overview

The debate about the relationship between art and politics, and about the politicization of art have a long history in the European tradition, “from Plato who wanted to banish poets from the republic, to Shelly who claimed that the poems were the unacknowledged legislators”.<sup>1</sup> Making a connection between art and the economic, social and political context of its creation can be traced back to the Marxist theory and thinkers like Georg Lukacs and Theodor Adorno have influential opinions in this regard.

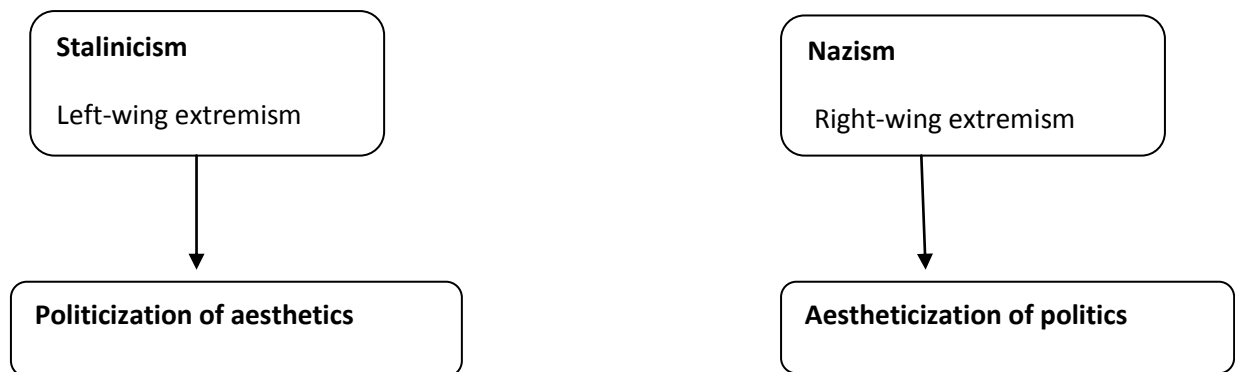
---

<sup>1</sup> Jin McGuigan, “The Cultural Public Sphere (2005)”, in *The Cultural public sphere*, Vol. 3, Los Angeles : SAGE, 2011, p. 266.

One of the serious discussions about the politicization of art was begun by Walter Benjamin and his approach to the relationship between the Nazi regime and art in the 1930s. According to Benjamin, “in the 1930s Nazism promoted the Aryan ideal in Germany, especially in its bodily form, and attacked degenerate art”.<sup>1</sup> In other words, “the Nazis had aestheticized politics with their showy displays and affective appeal”.<sup>2</sup>

By contrast, Benjamin suggested the opposite direction to resist the process of aestheticization of politics. It means that “for Benjamin, the point of *oppositional art* was to reverse the process, to politicize aesthetics”.<sup>3</sup> However, reversing the process as Benjamin had suggested, did not have better results. If the aestheticization of politics by the Third Reich and right-wing extremists in Germany was disastrous, the leftist version was horrible too. In fact, the politicization of art by left-wing extremists in the Soviet Union ended up with “the Stalin’s socialist realism and a suppression of experimental art and artists comparable to that of the Nazis”.<sup>4</sup>

Figure 1.<sup>5</sup>



---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 266.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 266.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>5</sup> Derived from: *ibid.*, p. 267.

The above descriptions can contribute to the perception of the relation between art and politics in both the extremist right and left ends of the political spectrum. Particularly in the leftist discourse, politicization of art which is relevant to this research points to the commitment of the artist to the people of the lower economic ranks, working classes, and proletariat to reveal injustice and inequality by means of committed or oppositional art.

However, politicization of art according to the radical view, at least as it occurred in the Soviet Union, led to the escape, exile and imprisonment of many artists who did not accept to confine themselves to *the socialist realist* style. These artists did not accept to be the ideologues of Marxism-Leninism and Stalinism. On the other hand, the idea of *art for art's sake* has been criticized for being inattentive to the social, political and economic dimensions of the artwork.

Giving numerous definitions of art and its social or political role has not been the main concern of this part. It seems reasonable that art cannot be totally separated from its social, political, economic or historical context, but it is important to think of art as a phenomenon which cannot be bound by politics and utilized as a political instrument. The bitter experiences of Nazism, Fascism and Stalinism are still alive in the historical memory of the human being.

## 2. The notion of the public sphere: a brief theoretical overview

The public sphere is the “appearance space- the space of being seen and heard by others”. If human beings are living together in the world, the public sphere is the common world, a man-made and artificial world. As Arendt describes “a world of things [which] is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time”.<sup>1</sup>

In more sociological perception, the public sphere can be described as “a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed... A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body”.<sup>2</sup> For this space to be formed citizens need to be free to express and publish their opinions and to have freedom of assembly and social gathering. Also they need media as the means of their communication. Generally, newspapers, magazines, radio and television, satellites, internet can be considered as the media in the public realm.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, *the Human Condition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Jurgen Habermas, The public sphere: an encyclopedia article, in *The Public Sphere: Discovering the Public Sphere*, Edited by Jostein Gripsrud, Halvard Moe, Anders Molander and Graham Murdock, Volum 1., Los Angeles, London: SAGE publication, p. 171.

In democratic societies, recognition of these freedoms and access to these media have been provided by the political system. In this condition public opinion can be manifested in the public sphere. "Public opinion refers to the task of criticism and control which a public body of citizens informally- and in the periodic election formally as well- practices vis-a-vis the ruling structure organized in the form of a state".<sup>1</sup> In this situation, the public sphere is a sphere which mediates between society and state. The public opinion that is reflected in public realm provides a feedback to the political system and has a strong effect on the outputs of the political system or political decisions.

However, the public sphere cannot be reduced to the political public sphere. The public realm in its more fluid and dynamic perception can be shaped wherever streams of communication flow freely. It can "best be described as a network for communicating information and points of view... It refers to the social space generated in communicative action".<sup>2</sup> So, agents and actors can create different public spaces during their communicative act, and there are a variety of public areas to be mentioned in Habermas' thought. There are political public realm, economic public realm, social public realm, and literary or cultural public realm and all of them play a significant role in public life of agents and actors.<sup>3</sup>

"The idea of the public sphere was born as a bourgeois idea, in and out of the struggles against absolutist monarchy and aristocratic power in 18<sup>th</sup> century Western Europe, but due to its universalistic claim set free a political dynamic that transcended its socio-cultural genesis".<sup>4</sup> So it seems that this theory is not just a descriptive idea about a specific context, but it has a normative content at the same time.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> Habermas, "Civil society, public opinion, and communicative power", *op. cit.*, p. 52.

<sup>3</sup> Hossein-ali Nowzari, *Rewriting Habermas*, Tehran: Cheshme Press, 2002, p. 466. Translated from: Esteven Seidman, *Jurgen Habermas on Society and Politics: A Reader, Selections translated from the German*, Boston: Boston Press, 1989, ch. 10, "The Public Sphere", p. 231.

<sup>4</sup> Jostein Gripsrud... [and others], "General introduction", in *Discovering the public sphere*. Vol. 1. Los Angeles : SAGE, 2011, p. xxxii.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. xxxiii.

There are optimistic and skeptical approaches towards the theory of the public sphere. It has been seen as the notion which “was invented as an idea and ideal, while as being rejected to varying degrees by skeptics regarding it as a mere phantom. Since the idea of public sphere first appeared, it has been contested as to what extent one can expect the formation of a reasonable public opinion based on vigorous, open and principled deliberation on issues of common interest”.<sup>1</sup> Particularly the advocates of radical outlooks to the concept of the political like Marxists and Feminists are the main critics of the idea of the public sphere. Some of these criticisms will be mentioned in the next part. Despite all the skeptical attitudes to the notion of the public sphere, however, this theory is closely intertwined with building a theoretical background for this research.

In fact, the theoretical concern of this research has its roots within the theoretical debate about the public sphere and using non-political realms instrumentally for political purposes in a fragile public realm. So the process of politicization of children’s literature can be understood in connection with and inseparable from the conditions of the declining public sphere. Maybe it can be helpful to repeat the main questions of the research here again and then enter into a deeper theoretical discussion. The main questions are:

“How can in a declining public sphere of a non-democratic society, non-political realms like children’s literature be politicized? How has children’s literature been utilized as a political instrument to give expression to public demands of the Iranian people in the declining public sphere of Iran (1963- 1979)?”

Therefore in this research, in addition to politicization of a specific artistic area, the concept of the public sphere has played an important role. It means that the perception of the term politicization is closely and directly connected to the perception of politics as public action and speech.<sup>2</sup>

To clarify the concept of politicization the meaning of politics should be described first. Specifically the meaning of politics which is relevant to the public realm and its institutions. So in order to analyze the theoretical framework of this study, dealing with some questions seems inevitable. The answers to these preliminary questions provide the background to enhance the effectiveness of the theoretical reflections. Thus at first, the discussion involves questions such as what is politics, and how can it be defined? How can some links be forged between politics and different social and cultural spaces?

---

<sup>1</sup> Jostein Gripsrud... [and others], “Introduction: Discovering the Public Sphere”, in *Discovering the public sphere*. Vol. 1. Los Angeles : SAGE, 2011, p. xxxvii.

<sup>2</sup> The main idea is derived from: Hannah Arendt, *the Human Condition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Needless to say, questions of this type raise numerous issues and problems. In the next part the attempt will be to summarize and organize these answers in a manner according to which a general picture of the spectrum of these ideas can be depicted. Then, it can be decided which idea of *politics* or *the political* is more efficient in terms of the main question of this research.

### 3. Moving across the political spectrum: From the concept of *politics* to *the concept of the political* <sup>1</sup>

As mentioned before, giving any explanation about the process of politicization of children's literature depends on the perception of the meaning of politics and the different approaches towards it. In other words, it depends on the answers to the questions such as: Where and in which realms can politics be found? Which activities can be called political activities? Can all human activities and realms be relevant to politics, or are there domains and activities which are completely irrelevant to politics and cannot be political?

Here three general answers to the above questions have been provided. These answers point to different attitudes to politics. In other words, if the numerous definitions of politics can be represented on a spectrum three main points can be distinguished at the two ends and in the middle of this spectrum.

The first approach to politics which can be considered as the most conservative one, suggests the narrow and limited conception of politics and its realm. Here politics is limited to the governmental realm, to "a system of social organization centered upon the machinery of government".<sup>2</sup> In such a restricted view of politics the realm of political practice would be "cabinet rooms, legislative chambers, government departments and the like, and it is engaged in by a limited and specific group of people, notably politicians, civil servants and lobbyists".<sup>3</sup> It is obvious that if politics is looked at from this narrow point of view, searching for political meanings and messages in realms like children's literature can be totally irrelevant. So this attitude does not seem useful within the theoretical framework of this research.

---

<sup>1</sup> The main idea of this part is derived from: Andrew Heywood, *Politics*, third edition, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Heywood, *Politics*, third edition, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

Somewhere in the middle of the aforementioned spectrum, the idea of politics as an activity in the public realm can be situated. Here the realm within which politics can be found and political messages can be heard is the public sphere. According to this approach there is a distinction between the public and the private realm. With a broader conception of politics, it “moves beyond the narrow realm of government to what is thought of as ‘public life’ or ‘public affairs’. In other words the distinction between the political and the non-political coincides with the division between an essentially public sphere of life and what can be thought of as the private sphere”.<sup>1</sup> This theoretical approach seems more suitable for understanding the process of politicization of children’s literature, since the political voices cannot be reduced to the governmental voices and opinions.

However, the major problem with this approach is that, particularly in the liberal-rational tradition, politics is seen as compromise and consensus. Since consensus, compromise and reconciliation are the main themes of political activity, they can be found in a society in which there is a wide dispersal of power. Conflicts, disagreements, and contradictory interests can be discussed in the public realm through open, transparent and clear dialogue. These conditions are characteristics of a society with a strong public arena where the legal institutions of the political public sphere, free media and channels of communication function effectively. “As a result this model has little to say about one-party states or military regimes”.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, when the politicization of children’s literature is seen from this angle the questions arise like: why should politics be searched in the realm of children’s literature at all? What has happened to the political parties, organizations, press, media, or at least adult’s cultural productions that lead the researcher to the realm of children’s literature to hear the political messages and meanings? Thus, particularly where the legal institutions of politics are powerful enough to give expression to public demands, searching for politics in children’s literature seems nonsense. Politicization of children’s literature, then, can be the indicator of inefficiency and weakness of the institutions of the public realm. And this is the point from which the debate on the politicization of children’s literature in the crumbling public realm can be started.

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.

Therefore, although this second approach to politics can be the starting point to think of politicization of children's literature in a declining public sphere and reveal some dimensions of it, the major problem is that a researcher who is focused on institutions of the public sphere according to the patterns of the western democracies probably will not look for politics in the realm of children's literature in first place. This is because his or her understanding of politics is not broad and flexible enough to think of a realm totally irrelevant to politics according to organizations of the public sphere in a democratic framework. In order to reveal the political instrumentality of children's literature in a fragile public sphere, then, looking from the other end of the spectrum seems inevitable.

The most radical perception of politics and its realm can be located at the opposite end of the spectrum. This is the broadest attitude towards politics, according to it, politics can be found "at work in all social activities and in every corner of human existence"<sup>1</sup> It can be seen "at the heart of all collective social activity, formal and informal, public and private, in all human groups, institutions and societies".<sup>2</sup> ...It takes place at every level of social interaction; it can be found within the families and amongst small groups of friends just as much as amongst nations and on the global stage.<sup>3</sup> Marxists, Feminists, Postmodern thinkers, and theorists of new social movements look at politics from this angle. Here instead of using the concept of 'politics' the idea of 'the political' is preferable.

From this approach "politics is, in essence, power: the ability to achieve a desired outcome, through whatever means... [therefore] politics is about diversity and conflict", <sup>4</sup> instead of consensus and compromise. Therefore drawing borders and lines between public and private only prevent the different kinds of power relations in the private life, from being exposed and brought into the public light. So it can be claimed that thinking of politics as public activity and being inattentive to the private realm lead to the continual injustice, inequality and inferiority in the private sphere. "Modern feminists, for instance, have shown particular interest in the idea of 'the political'.<sup>5</sup> ... They attack the 'public/ private' divide, proclaiming instead that 'the personal is the political'. This slogan neatly encapsulates... that what goes on in domestic, family and personal life is intensely political".<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 12.



The idea of 'the political' has been proposed by Carl Schmitt. After him post structuralists such as Chantal Mouffee and Ernesto Laclau developed the idea of 'the political' on the basis of Schmitt's attitude towards *the concept of the political*. According to the radical outlook towards politics and the idea of the political the concept of politicization seems pointless and futile, since all realms, activities and orders in a society have already been political. In fact, those thinkers who try to define politics according to certain realms or the political sphere or activity in opposition to economic or social spheres- like Arendt for instance- *neutralize* and *depoliticize* the domains which are mainly political.<sup>1</sup>

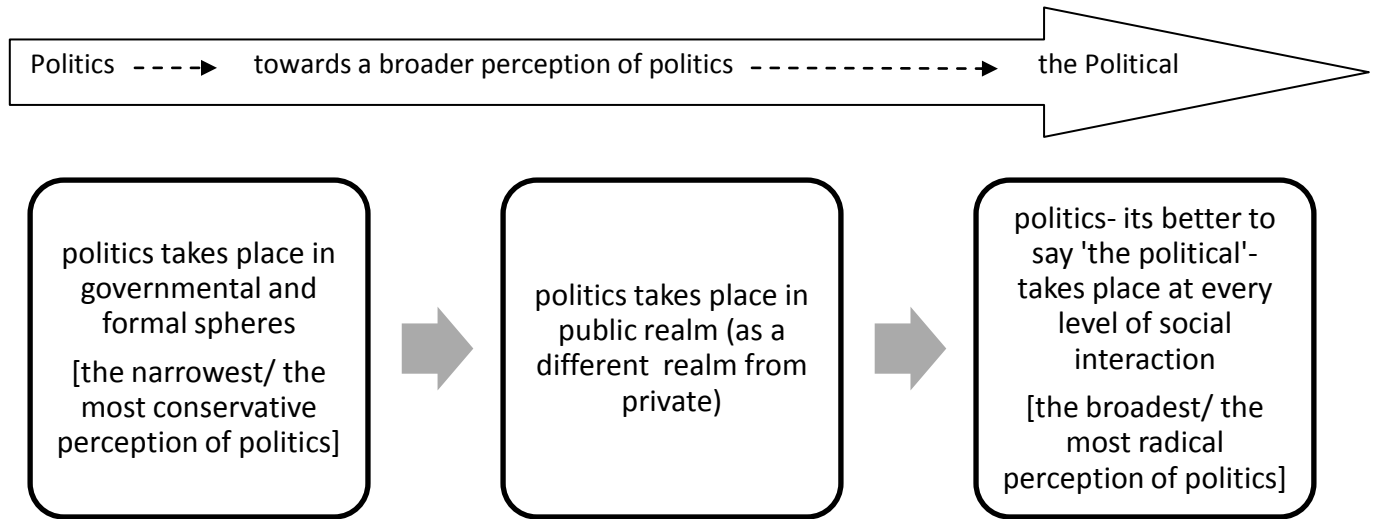
The radical approach to politics, or, it is better to say, *the idea of the political*, is a flexible and broad perspective on politics and give the researcher this theoretical openness to look for politics in every social and cultural realm. As far as it relates to this research, the strength of this outlook is that it stimulates the researcher to go beyond the predefined patterns of the western democracies and search for political voices and demands in the unusual or uncommon realms like children's literature. However, it seems that this approach alone cannot establish a reliable theoretical framework to describe the process of politicization of children's literature in a declining public sphere. To describe this process it can be more useful to think of politics as a public activity and the idea of the political at the same time. It may seem contradictory, but in the next part, an attempt has been made to deal with the main concern of this research using the second and third approaches.

In the figure below, three different attitudes towards politics have been depicted across the spectrum.

---

<sup>1</sup> Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, translated by Matthias Konzen and John P. McCormick, the expanded edition, Chicago and London: The University Of Chicago Press, 2007, p. 22.

Figure 2.1



<sup>1</sup> Derived from: Andrew Heywood, op. cit., pp. 1- 13.

## 4. Avoiding theoretical stereotypes: politicization of non-political realms in the declining public sphere

As it was described in the previous part, it seems that the second and third approaches to politics can contribute to understanding the process of politicization of children's literature in the declining public sphere.

According to the second approach to politics, which connects politics to the public realm and public activity, politics is inseparable from speech and action in the public sphere.<sup>1</sup> The political voices can be heard within the spaces of communication in the public sphere. Politics, then, is closely intertwined with public debate and dialogue. In a democratic society, at least according to the model that has been portrayed by Habermas and despite all the weaknesses and flaws of this theory, the political public sphere can be distinguished from the cultural or literary public sphere. These two, however, are intimately connected. It means that the political public realm and its institutions, at least in the context of the European society in the 18th century, grew out of gradual bureaucratization and rationalization of society.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, Habermas has pointed to a dynamic and intimate connection between public and private realms. Even the private sphere, the lifestyle, the architecture of houses, and the relationship between family members have according to Habermas, had strong effects on the formation of the spaces and the realms of rational critical debate or on public use of reason. Therefore, although on the one hand the cultural or literary public sphere or the private sphere is not directly political, on the other hand the political institutions of the public realm have their roots within the ground of the cultural context and private life. These elements- and many others, which have not been described here- have given rise to the political institutions of the bourgeois public sphere during the historical period of the 18th century in Europe.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> The main idea is derived from: Hannah Arendt, *the Human Condition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958.

<sup>2</sup> See: Jostein Gripsrud... [and others], "General introduction", in *Discovering the public sphere*. Vol. 1. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> See: Jürgen Habermas, *The structural transformation of the public sphere : an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Translated by Thomas Burger; with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge : Polity, 1989.

Apart from this fact that the western democracies have their own problems and difficulties, and despite all criticisms of the Habermas's idea about the formation of the bourgeois public sphere, many thinkers have accepted that the democratic political institutions in the west have their roots in the cultural and social context of these societies. The move towards rational dialogue and public debate has taken place in the public realms of the western democracies gradually and during a historical period.

Now the key questions are: Have political and legal institutions also in non-democratic societies grown out of the cultural and social ground of these societies? Are legitimate channels of communication in a declining public realm open and effective enough to give expression to public demands? Can the public realm in a non-democratic society be considered the open, clear, and rational realm of dialogue and discussion about political issues?

Giving any answer to these questions needs a deep and detailed research. However, these questions lead the researcher to this idea that in a non-democratic society, perception of politics which is based on transparent, rational-critical dialogue in the public sphere can be very challenging and difficult. It is precisely because of these complications that the radical approach to the concept of the political can be more useful to search for politics in uncommon realms of political debate, such as children's literature in these societies. The radical perception of politics helps the researcher to recognize different political spaces within the extremely complicated conditions of a non-democratic society through a more dynamic understanding of the concept of the political. This approach keeps the researcher from accepting the stereotypes of democratic societies and imposing those models on a different social, political and cultural context of a non-democratic society.

However, it seems that the idea of the political is not sufficient for the main purposes of this research, because the process of politicization and being political in its radical sense in a democratic society is different from politicization in a non-democratic society. Thus, it can be claimed that without using the idea of a public sphere it will be difficult to understand the distinction between the process of politicization under democratic conditions and politicization that occurs in a non-democratic society. The question is how the process of politicization of realms that are irrelevant to politics within a strong public sphere differs from this process within a weak public sphere. The answer to this question can cast a new light on the politicization of children's literature in the declining public sphere.

In a democratic society advocates of the radical approach to politics and the idea of the political are mainly those who are supporters of new social movements. They look for spaces and realms that contribute to the marginalized voices to be heard. The voices of minorities, the voices of women entangled in patriarchal social structures, the voices of repressed ethnic groups, and any other parts of society that have been deprived of participation in the free and equal public life. The idea of the political in a democratic society points to power relations and suppressed voices of marginalized groups or outsiders. The proponents of social movements try to give expression to the suppressed demands and uncover the latent forms of force and coercion in every corner of society. They do not accept that they are politicizing non-political realms. They believe that unequal power relations have been naturalized, and they only reveal and problematize them. Since the public sphere is strong in a democratic society, the politicization in this framework, opens the way to public debate and dialogue about latent conflicts within society, gives the suppressed groups this chance to show their disapproval in terms of hidden inequalities and injustice in a clear and open manner in public.

By contrast, in the non-democratic society the public realm is shaky and fragile. There are obvious and apparent forms of discrimination, suppression, coercion and injustice, which the majority can see and realize in the public domain, but due to the weakness of the institutions of the public realm, these weaknesses cannot be discussed transparently and clearly in public. Thus, in a non-democratic society, the suppressed voices are not the voices of minorities or outsiders, they are the public demands in terms of public interests, national economy, foreign affairs, free elections, decision-making in parliament, and so on. They are problems and issues that in a democratic society can be mainly and primarily discussed by means of political parties, political press, media or other spaces of the public realm.

So what does it mean when such obvious conflicts in the declining public realm are politicized? It means that such apparent and clear demands should find a complex and obscure language in order to release themselves from governmental censorship. They cannot manifest themselves transparently by participation in a rational, critical public debate. They cannot open up and be discussed clearly and straightforwardly, because they will be suppressed by the government. Consequently, they can be expressed only through using the language of private realms and hide themselves by shrinking into the darkness of spheres irrelevant to politics. In fact, the weakness of the public sphere leads them to banish transparency and publicity and only by using irrational and emotional language, can political demands be vocalized and heard in the crumbling public sphere.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See: Hannah Arendt, *the Human Condition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Thus, it seems that the feminist thinkers or the theorists of new social movement with a radical approach to the concept of the political cannot clarify the complexity of the process of politicization of children's literature in a declining public realm. This is because they cannot point to the somehow reverse process of politicization in a non-democratic society. Maybe Arendt's idea about the major differences between public and private, despite some defects and flaws of her theory, contribute to describe this process.<sup>1</sup>

In a society with a strong and well-established public sphere, politicization means proposing problems in public, letting the issues be seen and heard transparently and clearly by others. This is because the public realm, according to Arendt, is the realm of dialogue and debate between free equal citizens. On the other hand, in a society with a brittle and fragile public realm, politicization means using obscure and ambiguous language to be able to escape from governmental hegemony, to be able to criticize problems and issues which obviously can be seen and heard by others.<sup>2</sup>

Politicization under this condition means utilizing the emotional and unclear language which is, according to Arendt, characteristics of the private realm. Politicization in a crumbling public sphere, then, seems the reverse process of pushing public speech and act into the darkness and ambiguity of the realms that are totally irrelevant to the nobility, lucidity and glory of politics, according to Arendt. The difference between the process of politicization in a society with a well-established public sphere and a society with a declining public sphere can be depicted in the following figure.<sup>3</sup>

---

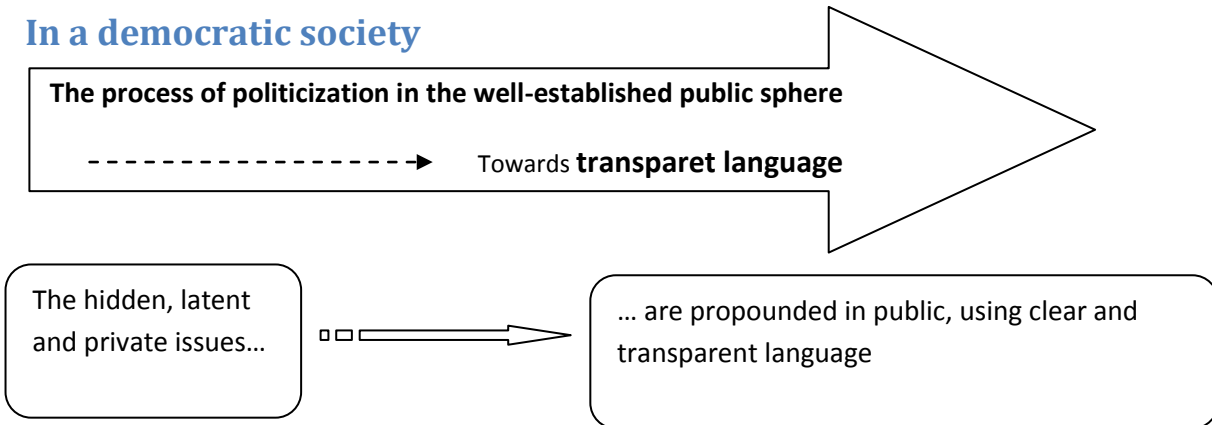
<sup>1</sup> The main idea is derived from: Hannah Arendt, *the Human Condition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958

<sup>2</sup> See: *ibid.*

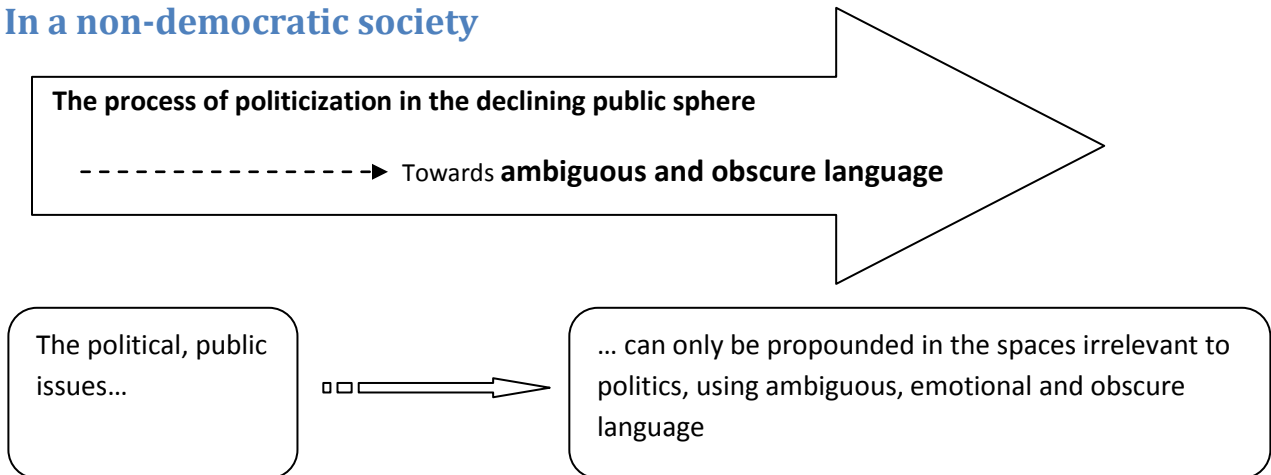
<sup>3</sup> See: *ibid.*

Figure 3.

### In a democratic society



### In a non-democratic society

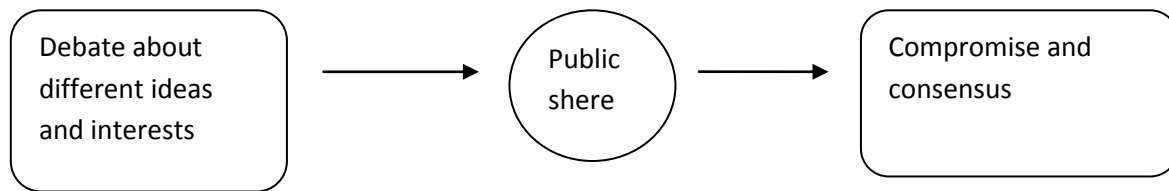


## 5. Shaky theoretical framework

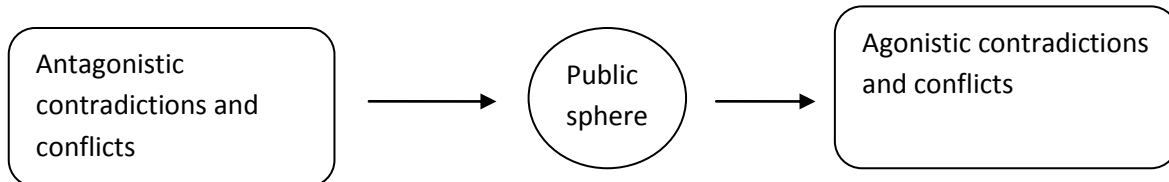
This chapter was a struggle for establishing a theoretical framework, a theoretical model in order to describe the politicization of children’s literature in the declining public sphere of a non-democratic society. However, the result was a shaky and fragile framework, full of contradictory ideas and theories. The idea of the public sphere has its own flaws and weaknesses, as both a normative and an explanatory theory of how to understand the context of a society. Nevertheless, even the opponents of the notion of public sphere, who are the proponents of the radical approach to politics, have accepted that the idea of a public sphere cannot be set aside and left out altogether. Because, in the end, living in a society means living with others; therefore, even thinking of the concept of the political and its *antagonistic* features, according to Schmitt, needs the realms within which this antagonism can be turned into *agonism*. In other words, public life needs a minimum degree of consensus, or at least that it is possible to debate about contradictory interests and ideas in the public realms. So it seems that for both approaches the public realm is of great importance. The function of the public realm in these two approaches has been depicted simply in the figure below.<sup>1</sup>

Figure 4.

### Emphasis on politics as consensus



### Emphasis on the political as conflict and contradiction<sup>2</sup>



<sup>1</sup> The main idea is derived from: Chantal Mouffe, *On the political*, London: Routledge, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> See: *ibid.*



Thinkers like Chantal Mouffe, as an advocate of the *agonistic model of the public sphere*, have pointed to. She is completely aware of this fact that without channels of communication of public dialogue and debate there is a risk that the antagonistic aspect of the political can penetrate into every realm of human life.<sup>1</sup>

It means that, since politics cannot be reduced to the legal institutions of the public realm, and when the institutions and organizations of the public realm are under the hegemony of the government, the antagonistic dimension of the political can penetrate into any parts of social life: into the literary, cultural, artistic, religious or even the private arena of human society. So it will not be strange that the political desires and demands manifest themselves in unpredictable, unexpected and irrational ways, utilizing the realms and activities that are irrelevant to politics to be vocalized in the lack of a strong public sphere.

In the specific case of this research in Iran, for instance, it can be shown how politics and the antagonistic feature of the political have penetrated into the children's literature; how juvenile stories can reflect the antagonistic dimension of the political in the brittle public sphere of this country. In the next chapter, the historical conditions of the crumbling Iranian public realm have been depicted briefly. It may contribute to a better understanding of this theoretical chapter as well.

---

<sup>1</sup> See: Chantal Mouffe, *On the political*, London: Routledge, 2005. and

Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, translated by Matthias Konzen and John P. McCormick, the expanded edition, Chicago and London: The University Of Chicago Press, 2007.

## Chapter III

### Declining public sphere of Iran: a historical perspective

As it has been described to some extent in theoretical chapter, in order to explain the process of politicization of children's literature in Iran it seems necessary to think of politics in terms of both public action and a more radical outlook to the concept of 'the political' at the same time. It is important to think that what will be the result if there is only a little chance for 'the political' and its antagonistic feature to be manifested through institutions of the public arena? In other words, utilization of children's literature as a political instrument in Iran can be described as one of the precarious outcomes of the declining public realm. In order to know about manifestation of political voices through children's literature in Iran it seems necessary to know that how powerful the public institutions have been within the historical context of Iran? Have been there open and free communication channels in order to give expression to the public demands? How strong have been the possibilities of speech and action within the Iranian public sphere?

A brief historical description can contribute to the perception of the context of Iran. However, such description by no means can cover all complications of the case of this country, but at least it will give us a rough idea of the key differences between the public realm in Iran in comparison with the western democracies. Such differences have strong effects on the politicization of specific spaces in Iran and the way of manifestation of the political demands within the Iranian public realm.

However, if the idea of the public sphere has its weaknesses and flaws in the European context, the problems of using this theory in the context of Iran will be more complicated and challenging. Although despite all of such challenges, a historical perspective to the declining public sphere in Iran seems inevitable in order to deal with the main questions of this research. Historical approach to difficulties of action and speech in the Iranian public realm casts a new light on the process of politicization of children's literature in this country. In fact the expression of *Iranian* public sphere implies that the public sphere in this country possesses some specific characteristics of its own which is *Iranian* in comparison with the European model.

In the following parts, in order to portray a sketchy picture of the Iranian public realm two major steps will be taken. In the first step, it seems necessary to realize the more general characteristics of public realm in Iran compared to the western pattern. Specifically the process of formation of the political public realm and its legal institutions which have been different from the European democracies. In the second step, with a more contemporary historical outlook the discussion goes back to the coup against Mosaddegh in 1953 to describe the particular historical period of this research and the condition of public realm between 1963 and 1979.

## 1. Fragile public realm: a chronic problem in Iran

It is by no means a simple task to establish a link between the political system and society in Iran. In other words, it is difficult to make a connection between the political demands of society and the voices rise from governmental tribune. Today's Iran is a country suffered from the phenomenon of lasting despotism which, according to many scholars, lacks major institutions of the public area in political, social and economic dimensions. It is also difficult to describe civil society in Iran by using the European models.

The economic structure of Iran, neither in the traditional form nor after the discovery of oil sources and in its modern period, has provided a suitable background to develop the civil society. By contrast, this structure has mostly led to concentration of power in the hands of regime and increasing fatness of the government; therefore, its shadow has continuously weighed down on the seeds of the private economy and generation of the civil society.<sup>1</sup> Neither organizations of private property nor other institutions of public area such as political parties and free media were born in Iran in accordance with the classic pattern of the West.<sup>2</sup> Such complications and challenges may strengthen the view of driving the politics to the arena of government, in other words, to the realms where official and governmental exercise of power are being taken place.

In order to have a better understanding of the context of Iran, then, it is important to remember that weakness and the decay of the public sphere in Iran is not a short-term problem. From a historical perspective, even in ancient Iran the *agora* or *gathering place* cannot be found as it was in ancient Greek city- states. The relation between rulers and the people in Iran has historically followed an authoritarian model in which the society has been prohibited from establishing an effective link with the governance area, except when submission and obedience.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See: Mohammad Homayun Katouzian, *Iran's Political Economy, from the Constitutional Era until the end of the Pahlavi's dynasty*, translated into Persian by Mohammad Reza Nafisi, Kambiz Azizi, Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> See: Soroush, Abdolkarim et al., *civil society and today's Iran; collection of articles*, "civil society and its relationship with religion", Tehran: Naqsh-o-negar Press, 1998, p. 141 to 190. And, ibid, Saeed Hajjarian, "Civil Society and Today's Iran", p.309.

<sup>3</sup> Thinkers such as Machiavelli, Hume, Hegel and Montesquieu have referred to the differences of political systems in the East and West. See:

- Ervand Abrahamian, *Articles on Iran's Sociology*, translation, Soheila Torabi. "Eastern Despotism", p. 2  
- Witfoegei, K.A., *Oriental Despotism*, NewHaven: Yale University Press, 1975.

- Abrahamian E. "Oriental Despotism: The Case of Qajar Iran", *The International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. No. 5. 1974.

The historical gap between government and nation<sup>1</sup> also has increasingly narrowed the area to create channels for proposing political affairs in the public realm. The government's dominion on the society, and pastor-drove or the lord-slave look have historically made difficult to recognize the people as the public owning right, given a special shape to the political power in Iran, and consequently given a different concept to the politics in thesaurus of the Iranian tradition.<sup>2</sup> In the history of Iranian's political culture, the rulers, elites and the government have been defined as separate classes whose tasks are punishing and threatening the peasants.<sup>3</sup> Due to lack of specific definitions of "public" and "public realm", it is difficult to reach a sphere where such concepts as "public opinion", "collective wisdom" and "public interest" can be defined.<sup>4</sup>

In fact, the patrimonial government in Iran has been based on the thought of authority and centrality of the king as the owner of people's lives and properties. The persistent characteristic of the vertical, unilateral structure of the power in Iran has been to the extent that neither Pahlavi's absolute modernity nor ideological traditionalism of the Islamic Republic era, was not a perfect rupture with the past, although each of them combined some elements of traditional patrimonialism with modern ideologies and/or traditionalism with Islamic ideology.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Theory of "contradiction of state and nation in Iran" is proposed in a book of the same title from Homayoon Katouzian. See: Mohammad Humayoon Katouzian, *The Dialectic of State and Society; theory of History and politics in Iran*, translated into Persian by Alireza Tayyeb Tehran: Ney Press, 2001.

Note."Somebody believes that the historical gap between nation and government in Iran is due to some features of lasting long political despotism in Iran; others also have argued that since the concept of nation historically has been synonymous with Shari'ah (religious law) or its followers, and Shiites and at their heads, Shiite clerics, are essentially have considered non-innocent government as usurped and unlawful, and the rullers as Amaleye Jowr (the agents of oppression), this gap has been intensified. In any case, the negative understanding of government and regime in Iran has deep historical roots in the political culture." (translation from Persian book by Mashallah Ajoodani, *The Iranian Constitution*, Tehran: Akhtaran Press, p.191)

<sup>2</sup> See: Javad Tabatabaai, *Decline of Political Thought in Iran; a speech on theoretical decline in Iran*, Tehran: Kavir, 2006, p. 34-41.

<sup>3</sup> Mohammad Reza Tajik, "psycho-political Anatomy of a choice", *New Selection*, with effort of Abdolali Rezaei, Abbas Abdi, p. 84.

<sup>4</sup> Javad Tabatabaai, op. cit., pp. 148-149.

And, Javad Tabatabaai, *Introduction to Theory of Iran's Decline; Tabriz School and Modernity principles*, Tabriz: Sotoodeh, 2005, pp. 306-307.

<sup>5</sup> Hossein Bashiriye, *Introduction to Political Sociology of Iran; the Islamic Republic era*, Tehran: Negah-e Mo'aser Institution, 2002, pp. 67- 68.

However, the birth of constitutional movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was the first new attempts to limit king's power domain.<sup>1</sup> From the Constitutional Revolution onwards, despite of regenerating of despotism which has severely weakened the public sphere, gradually some public institutions were built in accordance with the patterns of the European democracies.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The Constitutional Revolution: the establishment of brittle institutions of political public realm

Thinking of politics as an action and speech in the public realm in Iran can be traced back to the historical period of the Constitutional Revolution. On the threshold of entering Iran into its modern period, the first attempts were made to establish legal institutions of the political public realm. Defeat of Iranians in the Russia-Persian War (1804- 1813) was the turning point in the history of Iran. After this failure a group of royal elites became aware of the necessity of reform. The first steps were taken in the modernization of the political system. The landmark of such attempts was a political reform to turn the absolute monarchy of Qajar dynasty into a constitutional monarchy. For the first time, on August 1906 Shah agreed to allow a parliament, and in the same year first election was held, and people- or at least a group of Iranian elites- gained recognition as public.

However the constitutional revolution didn't achieve all of its aims. A chain of events ended up with failure of this revolution. The occupation of Iran in the World War I, the continual intervention of England and Russia, and internal and international ups and downs had negative effects on the constitutional movement, and the country was in the danger of disintegration. All of these incidents led to emerging Reza Khan and establishment of the new dynasty of Pahlavi in 1925. Reza Shah has had an undeniable role in the social, economic and cultural modernization of Iran. Nevertheless the process, or its better to say, the project of modernization of Iran was an imperative project that was commanded by government from above. It means that modernization was mainly a social engineering that was implemented by the government in a forceful and authoritative manner.

During the World War II Iran was stormed and occupied by allies again. As a result of Anglo-Soviet invasion Reza Khan, having a tendency towards Germany, was forced to abdicate the throne, sent to exile, and his son Mohammad Reza came to power. At this point, for the period between September 1941 and August 1953 there was a constitutional monarchy with less pressure on the public arena. But it does not last too long, and after the coup against Mosaddegh on 19<sup>th</sup> August 1953, most of the achievements of this period were disappeared.

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 64.

### 3. Declining public sphere in Iran (1953- 1963)

It can be claimed that during a period between the Iranian Coup and the Islamic Revolution in Feb 1979 there has been an absolutist regime in Iran. As a result of the Anglo-American coup, Mohammad Mosaddegh, Prime Minister of Iran who has the main role in nationalizing oil arrested and went to trial. Hossein Fatemi the foreign affairs minister of his government tortured and executed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1954. Many of Iranian intellectuals captured, imprisoned or forced to remain silent. The political public sphere which had been strengthened after the coronation of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi weakened and crumbled away.

Pahlavi's regime after that coup was more a dictatorship than a constitutional monarchy. "The 1953 coup brought down an iron curtain on Iranian politics".<sup>1</sup> The main goal of the political system in the years between (1953- 1963) was consolidation of power.<sup>2</sup> The consolidation of power was achieved on the basis of three pillars: "1. The armed force, 2. The court patronage network, and 3. The vast state bureaucracy."<sup>3</sup> In 1957 a security organization SAVAK was established.<sup>4</sup> It was a new secret police to support the military pillar, and to keep all political activities under its surveillance. "SAVAK was the shah's "eyes and ears, and where necessary, his iron fist".<sup>5</sup>

### 4. Continual suppression of political public realm (1963- 1979)

The condition of the Iranian public sphere from the White Revolution in 1963 onwards can be described as the continuity of the process of consolidation of power. The White Revolution was a socioeconomic reform with inevitable political effects in the same direction with the concentration of power. In 1963 the shah's regime had expanded its political power over public life and was stable enough to carry out its policy. This governmental policy can be called "uneven development" which involved a contradictory policy of 1. "Socioeconomic development"<sup>6</sup> and 2. "Political underdevelopment".<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982, p. 450.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 419

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 435

<sup>4</sup> named Sazman-I Ittila'at va Amniyat-I Keshvar its acronym is SAVAK it can be translated into 'National Security and Information Organization of the Country

<sup>5</sup> Abrahamian, *op. cit.*, p. 436.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 426.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 435

It means that while the Shah was successful in the socioeconomic modernization, failed to improve and modernize institutions of the political public realm. “This failure inevitably strained the links between the government and the social structure, blocked the channels of communication between the political system and the general population, widened the gap between the ruling circle and the new social force, and, most serious of all, cut down the few bridges that had in the past connected the political establishment with the traditional social forces, especially with the bazaars and the religious authorities”.<sup>1</sup> The White Revolution led to the upheavals of June 1963. During the riots of Moharam, for the first time Khomeini proved himself, as a well-known character amongst the religious opposition groups. Although Khomeini was forced to exile and government weathered the storm, this storm reappeared more intensely in 1979.<sup>2</sup>

A quick glance at the legitimate political parties during this historical period can clarify the policy of political underdevelopment. In fact, there was an intense pressure on the political public realm and a continual attempt to eliminate the dissident groups. It seems that the process of political underdevelopment accelerated from 1963 onwards. In 1950s at least ostensibly there was a two- party political system in Iran. Two royalist parties divided parliament between themselves. Although they had no effective functions in the parliament and “were known as ‘yes’ and ‘yes sir’ parties”.<sup>3</sup> The acceleration of the policy of political underdevelopment, however, was to such an extent that in 1975 these two obedient parties assimilated into one. In 1975 the Resurgence party was announced by Shah as the only legitimate political party. The growth of the Resurgence party intensified the state control and “despite the banner of modernization... this party managed to further undo an already underdeveloped political system”.<sup>4</sup>

## 5. Children’s literature in Iran (1963- 1979): a historical overview<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 427.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 426.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 420.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 446.

<sup>5</sup> Mahmud Taaher Ahmadi, “from Children’s Book Council to the Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Adolescence (1963- 1979)”, in *The Journal of Treasure Documents*, no. 51 and 52, autumn and winter of 2003, pp. 83- 89.

The configuration of a specific modern sphere in the literature of Iran which was dedicated to children started from the outset of modernization of Iran. Step by step, from the 19th Century onwards, traditional system of education which was in the hands of clergies turned into new institutions like schools, high schools and universities. In the end, though, the traditional Islamic educational system remained but marginalized and was only dedicated to the religious education of Olama. The process of modernization of the educational system, of course, was a complicated and challenging process which can be a topic for another major research itself.

Here, for the purpose of this research, a quick glance will be taken on the condition of children's literature during the kingdom of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The year 1963 is of a great significance in this regard. As it was mentioned before the White Revolution launched in this year. The modernization of the educational system and other cultural productions for children was an essential part of this socioeconomic reform.

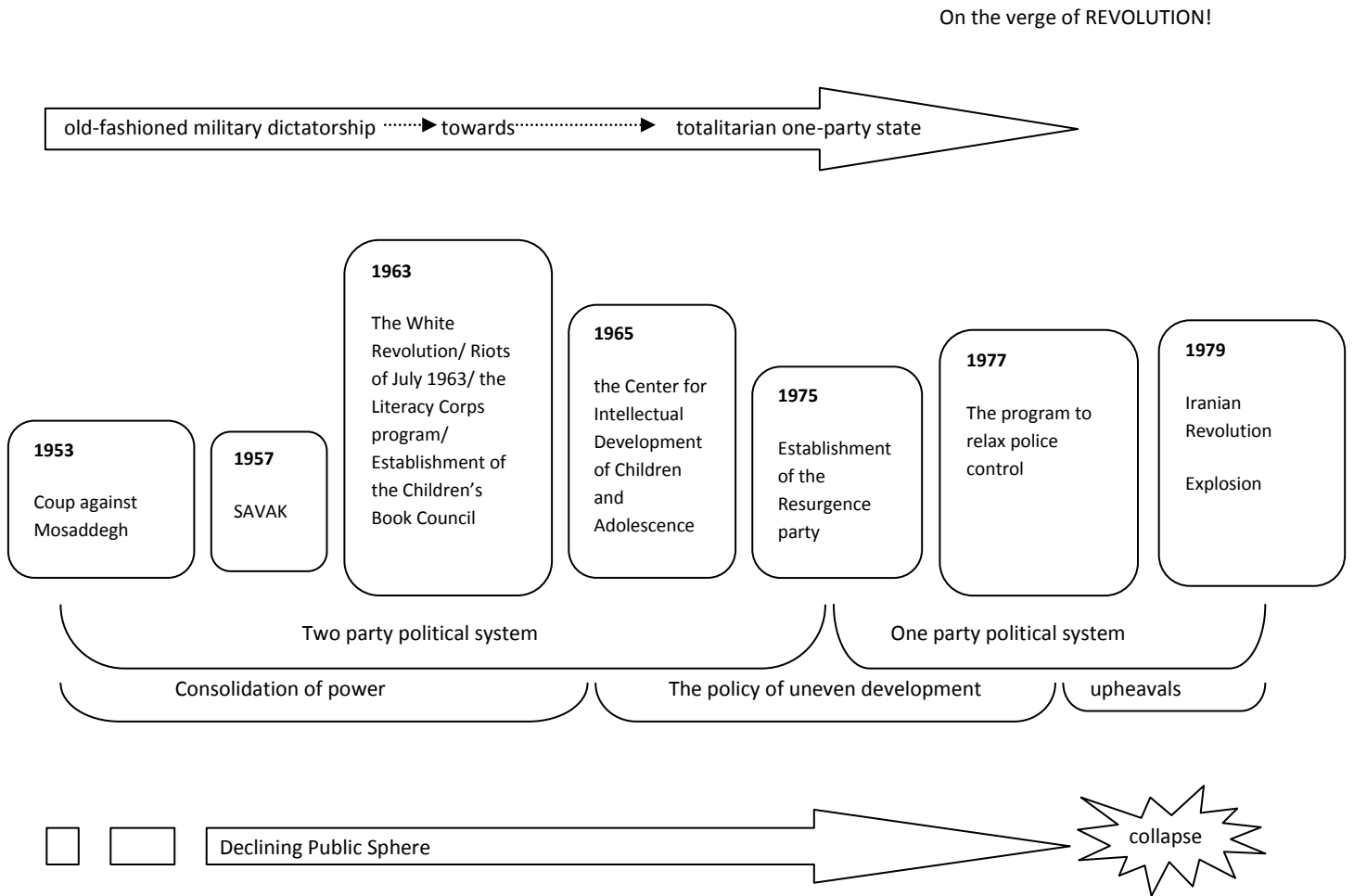
Both Reza Shah, and his son Mohammad Reza were advocates of peremptory modernization of Iran. However, cultural, social, and political obstacles decelerated the process of modernization of pedagogical organization. Needless to say, they did not deal with these obstacles through dialogue with traditional groups or public debate between government and dissident elites or intellectuals. Because of this, despite the successful referendum that was held by the regime, the White Revolution led to the upheavals of the Jun 1963. Nevertheless, the educational reforms that were made by Pahlavi's government promoted the literacy and the population of young readers increased considerably. The White Revolution and its declared aims in 1963 were obvious examples of peremptory modernization of the educational system. One of the best instances in this respect was the Literacy Corps program according to that a group of young students who had a diploma of secondary education sent to rural parts of Iran to serve as teachers and educators in the remote areas.

Because of the acceleration in the rate of the literate population particularly amongst children and adolescence the improvement in the literary productions for this age group was necessary. It was not by accident that the Children's Book Council established in January 1963. And almost two years after that 'the Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Adolescence' was inaugurated.

It is interesting to remember that this center was, in fact, a governmental institution. However, it quickly turned into a center for gathering a noticeable group of authors, poets, translators and artist who were strongly critical of governmental decisions and policies. In other words, amongst this group were those marginalized dissident intellectuals who had been deprived of speech and action in the political public realm. In the following figure the major historical events in terms of the Iranian public realm in the period between 1953 and 1979 has been portrayed.



Figure 1.1



<sup>1</sup> The figure has been derived from last two chapters of Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982.

## 6. Children's literature as a political instrument (1963- 1979)

This brief historical description indicates that the public sphere in Iran was shaking and crumbling under the hegemony of the political system. During the historical period of (1963-1979) with the centralization and consolidation of power, "the government interferes in practically all aspects of daily life".<sup>1</sup> But if political demands do not have this opportunity to be expressed and vocalized through democratic political media, it does not mean that they do not exist. In fact, "the iron curtain may have hidden the social tensions and the organized opposition, but it certainly did not succeed in eliminating them. On the contrary, the social tensions continued and intensified to explosion point, just as the opposition, despite the strait-jacket of police controls, survived to develop new ideas and new methods of translating these into concrete action".<sup>2</sup>

So it seems that in the declining public realm of Iran, a wide range of conflicts in terms of freedom, justice, independence, democracy and religion, lurks beneath the surface of the iron curtain. And the most important of them, a continual contradiction between tradition and modernity, and a growing gap between different economic classes as the result of the peremptory modernization of Iran according to the capitalist model of uneven development. The majority of traditionalists, leftists and nativists were strongly critical of the governmental policy. However, since these criticisms, conflicts and contradictions could not be manifested through the channels that normally can be considered as political media in a democratic society, the suppressed demands vocalized themselves through cultural and literary public realm.

The main problem was that the cultural or literary public sphere in Iran was very different from the literary realm of Europe in the 19th century. The political institutions of the European democracies or political public realm had their roots within the cultural public realm and came out of that context –at least as Habermas has shown<sup>3</sup> - but in Iran the political public realm or its legal institutions had copied from the European model. They had not emerged from the cultural or economic ground of Iran. It does not mean that there were not any modern cultural or economic changes, but such changes were not strong enough to create modern political institutions from within.

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 439.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 451.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Jones, "Beyond the Semantic 'Big Bang': Cultural Sociology and an Aesthetic Public Sphere (2007)", in *The Public Sphere: The Cultural Public Sphere*, vol. III, edited by Jostein Gripsrud, Hallvard Moe, Anders Molander, and Graham Murdock, Los Angeles : SAGE, 2011, p. 285.

As far as it relates to this research and its main questions, it seems that legal institutions of the political public realm in Iran were at best only a pale imitation of the European pattern. And cultural or literary public realm of Iran was not in favorable conditions to give rise to transparent rational debate to achieve a consensus on the problematic public issues. In other words, cultural or literary public realm was not ready for understanding politics in its Arentian meaning as speech and action as equal citizens in the public realm. The context of Iran lacked willingness to allow the other to speak up their ideas freely and there was a little tolerance towards opposing beliefs.

However the antagonistic feature of the political did not disappear or vanish. Debates on contradictory interests and ideas continued through the spaces and realms that were the realm of emotions and irrationality. The immaturity of the political public sphere pushed 'the political' and its antagonistic feature into an immature realm of juvenile literature. So it is not strange that one of the most irrelevant realms of politics according to the European democracy, namely children's literature, can reflect a part of the most political demands of Iranian society. It would be interesting to see how political contradictions and conflicts have vocalized through children's literature.

It seems that, in the condition of decay of the political public realm, children's literature can reveal a part of the latent and repressed political demands of, at least, a group of Iranian intellectuals. Through reading some of the texts of children's literature that have been created by dissident authors and artists in this historical period it can be shown that how latent and suppressed conflicts in the public realm have been manifested and vocalized through children's literature. To reveal these political demands and describe the process of using children's literature as a political instrument, some texts which have been written for children during the historical period of the research will be chosen and interpreted. The method that will be utilized for this purpose is semiology. In the next chapter semology or semiotics as the method of this research will be introduced briefly.

## Chapter IV

### Methodological reflections

A short review of the historical circumstances of the Iranian public realm can suggest those paths and tracks which can be followed by the researcher in the pursuit of more efficient method depending upon the particular characteristics of the context of Iran. In other words, since the chosen method can be utilized in the analysis of a certain case, challenges and problems in this regard would be more clarified in connection with the particularities of the situation of Iran. Casting light on the shadowy aspects of the Iranian public sphere (1963-1979) and the historical context of this research can help to find some guidelines and to choose a suitable method in order to answer the main questions of this research. It is under the circumstances of Iran and within the Iranian context that political meanings have been conveyed through children's literature, and political demands have been manifested through some parts of children's literature in the public arena.

The repressed demands in terms of freedom, justice, contradictions between modernity and tradition, between different economic and social classes, the status and position of women, the problem of independence and autonomy of Iran, the foreign relationships between Iran and international powers in the bipolar world, the regime's tendency towards capitalism, the critical attitudes of traditional, conservative and leftist groups towards the peremptory socioeconomic modernization according to the capitalist model, and so on, express themselves through some parts of children's literature. In other words, the signs in some of these texts which have been written ostensibly for children are the projection and the manifestation of these conflicts, contradictions, limitations in Iranian public life. They reflect, to some extent, suffocated desires of at least a group of Iranians in the declining public realm. So it seems that political meaning can be unmasked through reading some texts of children's literature.

The main goal of the present writing is to describe some methodological challenges and problems of dealing with text of children's literature to show that how they can convey political meaning. To raise some questions like: 'What are the applicable methods and techniques of text analysis which can reveal political meaning beneath the surface of texts of children's literature? How such techniques can be used to interpret and read children's book for this purpose? What are the challenges of using such methods? Depending on the particular characteristics of the situation of Iran, what are the major problems using such methods of analysis? What are the problems and difficulties of data selection and corpus construction in this respect? What are the flaws and weaknesses of these techniques? Step by step, in response to these questions a process might be formed through which a move from method towards methodology would be possible.

A quick look at the main goal and key questions in the previous part indicates that the emphasis would be on the importance of the process of meaning making. The interpretive or hermeneutic character of inquiry seems apparent. The researcher not only should be familiar with the language of the texts but also she needs to identify the codes of Iranian culture to penetrate beneath the surface of texts of children's book and to reveal political meaning which is assumed that has been latent in it.<sup>1</sup>

The process of interpretation here indicates that qualitative text analysis might be more suitable here. Of course there are different kinds of qualitative method of text analysis like: The question is which one would be more preferable? It seems that amongst various methods of qualitative text analysis such as discourse analysis, hermeneutics, rhetoric and semiotics, semiotics<sup>2</sup> could be more in harmony with the specific concern of the researcher.<sup>3</sup> In following parts, some reasons for choosing semiotics as the preferable method of text analysis would be clarified, different mechanisms for text analysis in semiology would be introduced briefly, and some challenges and problems in using these techniques would be discussed as well.

## 1. "The pursuit of signs":<sup>4</sup> semiotics as a qualitative method of text analysis

As it was mentioned before here it is important to show that texts have a surface of children's literature while beneath this surface there are political messages and meanings. Under the mask of some productions of children's literature parts of suppressed voice of the opposing public can be heard. In order to understand the process of meaning-making and reveal latent political messages it is necessary to think of texts of children's book as an assemblage of signs, to think of signs and the meaning to which they refer.

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin Hammersly, 'Deconstructing the Qualitative- Quantitative Research', in *Mixing Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Research*, ed. by Julia Brannen, London: Ashgate, 2003 , p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Despite some differences two concepts of 'semiotics' and 'semiology' in this text have the same meaning.

<sup>3</sup> However, semiotics is not incompatible with the use of quantitative techniques. Look at: Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: the Basics*, London: Routledge, 2002, p. 144.

<sup>4</sup> The name of the book by Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981.

Semiotics as a method of qualitative text analysis seems well suited for dealing with texts in this way. Semiotics involves “reflection on signs and meaning”<sup>1</sup> and a semiotician “attempts to make explicit the implicit knowledge”<sup>2</sup> which is hidden in a text. Here “the problem of the sign and its varieties would be the center of an intellectual inquiry”.<sup>3</sup> From a semiotic standpoint every phenomena can be considered as a sign or a system of signs which have a meaning behind it. Human beings live in a world of signs and they create signs to make the connection with each other and with reality. Every text is an assemblage of signs which need to be interpreted to have meaning. A text does not simply convey apparent and obvious meaning which refers to an already shared reality. There is not a fixed, stable, meaning for any text or practice which is firmly fastened to the obvious reality. Instead, to understand the meaning of a text one should be familiar with cultural and social codes and conventions of the context.<sup>4</sup>

Here, in particular, from a semiotic point of view, texts of children’s literature cannot be studied simply according to the title has been attached to it. The children’s book can be full of signs with latent meanings. These meanings can be understood in terms of social, cultural, political, historical concerns of the interpreter. In order to reveal such meanings a reader needs to know about codes and conventions in a particular social, cultural, political and historical context. “The task of semiotics is to describe those conventions that underlie even the most ‘natural’ modes of representation”<sup>5</sup> and by doing so they shed light on the hidden meanings.

Semiotics as a method has its roots in linguistics. In fact it “takes the structural linguistics as its methodological model... linguistics would serve as an example and its basic concepts would be applied to other domains of social and cultural life”.<sup>6</sup> In other words, “social and cultural world can be thought as a series of sign systems comparable with language”.<sup>7</sup> It was Saussure as a linguist who “postulated the existence of a general science of signs, or semiology, of which linguistics would form only one part”.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, although semiology borrows its basic concepts and techniques from linguistics, it goes beyond the linguistic concerns. Its concentration would not be on morphemes or phonemes. It pays more attention to second-order language. The focus would be on different units or segments. “Those larger fragments of discourse referring to objects or episodes whose meaning underlies language, but can never exist independently of it. Semiology is therefore perhaps destined to be absorbed into a trans-linguistics. The material of which may be the myth, narrative, journalism, or on the other hand objects of our civilization, in so far as they are spoken (through press, prospectus, interview, conversation)”.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 22, 23.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Roland Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, trans. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, New York: Hill and Wang, 1967, p. 11.

Language, nevertheless, has been the most influential and important system of signs which has been known so far. Therefore, as it was mentioned before, semiotic analysis has borrowed its basic terminology and analytic techniques from linguistics to create a sufficiently general and homogeneous basis for its methods.<sup>1</sup> Barth, for instance, has borrowed four main headings of his analysis from structural linguistics: and has tried to introduce a systematic and organized way for semiotic analysis of different sign systems.<sup>2</sup>

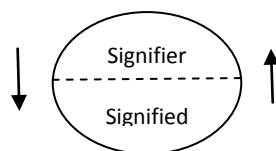
This paper, however, is not going to detail all the elements of semiology or go to the depth of all its philosophical foundation. Since methodological challenges are the main priority here, the concentration would be on the more practical techniques of semiotic text analysis. Those techniques which can be applied by the researcher to deal with a text in an organized and systematic manner. However, it involves a brief description of some key concepts of semiology, and in some parts, it would be necessary to enter into a concise philosophical explanation. The concept of the sign and its components are at the heart of any semiotic analysis. In the following part, a short description has been provided about this key concept.

## 2. A model of the sign

In order to start a semiotic analysis it is important to have a perception of the sign. A model of the sign of course can be suggested first of all for analytic purpose. Saussure and Pierce have offered two different models of the sign. Saussurian model is a dyadic or a two-part model and Piercian model is a triad. Here the dyadic model would be described.

“In Saussurean terminology, the signified and the signifier are the components of the sign”.<sup>3</sup> While “The signifier is commonly interpreted as the material or physical form of the sign... the signified is the concept to which signifier refers... the relationship between the signifier and signified is referred to as signification”.<sup>4</sup> According to this division, with a quick glance, a signifier refers to the expression or sign vehicle, while signified refers to content, sense or meaning. Within the system of traffic light signs, for instance, each light is a signifier, while the meaning which is conveyed by the light is signified.<sup>5</sup> In a written text, words, sentences and paragraphs, and in short, all units which have been written and can be seen and read on the surface of a text are signifiers. The meanings and concepts of those written units which a text refers to them are signifieds. Saussure’s dyadic or two-part model of sign can be illustrated like this:<sup>6</sup>

Figure 1.



---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> “I. Language and Speech, II. Signified and Signifier, III. Syntagm and System, IV. Denotation and Connotation”. Look at: *ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: the Basics*, London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 18, 19.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 18.

However, such outlook is rather simplistic because as it was mentioned before distinction between the signifier and the signified is more useful for analytical purpose. In fact, these two components of a sign “are inseparable as two sides of a piece of paper”.<sup>1</sup> In a system of signification “There can be no content without an expression, or expressionless content; neither can be an expression without a content, or content-less expression”.<sup>2</sup> Both signified and signifier have form and content and both of them take part in the process of meaning making.

According to Saussure, the relationship between the signifier and the signified is not inherent and intrinsic and it is not motivated as well. This relationship is arbitrary and is determined only by codes and conventions and traditions. It means that on the one hand, the signifier doesn't simply refer to things but it refers to concepts in the mind. On the other hand, these concepts have been determined by codes of a sign system which are culturally and socially constructed. In order to know the meaning of a sign, then, the reader needs to be familiar with such codes and conventions. At the same time, lack of any intrinsic relation between signifier and signified open the way for the multiplicity of meaning and proliferation of interpretation.

### 3. Semiotics and analysis of structures of a text<sup>3</sup>

In semiotics, structural analysis can provide a framework by which a text can be read and interpreted according to structural relations between different units of it. It means that for a semiotician the first task is “to divide up narrative and define the smallest narrative units... meaning must be criterion of the unit: it is the functional nature of certain segments of the [text]... that makes them units”.<sup>4</sup> This process can be called “structural reduction”.

So in structural analysis of a text, units can be chosen according to their functions in the text and these functions can be seen from the point of view of an analyst. Specifically the meaning which is the criterion for choosing a unit could be different in different research projects. It means that inside every unit there is the possibility to find other units or segments and the level of analysis would be decided by the interpreter. For instance, if a short story has been considered as a text for semiotic analysis. The story as a whole and its subject matter can be considered as a unit. Inside of this narrative, of course, there are other units like, chapters, paragraphs, sentences and so on, each of these segments can be chosen by different researchers of a text for different interpretive purposes. So, the choice of minimal units depends on the standpoint of the researcher and the purpose of the research.

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 92.



After structural reduction and choosing the minimal units of it, the text can be analyzed according to: 1. Present units and 2. Absent units. This division comprises two dimensions of analysis which are different and at the same time closely related to each other. Present units and structural analysis of their combination could be described in terms of *syntagmatic analysis*. Absent units which have been excluded or marginalized from the text are the main concern of *paradigmatic analysis*. These two aspects of structural analysis have been introduced briefly in the next parts.

### 3- 1. Syntagmatic analysis<sup>1</sup> and the present units

Syntagmatic analysis can be described in terms of the present units. In every text there are different kinds of combination between units which can be seen in the text. The way these segments have been positioned in a text would be on the basis of conventions and codes which decide the possibilities of combination. The convention or rule according to which signs are combined in a text has a strong effect on meaning. The study of these structures is the main concern of syntagmatic analysis. In other words, the syntagmatic analysis involves revealing those conventions which are beneath the surface of a text and the effects of such conventions on the meaning which are conveyed by text. How “this and this and this” units have been positioned as a chain to convey meaning. Syntagmatic analysis can reveal the rules of combinations at two levels of signifier and signified.

At the level of signifier, for instance, the syntagmatic analysis of a sentence which has been divided into words as its minimal units, can describe how the name, adjective, adverb, verb, and other words positioned in a sentence according to English grammar. Obviously, different combination conveys different meanings. As the combination of words in an interrogative sentence is different from imperative sentence and it conveys different meaning. Syntagmatic analysis can be used to reveal conventions and structures beneath a narrative of a story as well. Here, there is a *sequential* relationship between events which shapes *grammar of the plot*. And syntagmatic analysis, for instance, can illustrate these sequential relationships according to the role and the function of different characters in a specific genre of the narrative.

At the level of the signified syntagmatic analysis can be applied to reveal *conceptual relations* between different units. Conceptual relationships have a strong effect on the process of meaning making as well. For instance, “the convention of expository prose in English... is the three-part structure of: introduction, main body and conclusion”.<sup>2</sup> Feminist thinkers have problematized this structure and consider it as the characteristic of ‘masculine’ order.<sup>3</sup> So feminist analysts by utilizing syntagmatic analysis at the level of signified can show that how syntagmatic relationships reveal deeper male dominant conventions which are hidden in the text. In this way they can point to the implicit patriarchal meaning of it.

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 84, 85.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 85.

### 3- 2. Paradigmatic analysis<sup>1</sup> and absent units

The paradigmatic analysis goes beyond the syntagmatic relation and surface structure of text. It searches “paradigms which underlie the manifest content of texts”.<sup>2</sup> It reveals those parts which are excluded from the text. Those units which are absent. “A paradigm is a set of associated signifiers or signifieds which are all members of a defining category, but in which each is significantly different... [here] the choice of one unit exclude the choice of another”.<sup>3</sup> The main concern of paradigmatic analysis, therefore, is the substitution relationships between different units. It is the matter of making a choice between “this or this or this” unit. By choosing one signifier rather than another, negative and positive connotations of a signifier can be understood by an analyst. Absence of other possible substitutions for a signifier conveys meaning. So, in comparison with syntagmatic analysis which emphasizes the co-presentation of signifiers or signified, the paradigmatic relationship can provide an analytical tool to know about the effects of absence of particular units. For instance, when a particular subject matter is chosen by an author it excludes other subject matter and it can create a very different narrative.

Paradigmatic analysis can involve identification of binary or polar semantic oppositions. It shows the marginalized signifiers according to the binary categorizations. Such oppositions are vital to human cognition, but they are not natural, intrinsic or inherent qualities. Paradigmatic analysis denaturalizes them and sheds light on the effect of these polar oppositions on meaning. So, pair signifiers like: us versus them, self versus other, public versus private, male versus female, mind versus body, nature versus culture, and so on will come under scrutiny. Through problematization of such binary oppositions and dualisms in the text a semiologist reveals dominant paradigmatic choice and its effects on meaning.<sup>4</sup>

Binary oppositions indicate cultural codes which are deep-rooted in the political, historical and social context. And it seems that these oppositions can reveal additional vertical relationship between the paired signifiers in a text as well. Around such binary relationships other linked can be found which are in connection to and in parallel with such oppositions. So an alignment in a text can be shaped around these binary oppositions. For instance, feminists have described that how a conceptual system on the basis of opposition between man and woman in a text points to cultural code. And at the same time, some parallel arrangements on the basis of this dualism can be shaped. Consequently, a pair signifiers of male versus female in a text extends beyond this male female dualism and leads to alignments like male-mind-rationality versus female-body-irrationality.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 98.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 101- 106.

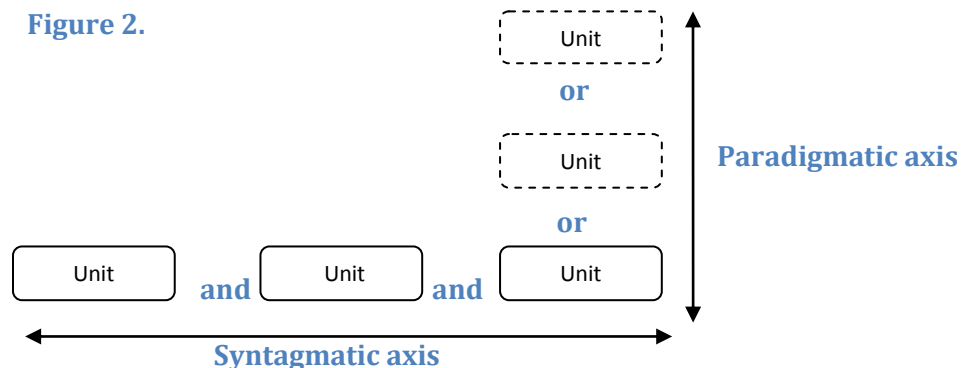
<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 106.

On the other hand, binary relationships indicate the unequal weight of signifiers which can point to the *markedness* of a sign. Unmarked sign indicates the presence of an attribute while marked sign indicates absence of that attribute. Marked signs most of the time convey a sense of being different, out of ordinary, norm-deviation and the special case.<sup>1</sup> Markedness can be traced back to dominant historical dichotomies and has its cultural and historical origins as well. Markedness can be explicit or implicit in a text. If the binary oppositions are apparent it would be obvious and explicit. It would be implicit when the frequency of using a marked sign or distribution of it throughout a text is less or it is absent from it.<sup>2</sup>

### 3- 3. Inseparability of paradigmatic and syntagmatic analysis

In the structural analysis of a text, in order to reveal these codes and conventions according to which a text has been shaped both dimensions of structural analysis, namely syntagmatic analysis and paradigmatic analysis, should be considered together. These two aspects are often illustrated by two axes in the figure below:<sup>3</sup>

Figure 2.



As it has been presented in this figure, paradigmatic and syntagmatic analysis are inseparable from each other. They are two kinds of analysis which complement each other and in connection with each other can contribute to understanding the meaning of a text. So “the analyst is likely to need to move back and forth between these two approaches as the analysis proceeds”.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 110- 114.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 83.

## 4. Semiotics and “challenging the literal”<sup>1</sup>

*Literal language* has defined as a kind of language which represents things neutrally and as they are. By contrast, “*figurative language* is a language which doesn’t mean what it says”.<sup>2</sup> Semiology challenges and problematizes these definitions. Language is not like a transparent and clear glass between mind and reality or between two minds. It is not a neutral medium which conveys a fixed and apparent meaning.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, a semiologist does not draw a sharp distinction between literal and figurative language and figurative language cannot be banished from a text.

The figurative language of a text may seem neutral and literal for those readers who are insiders of a particular culture or sub-culture. But a semiotician tries to problematize this neutral and literal perception of a text and reveal figurative language which seems clear and literal at first glance. By challenging the idea of transparency of a text the *figures of speech* and *master tropes* in the text might be recognized and interpreted by an analyst. So master tropes like metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony should be taken into consideration.<sup>4</sup>

The meaning of figurative language can be understood in terms of cultural, social, political and historical codes and conventions which goes beyond the linguistic concerns. It seems that, identifying figurative tropes in a text can help to highlight underlying theme and framework. They can point to ideologies, world-views beneath the text.<sup>5</sup> For instance Derrida shows how philosophers have traditionally referred to the mind and the intellect in terms of tropes based on the presence or absence of light”.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 127.

## 5. Denotation and connotation: first-order and second-order systems

As it was mentioned in the previous part, semiotics denaturalizes literal language and doesn't think of language as a transparent medium. Signifier and signified are not identical and language of a text cannot be purely literal which transmits obvious meaning. It conveys ideological, cultural, social and political meaning. The difference between *connotation* and *denotation* can be seen from this standpoint.

While "denotation tends to be described as the literal, obvious or commonsense meaning of a sign... connotation refers to the socio-cultural and personal associations (ideological, emotional, etc.) meaning of the sign".<sup>1</sup> The semiotic method tries to go beyond the denotations and reveal connotations. It moves from the first level of interpretation to the higher level. While "at the first level of analysis of denotation the reader requires only linguistic and anthropological knowledges, at the second level of connotation the reader requires further cultural knowledge".<sup>2</sup>

A text as "a system of signification comprises [two planes]: a plane of expression... a plane of content... and that the signification coincides with relation of two planes"<sup>3</sup>. The system of signification itself can act as a sign for another system which conveys another meaning. In other words, any sign in a text can act as a signifier which refers to other signified. According to this, there is a first-order system of signification which does not simply refer to a transparent meaning, but refers to another signification system or second-order system. A semiotic analysis, therefore, can shape a process which moves towards the higher level of signification. A move from denotation to connotation, from literal to rhetorical, and finally to ideology and *myth*. At the level of metalanguage "myth is the means by which a culture naturalizes, or renders invisible, its own norms and ideology... the semiologist's task is to demystify or 'unmask' this process of naturalization by drawing attention to the constructed nature of... the text".<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>2</sup> Gemma Penn, 'Semiotic Analysis of Still Image', in *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound*, ed. by Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell, London: SAGE Publications, 2000, p. 230.

<sup>3</sup> Barthes, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

<sup>4</sup> Penn, *op. cit.*, p. 231.

## 6. Challenges of corpus construction

In the semiotic analysis “the corpus<sup>1</sup> is a finite collection of materials, which is determined in advance by the analyst, with some inevitable arbitrariness, and on which she is going to work”.<sup>2</sup> Productions of children’s literature in Iran during (1963- 1979) include a wide range of different texts. Due to the limitations of this project, and because of the qualitative approach and emphasis on the process of meaning making, quality precedes quantity and the process of data analysis is far more important than data selection.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the emphasis would be on the “purposive nature of selection”.<sup>4</sup> It means that data should be chosen in a way which is more in harmony with the direction and the aim of the research.

According to Barthes in order to construct a good corpus it is important to build a *simulacrum* of the objects under observation.<sup>5</sup> For this purpose, the researcher should accept “a limiting principle... of relevance... [namely] gathering data from one point of view only... [and] keeping only the features associated with this point of view from the heterogeneous mass of the facts”.<sup>6</sup> The corpus “must be as homogeneous as possible... homogeneous in substance ... and homogeneous in time”.<sup>7</sup> Homogeneity in substance means that “a corpus should comprise only one and the same type of document”.<sup>8</sup> And homogeneity in time indicates that “the corpus must keep as close as possible to the synchronic sets. [Therefore] a varied but temporally limited corpus will be preferable to a narrow corpus stretched over a length of time”.<sup>9</sup>

The reality, however, is very complex<sup>10</sup> and due to the particular purposes of this study some of these criteria cannot be met. As it was mentioned before, the main aim of this paper is to find a method which enables the researcher to show that how suppressed political demands in the Iranian public realm have been manifested through the texts of children’s literature. So the main aim here is not providing a data collection which is the representative of children’s literature as a whole in this historical period. A quick look at productions of children’s literature between 1963 and 1979 in Iran shows that they can be divided into three major categories:

1. Governmental productions or formal productions which are under the direct control of the regime. For instance school books or educational books for children.

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin W. Bauer and Bas Aarts, ‘Constructing a Research Corpus’, in *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: a practical handbook*, ed. by W. Bauer and George Gaskell, London: Sage publication, 2000, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Barthes, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> Bauer and Aarts, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 23

<sup>5</sup> Barthes, op. cit., p. 95.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 97, 98.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p. 97.

2. Semi-formal productions which are under the control of government indirectly. They are not published and produced by the governmental educational system directly. However the main aim of these productions is entertainment, recreation and amusement so they do not seem relevant to manifestation of political demands.
3. A strong stream of children's literature which has been created by Iranian intellectuals. Although a considerable part of the literary production of this stream has been published by formal and governmental institutions like 'the center for the intellectual development of children and adolescents', the main aim of these productions seems primarily political. The addressee of the message of these productions is the Iranian public. Thus these literary works try to communicate with adults not just children in the declining public realm of Iran. These productions seem more relevant to the purpose of this research and the focus would be on them.

In order to construct a corpus here, the texts can be chosen from third category. Of course it doesn't mean that political meaning and message cannot be found in other categories, but the third one is interwoven with those political demands which have been repressed by the government in the Iranian public sphere.

The emphasis on Iranian intellectuals is due to the specific circumstances of the Iranian public realm.<sup>1</sup> In fact, a researcher who is going to deal with the political demands of the Iranian people will face a key question: How public demands can be found where under the pressure of totalitarian regime it is almost impossible to find the public opinion in its organized form as it is in a democratic society? Therefore, to have access to political demands, the focus would be on the demands of intellectuals as influential public features. Particularly those intellectuals who are critical of governmental policies. It seems a reductionist outlook, however, and intellectuals's demands cannot cover all demands of the public of Iran, but it can at least put some limitation on a numerous formless and atomized political requests in the crumbling public realm of Iran. Yet, despite of the importance of the dissident intellectuals for data selection, the emphasis would not be on them as writers or their intention. Instead, the focus would be on the texts themselves.

The substances of texts can consist short story, drama and poetry. For every genre a separate corpus can be shaped to make it more homogenous. Although since the focus is on a historical period of almost two decades choosing temporally limited corpus would be particularly at odds with the purpose of this research. Therefore it seems that the criteria for a good corpus, at least according to Barthes, have not been met here, and the constructed corpus probably would not be a good one since it is a narrow one stretched over a length of time.

---

<sup>1</sup> "The twenty-five-year repression produced a new intelligentsia that formulate ideas far more radicals than... [their predecessors]". Look at: Abrahamian, op. cit., p. 451.

## 7. Flaws and weaknesses of semiotic analysis

It seems that semiotics in this paper has been idealized as a method of text analysis while there are considerable flaws in this respect. "Semiotics is not widely institutionalized as an academic discipline",<sup>1</sup> and it is an informal method of analysis.<sup>2</sup> It has been criticized because of the extension of methods of linguistics to cover analysis of different systems of signs and at the different levels of analysis.<sup>3</sup>

The issue of subjectivity in semiotic method indicates that the condition of analyst has a strong effect on the result of the research. So the semiotic interpretation can be under the influence of the personal situation of the interpreter like psychological and emotional circumstances of the analyst. The capability of analyst has profound effects on the quality of analysis as well. It raises the question of "possibility of establishing consistency and reliability, in the form of agreement among analysts".<sup>4</sup> Consequently, it can be claimed that "semiology is only capable of... impressionistic insight into the construction of meaning".<sup>5</sup>

Semiotic analysis, instead of demystification and revealing the hidden meaning of the text, can end up with the abstraction and mystification. "Quest for hidden meanings and myths can blind the researcher to surface details and structures".<sup>6</sup> Particular emphasis on connotation and signified prevent the researcher from seeing the denotation and the signifier. So the obvious, literal and common sense can escape analyst's notice.

It is not clear that when the process of semiotic interpretation would be complete and when the researcher can stop the process of demystification which seems endless.<sup>7</sup> While in semiology the emphasis is on the denaturalization and problematization of the representation of reality, this aim cannot be met easily. On the one hand, a researcher needs to be familiar with the particular cultural and social codes and conventions to be able to interpret a system of signs. On the other hand though, "membership of a culture involves taking for granted many of its dominant ideas",<sup>8</sup> which stands in the way of problematization and denaturalization.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Chandler, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Bauer, Martin W. George Gaskell Martin and Nicholas C. Allum. 'Quality, Quantity and Knowledge Interests: Avoiding Confusions'. in *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: a practical handbook*, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Chandler, op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Penn, op. cit., p. 240.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>8</sup> Chandler, op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 146.



At the same time there are major weaknesses here in terms of data selection. The emphasis on intellectuals in order to choose particular texts of children's literature in Iran (1963-1979) leads to a reductionist outlook which reduces public demands to intellectual demands and can have negative effects on the outcome of research. Moreover, the different historical context of almost two decades between 1963 and 1979 can challenge the idea of synchronicity of structural semiotic analysis.

Therefore here there is no reason to believe that the researcher would be an ideal reader or super reader and the technique which has been utilized by her would be the ideal one. Revealing the meaning involves the interpretive act of the researcher as an agent in the social cultural and historical context. "The act of reading a text... is a constructive process... [by which] meaning is generated in the interaction of the reader with material".<sup>1</sup> The process of sense making and "act of interpretation does not necessarily... [lead to] an accurate understanding of"<sup>2</sup> the texts. Researcher's reading is not only a historical practice but also the cultural, social and psychological one.<sup>3</sup> So, the analyst should accept and support the proliferation of meanings and interpretations without considering them as obstacles to knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Penn, op. cit., p. 231.

<sup>2</sup> Culler, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 48.

## Chapter V

### The semiotic analysis of two short stories by Samad Behrangi<sup>1</sup>

Samad Behrangi was a well-known teacher and writer for children. He was a dissident intellectual and an outspoken critic of the governmental policies. While Pahlavi's regime has been known as a government which followed capitalist patterns of development, Behrangi had strong leftist tendencies. However, he did not participate in armed struggle against the government directly, he was involved in social and cultural activities to criticize the status quo throughout his life. Because of the restrictions and limitations of political activity, he directed his effort to use his literary and artistic works to give expression to his voices of dissent and protest.

He was a leftist writer who has utilized children's literature to express parts of his political views and opinions through his stories for children. Many of adults and children in today's Iran are familiar with his works and probably hardly anyone can be found who have not heard about Samad's life and his most famous story 'the little black fish'.

Apart from the artistic dimensions of his works, Samad tried to use children's literature instrumentally for his political purposes, to awaken the people of the lower classes to the injustice and inequalities in the remote villages and rural parts of Iran. He worked as a teacher for many years, specifically in the villages of the East Azarbaijan in the Turkish province of Iran where his birthplace was. His political beliefs have been reflected in his stories and it seems that by using semiology as a method of text analysis some of these political and social tendencies and ideas can be interpreted and understood. In other words, by interpreting some of his short stories it can be described how children's literature has been used as a political instrument, and the political demands of Behrangi as a famous leftist writer has been manifested under the pressure of an absolutist regime (1963- 1979).

---

<sup>1</sup> The main idea of this chapter has been derived from:  
Mohammadi, Mohammad Hadi and Ali Abbasi, *Samad the Structure of a Myth*, Tehran: Chista, 2001.

## 1. Who was Samad Behrangî?<sup>1</sup>

During any historical period there are prominent authors who have gone beyond the literary value of their artistic works. They can be known as public characters whose biography have been interwoven with myths and legends . Samad Behrangî may not be a legendary writer judged by his writing, but his character within the political and social context of Iran in a certain historical period has been accepted by a considerable group of Iranian people as a mythical figure.<sup>2</sup> The choice of two short stories for children which have been written by him has not been made accidentally or unintentionally. Samad is a well-known writer particularly because of his literary and cultural activities for children in the Iranian public realm. He has had a specific public feature and occupy a particular position in children's literature in the historical period of this research (1963- 1979).

Samad was born in July 1939 in Charandab one of the southern districts in the city of the Tabriz, the capital of the north-western Iranian province of East Azarbaijan. So his mother tongue was Turkish and he was born and grew up in the Turkish area of Iran. His father was a laborer and his family was of the lower economic class. Samad was born in a family of eleven children, amongst them only six children survived, but despite all difficulties and challenges he succeeded in his education. During the national movement and the coup against Mosaddegh he was in high school. He graduated from the teacher training academy in 1957 and started working as a teacher in the remote villages of Azarbaijan. In fact, teaching children of the rural regions in the East Azarbaijan in Iran and educating those young boys and girls who were deprived of learning facilities, became his lifelong concern during his short lifetime.

As it was pointed out, Behrangî has been known as a leftist activist and intellectual. He was familiar with the leftist political trends that were strong in Tabriz at that time. He had a deep emotional attachment to the Turkish folklore too, and many of his stories for children have been written in the Turkish language or inspired by Turkish legends. However, he was not a secessionist but more a nativist whose local concern was intertwined with independence of Iran, particularly from the capitalist campaign in the bipolar world of his time. Because of his concern for the progress of Turkish language, he tried to collect and rewrite some of the Turkish legends and myths of Azerbaija. He spent almost eleven years as a teacher in the villages of Azarbaijan.

---

<sup>1</sup> The information of this part has been translated from Persian. See: Asad Behrangî, *The complete works of Samad Behrangî*, vol. 1, Tabriz: Behrangî, 2002, pp. 3- 10.

<sup>2</sup> See: Mohammad Hadi Mohammadi, Ali Abbasi, *Samad the Structure of a Myth*, Tehran: Chista, 2001.

On the 8th of September, at the age of 29, his body was found in the river Aras on the border between Iran and the Republic of Azarbaijan. His death has been known as a suspicious death by many who thought that he had been drowned by the regime because of his political beliefs. Samad Behrangi was called 'Moalleme Tudeha', which can be translated as 'the teacher of the masses'. It means that he was more than just the teacher of children. Many of the Turkish names of the main characters of his stories became popular throughout Iran and Iranians chose them as the name of their sons and daughters.<sup>1</sup>

Behrangi was strongly critical of the governmental educational system. He believed that children's literature is not only a matter of entertainment and even gaining knowledge, but children's literature, in his opinion, had a political and social commitment. To him, a writer who created the literary work for children should make the children aware of inequalities and injustices and other social and political issues in the children's social environment. The writer of children's literature, then, bore a political responsibility. And literary products for children were committed to political aims and should be used instrumentally for political purposes.

Behrangi, in one of his articles 'On Children's Literature', suggests that a writer of children's literature should be aware of two key points: "the first point is that children's literature must build a bridge between the colorful world of carefree and sweet dreams of childhood and the dark and gloomy world of adults who are entangled in the bitter and painful realities of the social life... and the second point is that children's literature should introduce a scientific, exact world view to children which acts as a criterion according to which children can evaluate the changeable and unstable moral social issues in different conditions".<sup>2</sup>

'The little black fish' is the most famous story by Samad inside and outside Iran, particularly because of its graphic design. It was Farshid Mesghali, the graphic designer of the book, who won the First Graphic Prize in the Sixth International Children's Books' Fair in Bologna and the Honorary Diploma, in Bratislava Biannual, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and finally the Hans Christian Andersen award for illustration of the book in 1974. These rewards led the little black fish to be known at the international level and in many countries. This story has been translated and distributed in different languages too.

Behrangi's works can be classified into various categories: fictions, realistic style, fables, and he was very interested in the folk legends and myths of Azerbaijan. Samad's stories for children include such stories as: 'One peach, a thousand peaches', 'Ouldooz and the crows', 'Ouldooz and the talking doll', 'Koroglu and the bold Hamzeh', '24 restless hours' or '24 hours adrift', 'The beetroot-seller boy', 'Talkhon', 'The myth of affection', 'The little black fish', and many other poems, articles and letters.

---

<sup>1</sup> See: Asad Behrangi, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Samad Behrangi, *The Collection of Samad Behrangi's Articles*, Tehran: Rouzbehan, 1980, pp. 122- 123. Has been translated from Persian by the researcher.

Behrangi and his political tendencies are not unknown for many Iranian people. His public character, his biography and his works, during the upheavals of 1979 and even in today's Iran, still have a significant position.

In this chapter, the main aim is to show how the political ideals and ideas of Behrangi as a dissident writer have been reflected in his stories for children. This aim can be achieved, to some extent, by interpretation of only two short stories by him. It is important to remember that, the works and activities of Behrangi cannot be reduced to such a narrow realm. So it seems totally inadequate to concentrate on only two texts which have been written by him. However, this thesis is not about Samad Behrangi himself. The main theme of this research is to show the process of politicization of children's literature in the declining public realm of Iran (1963- 1979), and these two short stories by Behrangi are used as the examples of utilizing children's literature as a political instrument to give expression to part of the political demands of Iranians.

In the following parts, two short stories by Behrangi will be interpreted according to the semiotic method of text analysis. The aim is to show how Samad Behrangi by utilizing children's literature and children's language, has manifested his political beliefs and ideas. These two stories are:

1. The little black fish<sup>1</sup>
2. Twenty-four restless hours or, 24 hours adrift<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The little black fish: a semiotic analysis

Semantic analysis, as it was described in the previous chapter, is a qualitative method of text analysis which help the researcher to uncover hidden meanings of the text. A text can be seen as an assemblage of signs which consist of signifier and signified. The components of a sign which are signifier and signified both play main roles in the process of meaning construction. Signifier can be more relevant to the form, to the present units and to the structure of the text, while signified is more in connection with deeper layers of meaning, content and absent units. Form and content, however, are inseparable from each other, and both of them are intertwined with the process of meaning making.

---

<sup>1</sup> See English translation of "The Little Black Fish" on the link below:  
[www.iranchamber.com/literature/sbehrangi/.../the\\_little\\_black\\_fish.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/literature/sbehrangi/.../the_little_black_fish.php)

<sup>2</sup> See English translation of "24 restless hours" on the link below:  
[www.iranchamber.com/literature/sbehrangi/works/24\\_restless\\_hours.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/literature/sbehrangi/works/24_restless_hours.php)

Syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis which explained in the previous chapter on methodology can be utilized by the researcher to interpret the structure, the form, and the relationship between present units, on the one hand, and the content, the absent units and the dominant paradigmatic choices which have been made by the author, on the other hand. So syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis can be used in the interpretation of the text of 'little black fish'. In addition to syntagmatic and paradigmatic interpretation, the semantic analysis of the text can go beneath the surface of denotations and penetrate deep into the second-order analysis of connotation, ideology and myth. This method is also utilized concerning the analysis of this story.

Now, according to this brief methodological reminder, the semiotic interpretation of 'the little black fish' can be started. The little black fish is a story which characters are animals. It has a modern language, and different characters of the narrative do not use sayings or proverbs during their conversations, which is common in the traditional literary texts in Persian. Despite this, however, the structure of the story seems more like a fable or allegory. It is a story about the adventurous journey of the little black fish from a small pool which is her home to the sea. The story is narrated by an old fish for 12 thousand of his/her children and grandchildren. According to the semiotic method of text analysis and in order to point to the political meaning of this story, several steps have been taken in the following parts:

The first step is a structural analysis of the story of the little black fish which contains the interpretation of the structure of the plot, syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis of the text to see what the structure of the story or the grammar of the plot has to say in terms of latent political or social meanings of the text. The second step includes semantic analysis, recognition of denotations and connotations to uncover the other dimensions of political messages which are hidden beneath the surface of the narrative. In other words, an attempt has been made to show how Behrangī as a dissident writer has expressed his political and social ideas and ideals through the story of the little black fish.

## **2- 1. Structural analysis of the little black fish**

In order to start structural analysis of the text of the little black fish, first of all the narrative should be divided into specific units or segments according to the purpose of this research. In other words, the aim of semiotic interpretation in this part is to show how Samad Behrangī has vocalized his political dissatisfaction and discontent through the relation between different units of the narrative or through the structure of his story.

The main structure of the plot of this story has been formed on the basis of one storyteller who narrates the story of the little black fish for thousands of other little fishes. So at first the political or social meaning which can be conveyed by this structure will be described. Then, in the next step the focus would be on the structure of the story of the little black fish's journey as it has been narrated by the storyteller. In this part some units have been divided and specified according to the different phases of the journey of the little black fish. Then according to the divided segments and the sequential connections between them syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis are provided.

## 2- 2. A monologue: one speaker and twelve thousand listeners

The main structure of the plot has been built on the basis of one narrator who tells the tale of the little black fish for the masses of immature fishes. This structure can act as a sign which conveys political meaning. In other words, the tale of the little black fish, her journey, and her fate is narrated by only one storyteller. The story has one narrator and a twelve thousand audience. It means that the narrative is a monologue, not a dialogue. An old fish is the storyteller and thousands of her children and grandchildren are only listening to her without saying a word. So the relationship between the storyteller and listeners is a one-way connection which quality is more like giving a lecture, delivering a sermon, or in its political form reading a political manifesto to mobilize a group of followers. Moreover, what kind of story is the tale of the black fish? Is it a legend? Is it a historical story? Does the little black fish belong to this community? These are unanswered questions. Nobody amongst the twelve thousand audience asks such questions and the only speaker is the one who continues his/her speech without any interruption.

The narrator is, or can be, more like a teacher, a preacher, a lecturer or maybe a leader. Whoever the narrator is, she/he is in a superior position and the mode of conversation is a monologue. Others are just listeners, masses of an immature audience. The narrator tries indirectly to encourage them, and inspire them emotionally by repeating a story from the unknown time, most probably in the past. There is not a process of critical thinking, or of asking questions and giving answers about the black fish, her surroundings, or about the life of listeners in comparison with the fate of the main protagonist of the story. The listeners can only be persuaded, or become enthusiastic and eager to follow the way of the little black fish. They can be emotionally motivated without engaging in a thoughtful and constructive or critical dialogue with the storyteller.

The place where all little fishes have been gathered, is somewhere in which they can only be listeners and believers. The gathering place is not a place of debate and discussion and there is only a predefined path that can be followed by other little fishes to become an admirable hero. This path is the way of the little black fish or the stream of water. Behrangi seems to portray the public realm of his country through this relation between the old storyteller and his/her audience. Debate or dialogue is impossible; it seems unthinkable to modify, to reform or to better the status quo. So the only solution is the way of the little black fish, or to inspire others to follow the black fish's way, to go to the end of the stream. In other words, leaving the birthplace and leap into the unknown world. It suggests this as the best solution, which can indicate the radical tendencies and idealism of the author.

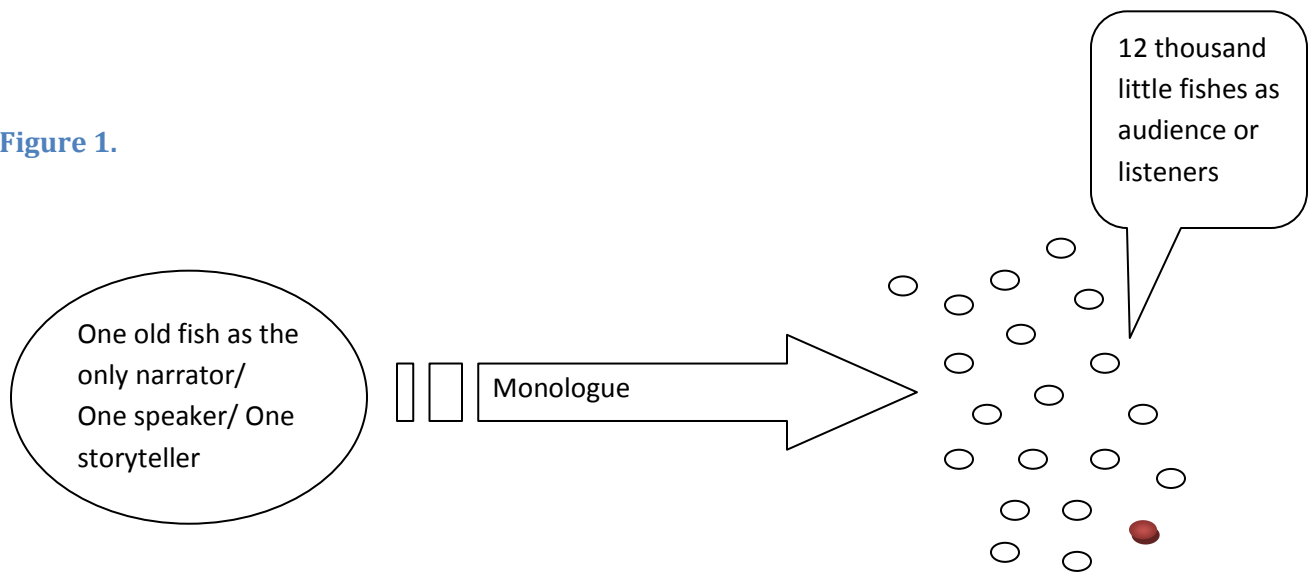
This structure, at the same time, indicates that Behrangi as a Marxist intellectual, although criticizes the limitation of the public domain, does not have any perception of open debate and dialogue between free and equal citizens in the public sphere. Samad does not give any description of the character of the old storyteller, but the narrator is definitely not depicted as a negative character. So while the writer portrays a picture of the declining public realm in which free and unrestricted dialogue is impossible, he himself does not challenge the authoritarian structure of the communication. In other words, he not only does not attack the inequality of the position of the participants in dialogue, but also repeats it as the main pattern, or grammar of the plot of his story.

The main problem with politics in Iran (1963- 1979), in Behrangi's opinion, is not the long-standing bias and narrow perspective towards pluralism and free participation in public life. Despite his strong criticism of the dictatorship of Pahlavi's government, he is only looking for solution by means of replacement of the political leaders. The narrative structure, like political structure, will remain a monologue, a one-way communication between political leaders and masses, only the storyteller will change. The collapse of Pahlavi's regime leads to independence, freedom, and equality spontaneously. This simplistic belief has been reflected in the main slogan of the Iranian revolution in 1979 as well. Does it mean that, to Behrangi, the solution of deep-rooted political problems is substitution of Shah for an ideal perfect political leader? Who will be the new narrator? After the Iranian revolution, they were Islamists who decided. At that time, Behrangi was not alive. He was fortunate enough not to see the new storyteller!



On the other hand, it is interesting that the writer has not given any description of the place where the narrator and his/her thousand young listeners have gathered. Are the narrator and his/her listeners still living in the same small pool where the little black fish had lived once upon a time? Or are they living in a different place, in a larger pond, or in the river? It means that the conditions of the public space for Behrangi as the writer are ambiguous and shadowy. The reader, however, through the atmosphere which has been portrayed by the author, can get the perception that the situation is not good or acceptable. One thing seems obvious, the present conditions are still unfavorable, because in the end one little red fish- this time she is red, not black- has been deeply affected by the story. Without asking any further questions, without any dialogue with the storyteller, she will probably be the one who is going to follow the path of the little black fish.

Figure 1.



## 2- 3. Syntagmatic analysis of the little black fish

In this part the story of the journey of the little black fish and its structure are interpreted according to the syntagmatic analysis of the text. The plot of the story of the little black fish's travel is a linear and sequential one. But each phase of the journey or each segment of it is more like a separate unit with its own new events, characters, and ups and downs. The little black fish starts her travel from a small pool where her home is and finishes it in the sea. Although she finally ends up in the stomach of the heron, using her dagger to kill him, she has reached to the end of the stream, to the sea.

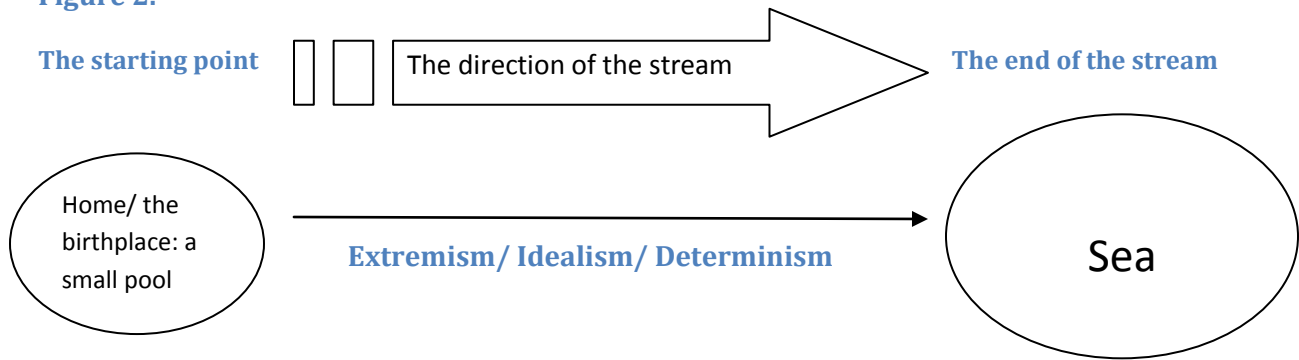
While the reader can feel the chronological order of events, time is uncertain, and only through events in some parts of the story can the reader recognize the time. For instance, in the morning when for the first time the little black fish tries to speak with her mother about her new thoughts, or when the little black fish talks with the moon, or when the shepherd or wounded deer comes close to the river or some other situations in which the writer points to the time indirectly.

So the sequential structure in this story cannot be known through the time arrangement, but through the little black fish's experience of the depth and width of the water stream. Through the black fish's experience, the reader has this sense that it is a progressive journey, evolutionary, ahead-going and forward-looking. In fact, the stream and its direction itself have formed the sequential orders of events in this narrative. The more the little black fish advances, the more she moves forward to a broader and deeper realm of life, of freedom, and of course, of new threats and dangers.

However, Behrangi admires this revolutionary trait of the main character of his story. In fact, there is nothing wrong with his little risk-taker protagonist. It is impressive that the black fish decides to go to the end, to the end of the stream. There are, however, some contradictory dimensions between this linear structure of the journey and the revolutionary aspect of the personality of the main character of the story. Because, despite this fact that she stands against conservative and old-fashioned residents of the small pool in her birthplace, and even against her mother, the little black fish does not swim against the flow. She follows the stream and swims with the tide. It is as if there is a deep attachment to the stream, its direction and where it goes.

But what is the stream? Can it be the stream of ideas? Can it be the stream of life? Can it point to a deterministic viewpoint towards the direction of the journey? As far as it is relevant to this part, the sequential order of the narrative can be determined by the linear direction of the water stream. This structure, particularly with strong emphasis on the end, can be considered as a sign of political determinism, idealism, or even extremism.

**Figure 2.**



So it seems that Samad Behrangī has manifested part of his political or ideological tendencies through the linear sequential structure of the journey of the little black fish; through admiring the revolutionary traits of the main character of his story, through highlighting her undeniable persistence to leave the unfavorable conditions of her birthplace and going to the end, towards the sea, and through her swimming in the same direction with the stream. Is it not like the evolutionary direction of historical stages, from primitive communism to socialism and finally communism in Marxist theory? Can this structure, which has been built upon the direction of the stream, be interpreted as a sign of Behrangī's political orientation towards the Marxist or Socialist ideology? The little black fish, as she herself admits, is not a philosopher or scholar,<sup>1</sup> but she can be a philosopher in its Marxist sense, because if "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways [so far]: the point... [for the little black fish], is to change it".<sup>2</sup>

Now it can be helpful to point to different segments or units of the journey of the little black fish and its different phases:<sup>3</sup>

**Unit I, Phase (1):** The little black fish starts questioning- She is in her birthplace a small pool

**Unit II, Phase (2):** Leaving home and starting the journey- Going down the waterfall

**Unit III, Phase (3):** Entering into the pond full of water- Meeting the tadpoles and frog

**Unit IV, Phase (4):** Entering into the deeper and wider stream in the valley- Meeting the crab

<sup>1</sup> See the English translation of 'The Little Black Fish':  
[www.iranchamber.com/literature/sbehrangi/.../the\\_little\\_black\\_fish.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/literature/sbehrangi/.../the_little_black_fish.php),

<sup>2</sup> The famous quotation from Karl Marx, in the 11th thesis on Feuerbach: "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." (Wikipedia)

<sup>3</sup> See the English translation of 'The Little Black Fish'  
[www.iranchamber.com/literature/sbehrangi/.../the\\_little\\_black\\_fish.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/literature/sbehrangi/.../the_little_black_fish.php)

**Unit V, Phase (5): Meeting the lizard- Taking the dagger- Entering into the river**

**Unit VI, Phase (6): Meeting the tiny fish in the river**

**Unit VII, Phase (7): Talking to the moon**

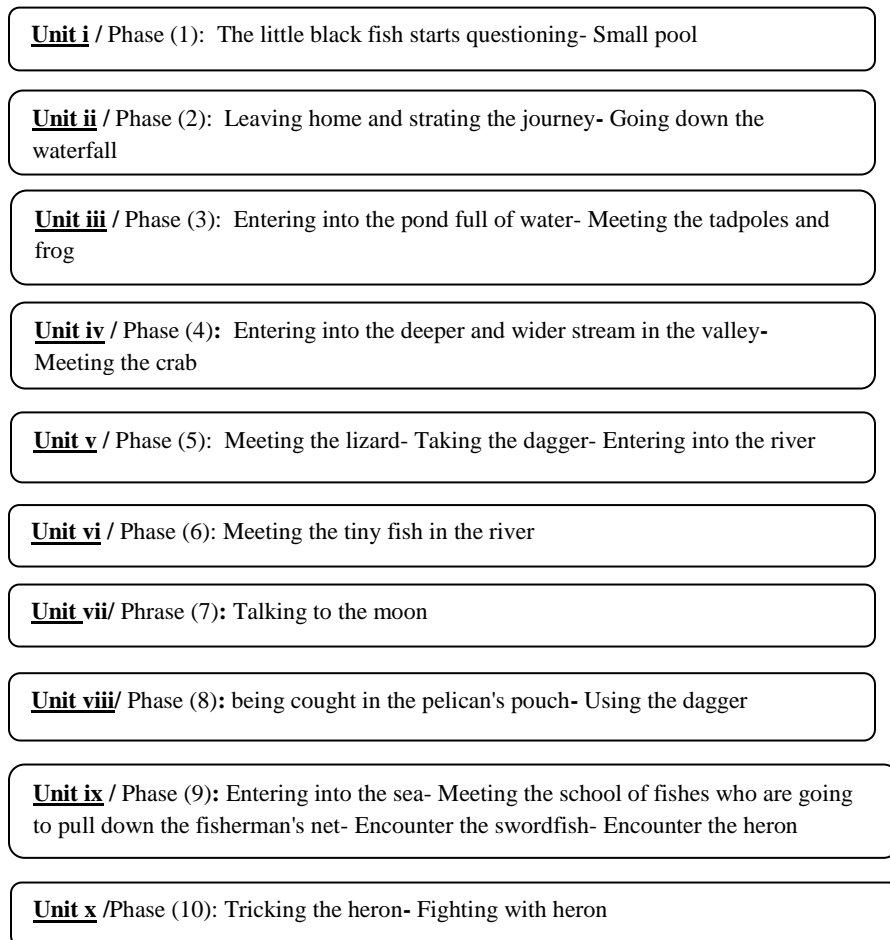
**Unit VIII, Phase (8): being caught in the pelican's pouch- Using the dagger**

**Unit IX , Phase (9): Entering into the sea- Meeting the school of fishes which are going to pull down the fisherman's net- Encounter the swordfish- Encounter the heron**

**Unit X, Phase (10): Tricking the heron- Using the dagger and killing the heron**

**Figure 3.**

**The sequential order of the little black fish's travel:**



The story of the little black fish is not a folk legend and it is not a myth but the structure of its narrative is traditional to some extent. This is because it is very common in the Iranian legends and myths that the main character starts his or her journey and should endure the pains and hardships along the way. In every phase the seeker of the truth and happiness faces more challenges and obstacles to grow, to flourish and to become stronger.

In the story of the little black fish this pattern has been repeated, but not in a spiritual but more ideological sense of it. It means that the journey of the little black fish can be better understood in terms of the black fish's eagerness for the broader space to move, to experience life more freely, which can be the sign of political and social desires of the writer himself. The little black fish does not obey the ethical principles, at least her concern is not about what is morally right or wrong, which is common in the traditional stories of this type. She starts her travel from a tight sphere of a small pool where "life is simply for circling around in a small place until you become old and nothing else... [to see if ]... there is another way to live in the world".<sup>1</sup>

## 2- 4. Paradigmatic analysis of the little black fish

The little black fish lives in a small pool. It means that the other possible choices by the writer has been excluded. But why has Behrangi started the first phase of the journey of the main character of his story from a small pool on the side of the mountain? Why has he selected the aquatic creatures and preferred an underwater realm as the starting point of his story? Why does he choose not to depict the life of animals on land? If he has decided to portray the life under water as the birthplace of his main character, why does he choose such a tight and gloomy pool? Why does not the little black fish live in the river? Why does she not live in the sea?

Behrangi has portrayed a dark, dull, dingy atmosphere as the birthplace of the little black fish. The choice of the life under water can be the sign of a place where the creatures on land can not breathe. Living under water indicates that any imagination of fresh air, of filling your lungs with oxygen will be impossible, instead you need to have the specific organ to stay alive, you need to have gills in order to breathe underwater. This depiction of breathing has to do with living in the Iranian political and social context (1963- 1979). Inside the home, all creatures live a boring, mundane, monotonous life. Does this indicate the political and social atmosphere of Iran too? The dark small pool with little or no light, where the little black fish can hardly even talk to the moon. Does this bleak, sad house, this pool as the home of the black fish, indicate the birthplace, the homeland of Behrangi?

---

<sup>1</sup> English translation of "The Little Black Fish" on the link below:  
[www.iranchamber.com/literature/sbehrangi/.../the\\_little\\_black\\_fish.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/literature/sbehrangi/.../the_little_black_fish.php) p. 2.

Most of the other fishes or creatures in this gloomy, small pool are satisfied and content with their situation, even the black fish's mother, whose only child who has survived is the little black fish. It seems quite similar to the biography of Behrangi himself, whose five or six brothers or sisters have died. Most of the other fishes, and specifically the older ones, are conservative and resist any change and alteration in their life. It seems that they have nothing worthy to say. They do not have any valuable experience to share. It can be the sign of rejection of the past and being unwilling to find something worthy or valuable in the other's experiences of life. It is as if, the birthplace of the black fish does not have a rich history which is worthy of study or curiosity.

The only creature that seems to have had something to teach to the little black fish has been a snail, an amphibious creature in fact. However, during the dialogue between characters in the pool it reveals that the snail has been drowned and killed by others, because of his revolutionary ideas, and because of the fear that his ideas might have evil effects on others in the small pool.

It seems that, Behrangi tries to portray the political, social and cultural atmosphere of his homeland. The most interesting part of the first unit is that any kind of meaningful dialogue between the main character of the story and others is almost impossible. Others are not willing to listen to the little black fish, and she bitterly criticizes them, claiming that "[she] has reason, intelligence and understanding... [She has] eyes and... [she] can see",<sup>1</sup> but what can she see and what can she understand except for the tightness and restrictions of the small pool? She has "just gotten tired of these swims. [She does not] want to continue the boring stuff and be happy as a fool until one day... wakes up and sees that like all of ...[others] ... [she] has become old, but still ...[is] as dumb as... [she is] now".<sup>2</sup>

In fact, the most noticeable characteristic of the little black fish is her revolutionary trait, her courage, her strong enthusiasm to go to the end. "[She]... wants to go and see where the stream ends... [She] wants to know what is happening in other places... [or] is there another way to live in the world".<sup>3</sup> But is the birthplace of the little black fish really such a boring place? Are there not any serious issues or problems which need to be faced? Both the little black fish and the writer are unwilling to answer these questions. They are searching for their utopia and they are determined to follow their revolutionary ideas and ideals. And throughout his life, Behrangi, like the little black fish "...[was not] ... able to think about anything else, [could not] ... sleep a wink all night...[and]... at last... decided to go and find where the stream ends".<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 2, 3.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 3, 3.

It can be the sign of radicalism or being revolutionary. The idealistic or even extremist viewpoint of the author and his dissatisfaction with the status quo, has been reflected in the relationship between the main character of the story and her environment. However, Behrangi tries to clarify or justify why this radicalism is inevitable. If the little black fish does not leave the small pool she will probably be killed by traditional and conservative residents of the pool and will face the same fate as the snail, who has been drowned by the conformist members of the community. Can it mirror the fate of a dissident intellectual in the declining public realm of Iran? Can it portray the dark and gloomy political atmosphere of Behrangi's homeland? Can it point to all those opposing intellectuals, artists, writers, journalists, thinkers, political activists who have been deprived of participation in public life by the absolutist regime of Pahlavi?

During the journey, the little black fish meets many different characters. Friends, enemies or weak characters. But the emphasis of the writer is more of the fighting spirit of his main character. The characteristics of the black fish's friends can convey some political meanings. The little black fish's friends are, the snail, the lizard, a school of little fishes, and the moon. The snail is not alive. As an amphibious creature he has been drowned and killed by the conservative residents of the small pool. He has been the snail who has had the same ideas as the little black fish. In fact, he has been a revolutionary and idealist character "since ... [the little black fish] is saying the very same things"<sup>1</sup> that the snail has said before.

Another friend is a lizard, who has been characterized as the wisest creature during the black fish's journey. In fact, it is the lizard that makes the little black fish aware of the danger of the pelican and his pouch. Moreover, the lizard, as a sensible friend is the one who makes daggers and gives these daggers to the little fishes like the little black fish. So it seems that the wisest creature during the journey of the main character is the one who makes the little revolutionary fish familiar with armed struggle.<sup>2</sup>

The moon is another friend of the little black fish. The relationship between the moon and the black fish is emotional and inspiring. However, it seems that there are always shadows and darkness which prevent them from developing an effective communication. In the seventh phase of the journey, when the little black fish is talking to the moon, "the moon couldn't finish her sentence. The dark cloud approached and covered her face".<sup>3</sup> Can it be an indicator of contradiction between the wishes of the main character and reality? Can it be the sign of the impossibility of developing a meaningful dialogue between the two sides of the conversation, who are too far from each other? And specifically one side, the moon, has a superior position. However, the moon tries to convince the black fish that this superiority is imaginary and only the result of the idealistic outlook of the little black fish herself.

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 5, 6.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 7, 8.

Maybe it is not the little black fish but Samad Behrangi who expresses the contradiction between his political and social utopianism and the reality of his social life in the context of Iran. It seems that Behrangi, like the little black fish, is searching for a meaningful dialogue with his ideal political figure. Does he look for a charismatic political leader? It was not strange, then, that after the revolution in 1979 a group of radical revolutionaries claimed that they had seen the picture of Imam Khomeini on the moon!!!

The other friends of the little black fish are members of a school of little fishes who are going to pull down the fisherman's net, and the little black fish is going to be with them the next time. They seem like a group of rebels or combatants whose goal is fighting with the superiority of the human being. The little black fish, without any deep or meaningful dialogue with them, accepts them as her friends. The style of conversation between the little black fish and this school of fishes is more similar to a dialogue with other comrades in the leftist discourse.

All other creatures are portrayed by the author as enemies or at least weak and cowardly characters. Some of them are narrow-minded and some of them are sly and cunning. The neighbors of the little black fish in her birthplace, even her mother, and during the journey the crab and frog, are examples of prejudiced and narrow-minded characters, and the pelican and the heron are more tricky and cunning. The pelican, the swordfish and the heron are frequently introduced as the main enemies of all fishes during the journey. Amongst them, the pelican and his character seems the most interesting one. The way the little black fish deals with him can imply some political meanings as well.

When a fish is caught in the pouch of a pelican he or she may stay alive for a short time there, but finally will be swallowed by him. It is in the eighth phase of the little black fish's journey that she and several other tiny fishes who have followed her are caught in the pouch of the pelican. The little black fish is totally aware of the fact that even if the pelican does not swallow them at once, they will be eaten in the end, because the lizard had warned her before and he gave her the dagger particularly in order to escape from the pelican's pouch. When the little black fish and other tiny fishes are caught in the pouch of the pelican, all the tiny fishes who are very afraid of the pelican start begging the pelican to let them go, except for the little black fish. The pelican gets angry and persuade others to kill the black fish. The pelican promises that if the tiny fishes do so and kill the little black fish, he will release them all. The little black fish is determined to show the others that this suggestion is only a trick. She wants the tiny fishes to pretend that they had killed her to prove that the pelican will swallow them anyhow. To warn the others that "the deceitful bird wants to turn... [them]... against each other"<sup>1</sup>, the tiny fishes notice the deception of the pelican, but it is too late. In the end, the only way to freedom is the dagger. All tiny fishes are swallowed by the pelican, except for the little black fish who "draws the dagger, splits open the wall of the pouch with one blow and flees".<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.



The canny pelican and his plan can be an interesting sign of the governmental policy towards the opposition in Iran (1963- 1979). The way the tiny fishes address the pelican can be a good indicator in this respect: "His Excellency", "Mr. Pelican", "Sir".<sup>1</sup> The tiny fishes clearly expresses their demand: "We want freedom!"<sup>2</sup>, but for both the little black fish and Samad Behrangi the only way to escape from the pouch of the deceitful bird, or oppression of the totalitarian regime, was by ripping the pouch open by a dagger.

On the other hand, the sly suggestion of the pelican implies political meaning as well. Can it convey this message that even the white revolution of the Shah and the people was nothing more than a deception? Was not the governmental institutions such as 'the center for the intellectual development of children and adolescents' like the pelican's pouch? The best way to escape from this governmental pouch was a dagger, and to Behrangi, as a dissident writer, this dagger was nothing but his pen.

The radical and extremist approach of the writer can be more obvious in this unit. The little black fish's sentences and the style of her dialogue with other tiny fishes who have been caught in the pouch of the pelican can be a clear sign in this respect. She calls them, coward and a crybaby,<sup>3</sup> she rejects and refuses any suggestion that has been made by the pelican and say to others again and again: "Don't agree!... Don't fall for his tricks!... You've lost your senses!... [and ask them skeptically]... Are you crying like this because you think this dishonest bird is merciful?"<sup>4</sup>

Behrangi and the little black fish were both sure that the sly pelican and the absolutist Pahlavi's regime are not merciful, but did they have any idea of how the Islamic Republic after the Iranian revolution in 1979 can be merciful?

## 2- 5. Semantic analysis: the little black fish

In this part the focus is on two specific characters of the story of the little black fish: the first character is the little black fish herself as the main character of the story, the second character is the red little fish as the only one who has been affected by the narrative of the black fish's journey at the end of the story.

In order to give a semantic interpretation here, there is a move from the literal and apparent meaning, namely denotation, towards an interpretation of the meaning in the deeper layers of connotation, ideology and probably the myth.

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 8, 9.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9.

The little black fish, at the level of denotation is an aquatic creature. Her color is black and she is a little fish, which means she is very young. She can be alive only in water, she is not an amphibious creature like crab or frog and cannot breathe out of water. These qualities suggest that she is not flexible enough to experience living on land. Her being, her existence depends on the particular environment, namely the water stream. It seems that the water stream implies the stream of ideas and ideals. The life of the little black fish depends on her deep attachment to this stream, which can be the sign of her ideological belief.

During the narrative it is revealed that the little black fish is a revolutionary, she has a questioning mind and is eager to have the different experience of living in other places. She starts her journey bravely and the stream of water, which can be the path and direction of an ideology, guide her during her journey. Her boldness and courage give her this ability to go to the end and enter into the sea, fight with her enemies, and finally her tragic fate is death in the stomach of the heron. These apparent traits can be interestingly linked with the color of the little black fish.

According to Iranian culture, the black color refers to mourn, to tragedy, and to grief and sadness. At the same time black connotes the tragic destiny of the revolutionary figures and martyrdom in the history of Iran. A good example in this regard is Abu Muslim Khorasani and his followers, who called themselves 'Siah Jamegan': it can be translated as 'those who wear black cloth'. Abu Muslim was the first Iranian commander who could establish an independent Iranian kingdom in the 7th century in Khorasan in the north east of Iran after the occupation of Iran by Arabs. The black color in Shi'a Islam has specific connotations as well. It indicates the Muharram, the month of the martyrdom of Imam Hussain the third Shia Imam. So the little black fish who carries a dagger, as she has been portrayed by Behrangy, stands for particular religious and political meanings, and in the deeper layer of interpretation it is relevant to Iranian myths too.

The little red fish shares some common characteristics with the little black fish, except for her color, and this fact that the red fish lives in the present, while the story of the black fish is narrated as an old tale in the past. So it seems that the little red fish can potentially be a new or modern version of the little black fish. The red color in the Iranian culture and particularly in Shi'a Islam is the sign of martyrdom, the blood of innocent heroes who sacrifice themselves for the higher good of the people. It connotes the Muharram as well. However, the choice of red color in the historical period of this research in the bipolar world implies additional political meanings. The researcher can ask why has not Behrangy chosen a white or a blue fish at the end of his story? The red color of the only little fish who thinks deeper than her nineteen thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine peers can be interpreted as the Marxist or Socialist tendencies of the writer. The little red fish is the only one among the masses of the audience that cannot sleep after the end of the story. Her personality at the ideological level of interpretation can be more similar to avant-garde or leading intellectuals in Marxism-Leninism theory.

On the other hand, these two characters who have occupied a specific position in the narrative are both fishes. Are they not, especially the red one, a reminder of Maoist guerrillas in the Chinese version of Marxist ideology?

### 3. Twenty four hours adrift: a semiotic analysis

In 'Twenty Four Restless Hours' or 'Twenty Four Hours Adrift', Samad Behrangi has portrayed the 24 hours of the tough life of a street boy who has to come to Tehran with his father because of economic difficulties of his family. The father has been out of work for months, so he and his son have left the mother, sister and younger brothers at home in another town to seek job in Tehran. It is not the only family that has been faced with this problem; there are some of their acquaintances from their home town who have migrated to Tehran looking for work in this, noisy disorderly metropolis. All of them have manual and low-paid jobs. One of them "has an ice stand, another one buy and sell used clothing, and a third is an orange vendor".<sup>1</sup>

After a while, the father "manages to obtain a handcart and becomes a vendor. He hawked onions, potatoes, cucumbers and other vegetables, earning enough to provide... [himself and his son] with a bit of food, and send something home".<sup>2</sup> The boy, whose name is Latif, is the main character and the narrator of the story. Latif, sometimes "accompanies... [his] father on his rounds, and sometimes... hangs around the streets by... [himself], returning to his father only at night... [or] sells one-rial chewing gum, charms and other such things".<sup>3</sup>

Latif has several friends who are also street children, as poor as, or even poorer than him. They are all illiterate and have been deprived of their basic needs. For instance, one of them has painted his feet to look like he has worn new black shoes. They all, nevertheless, laugh at his trick which is, in fact, very tragic.<sup>4</sup>

Samad Behrangi has depicted the miserable life of these children and their destitute in every sentence of his story. However, he has not introduced the characters of these children as weak, pitiful and feeble personalities. Most of these children, despite their tough life, possess a degree of self-esteem and confidence. Most of them do not beg for money and hate it. When one of them, Ahmad Husayn, begs for money the other friend of him grabs his arm and stops him begging. Particularly Latif, the main character of the story, does not accept to play with Ahmad Husayn and says: "I don't throw dice with beggars".<sup>5</sup> At the same time, it seems that these children, who are part of the crowd in the street, do not mingle with other people. It is as if they live in a totally separated and alienated world; there is a huge gap between these children and other passersby.

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.iranchamber.com/literature/sbehrangi/works/24\\_restless\\_hours.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/literature/sbehrangi/works/24_restless_hours.php) p. 1

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 2, 3.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4

Latif and his father do not have a shelter and are almost always hungry. The story has been written in the realist style, but some parts of the dreams of the main character are far from the bitter reality of his life. However, even in Latif's dreams, the most severe and radical criticisms of the conditions of Latif's life are expressed by the writer. Many economic, social, cultural and political programs of Pahlavi's government are being attacked by Behrangi through making a comparison between the harsh reality of Latif's life and this child's dreams and desires.

The greatest wish of Latif is to have a toy camel which is so large that it cannot fit behind the window of the toy store. The street boy loves this camel dearly. Latif, in his dream, talks to this camel, rides it and can even fly, goes on trips to see different parts of Tehran, and shares his desires with the camel. On the other hand, this camel is depicted by the author as a wise creature which shows Latif different aspects of living in Tehran. The toy camel, however, is not the only object for children in that toy store. There are dolls, teddy bears, toy rabbits, toy lions and monkeys, locomotives, and a toy machine gun behind the shop window, but Latif loves the camel more than the others.

The plot of the story of *24 restless hours* reaches its climax at the end of the narrative, when a girl and her father buy the lovely camel of Latif. Latif starts crying to defend the camel of his dream and prevent the rich family from buying it. The shopkeeper pushes him, beats him and throws him out on the street. When the father puts the camel in the back seat of his car, Latif "holds on to the car with both hands and screams... [but his] hands are snatched from the car, and... [he] falls on his face on the pavement".<sup>1</sup> The camel has been sold and Latif, while falling to the ground and the blood running from his nose, can only think of the toy machine gun.

The *twenty-four restless hours* can be one of the best examples of penetrating the radical antagonistic feature of the political into a story for children and utilizing juvenile literature instrumentally to manifest political protests of a dissident intellectual. It seems that Behrangi himself had been quite aware of the excessive and the immoderate aspects of his story, because at the beginning of it he notes:

*"I didn't write the story '24 Restless Hours' to set an example for you. My purpose is rather that you become better acquainted with your fellow children and think about a solution to their problems."*<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 1.

Despite this note, the radical and the antagonistic contradiction between rich and poor people, between traditional and modern lifestyle, and between the northern and the southern parts of Tehran have not been narrated by the author to address only children. The normlessness and anomie of Tehran as an underdeveloped metropolis, and the inevitable growing gap between different social, cultural and economic classes, which have been depicted by Behrangi, are the adverse consequence of the policy of the capitalist pattern of uneven development by the Pahlavi regime.

However, in the brittle public sphere of Iran (1963- 1979), the opposing ideas could not be manifested directly and transparently. The twenty four hours of the life of Latif, then, can be a political outcry of a Marxist intellectual against the governmental policy of Pahlavi's regime in the crumbling public sphere of Iran. Here, in this part it is described how Samad Behrangi as a Marxist intellectual has challenged the capitalist pattern of development and has pointed to the unresolved political, social and cultural problems through portraying the 24 hours of the life of a miserable street child, Latif.

It is important to remember that the socialist model of development can certainly have its negative effects on the society as well, but in Iran (1963- 1979) there were not any free and unrestricted spaces to debate about the advantages and disadvantages of different models of development and modernization. It was, particularly, the direct consequence of the policy of the political underdevelopment of Pahlavi's government, which was described briefly in chapter three regarding the historical conditions of Iran (1963- 1979). As the result of the increasing control of the totalitarian regime, and because of the lack of spheres open to debate and discussion in a rational, critical way, the leftist author tries to depict the social, economic, and cultural problems of his time in a childish story. He has portrayed an image of Tehran in the 1960s which can point to some serious issues of this city, but it is intertwined with obsessions and repressed emotions of a child who has been deprived of his basic needs. Could it be the meaningful way to deal with such extremely complicated issues in an underdeveloped country?

If this narrative had been written by an author in a well-established public sphere, where people had access to free and open channels of communication and were able to debate and discuss about their vital social or political difficulties, this story would not had carried such heavy political meanings. But in the context of Iran, when all Marxist and Socialist intellectuals had been forced to remain silent, *Twenty-four hours adrift* gains more and more political potential and can convey many political messages. It can even be claimed that, in the specific historical context of Iran (1963-1979), *twenty-four restless hours* looks more like an ideological manifesto of a radical revolutionary. The antagonistic and hostile attitude towards higher economic classes, or people with modern lifestyles in the capital of Iran, as it is depicted by Behrangi, can be an evident sign of polarization of Iranian society, which is the main theme of this story.

In the next part, due to the realistic style of the story, the structure of the text according to the first-person narrator, namely Latif, will come under scrutiny. After that, the connotations of the name of the main character, Latif, are described. And finally, the analysis of the text is carried out on the basis of duality and oppositions within the narrative. Needless to say, all of these interpretations are provided by using the semiotic method of text analysis.

### 3- 1. Twenty four restless hours: a first person narrative in the realist style

The '24 Hours Adrift' has been written in the first person narrative. The narrator is *Latif* a street boy. Latif stands at the center of this story, and the whole story revolves around him. He is not only the narrator, but also the main character of the story. Every event, situation, or character has been described from Latif's perspective. This pattern intensifies the quality of the first person narrative of the story.

He is Latif who gives the reader a perception of the life of other characters: his father, his mother, his family, his friends, his environment. It is through Latif's eyes that the reader can see the reality of living in Tehran. The reader can even feel and sense the different smells, colors, tastes and flavors through the sensual feelings of Latif. Latif illustrates the tragic or comic- if there is any comic situation- dimensions of events and characters. He not only observes, but also , as the main character, participates directly in the flow of conversations, confrontations, or violent acts. He, as a street boy, is the witness of the imbalanced, annoying and harsh conditions of the capital of Iran.

This structure does not refer to the multi-dimensional perspective of the author. It does not convey that the writer is ready to look at the multifaceted quality of the social, political, or cultural phenomena. Behrangi cannot, or is not willing to, consider the numerous problems in the life of his main character from different angles. In other words, the quality of one narrator and the mass audience in "The Little Black Fish" is repeated here even more intensely.

This is because of two qualities of the plot of the '24 Restless Hours': the first is that the narrator is the main character at the same time, and the second is that the story of Latif has been written in the realist style. So the only reality is the reality which is portrayed by Latif, as the only narrator and as the main character. It can be the sign of extremism, being intolerant to hear the voice of others, or looking at the reality from different perspectives by the author.

Moreover, in comparison with 'The Little Black Fish', it can indicate the more radical, more intolerant, and more biased approach of the writer. It can be linked to the political conditions of Iran (1963- 1979) and increasing pressure on the public realm as well. The space of speech and action has been tightened by the government more strictly. 'The Little Black Fish' was written one year before '24 restless hours', in 1969. It means that in 1970 the deterioration of the public sphere had continued. Under the conditions of suppression of opposing opinions, dialogue, tolerance, multi-dimensional approach and pluralism were meaningless.

The story of '24 Hours Adrift' is a tragedy, and tragedy most of the time, is the style of the criticism of a radical or revolutionary writer, as for instance, comedy is the style of a more conservative one.<sup>1</sup> So it can be claimed that the structure, the style, and the genre of the story of '24 Hours Adrift' have something to say about the political demands of Samad Behrangi as a dissident intellectual.

### 3- 2. Latif: the connotations of the name of the main character

Latif is the name of the main character and the narrator of the story of '24 restless hours'. The name Latif has an Arabic root linguistically. Latif can be translated into English as 'tender, delicate, or gentle'. As far as it relates to this story, these are characteristics of a street boy whose fate is exactly the opposite of his name. It seems that the choice of the name Latif, and the sharp contradiction between his name and his harsh life, points to some political meanings.

In fact, the gap between the name of the main character and the bitter reality of his life is as huge as Latif's love for the toy camel at the beginning of the story, and his determination to choose the toy gun at the end. Throughout the story, this contradiction between the name of Latif and his life is emphasized by the author. This contradiction is not only in the first layer of the meaning of the name of Latif, but also there is an apparent contradiction between the deeper layers of Latif's personality and his real life. Latif's character, in fact, is portrayed by Behrangi as a sensitive, dreamy boy with a fertile imagination. Moreover, Latif, despite his extreme poverty, does not lack self-esteem or confidence.

---

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: the Basics*, London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 106, 107.



In different situations he repeats that he is not a beggar.<sup>1</sup> For instance, when a shopkeeper insults him, because of his shabby and dirty appearance. The shop-owner mentions that "... [he has not] made any sales to give ... [Latif] something".<sup>2</sup> Latif repeats again that he is not a beggar. Also at the end of the story, when the father and daughter decide to buy the toy camel, "the father stretched out a two-rial coin towards... [Latif]..., [but he]... puts [his] hands behind... [his] back and looks into... [the man's] face... [in such a way that the man]... quickly puts the two rials into his pocket and passes by".<sup>3</sup>

However, the continual humiliation and contempt lead Latif to vengeful, vicious and spiteful behavior. In one part of the story, Latif, who has gone to the wealthier area in the north of Tehran, looks at himself in the store window and describes his appearance:

"I had a chance to look at my reflection in the store window. My hair was so long and thick that it hid my ears. It looked like a hat of hair placed on my head. My burlap shirt was a dark dirty color and you could see my sunburnt body at its torn collar. My bare feet were filthy, and my heels were cracked".<sup>4</sup>

Particularly, he feels rage when he compares himself with a group of children "whose parents were taking them to school in the car... [and] pleasant smell comes from their combed hair".<sup>5</sup> In some parts of the narrative it seems that Behrangi tries to justify the strong anger and violence of Latif by calling him Latif. Latif, his name and his dreams and desires are tender, gentle and sensitive. However, when Latif is insulted and humiliated by the men, women and children of higher social class, and witnesses the inferiority and injustice, his violence and rage can be explicable or even acceptable. Latif expresses his rage by saying: "I wanted to shatter the brains of the three rich children".<sup>6</sup> However, Behrangi prevents his main character to blame the rich children. The author tries to direct the reader's attention to a broader political issue. So Latif immediately adds another question to the previous sentence and asks himself: "But was it... the fault [of the rich children] that I had such a life?"<sup>7</sup>

Maybe Behrangi tries to warn the policy-makers that if the conditions of Iran in the 1960s remain unchanged without any modification or reform, probably Latif, a tender, dreamy, imaginative child will turn into a violent, resentful character. However, Pahlavi's government did not listen to such warnings.

### 3- 3. Twenty-four Restless Hours: the analysis of polar semantic oppositions

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, 13.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, P. 13.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, P. 17.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, P. 13.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, P. 13.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, P. 13.



Binary or polar semantic relations are inseparable parts of human cognition, to understand the world, one needs to differentiate, to make comparison and to categorize everything in the world around him/her. It can be learned from semiology, as it was described in the chapter on methodology, that such categorization and differentiation are not natural, intrinsic or inherent. In fact, these binary oppositions in the text point to the dominant paradigmatic choice of the author. Thus, an important part of a paradigmatic analysis in semiology is to problematize these polar or binary oppositions, to reveal the meanings which are latent beneath the surface of them. On the other hand, binary oppositions are in intimate connection with cultural codes which are deep-rooted in the specific social context. So semantic opposition and dualism in the text can be used by the writer to convey political meanings and messages.

Samad Behrangi, through highlighting the dualism and exposing the polar or binary oppositions in the story of *24 hours adrift*, tries to give expression to his political criticism of the status quo. His main political criticisms can be understood in terms of problems such as: the growing gap between higher and lower economic classes, the standard of life of the poor people and the rich people in Tehran, the difference between the scarcity of facilities and poor hygiene in the southern area of this city in comparison with the northern area, and the polar opposition between traditional and modern culture, behavior or lifestyle of people in Tehran.

On the other hand, and on the basis of such oppositions, the alignment has been formed in this text. It means that, around the binary oppositions in the story of '24 restless hours' additional dualism and polarity have been shaped which is manifested through the traits or characteristics of different personalities: the physical or personal appearance of different characters, the clothes which have been worn by them or the way they dress, the quality of food they eat, the way they communicate or talk to each other, the manner or behavior of different characters towards other members of society and within the group of family and friends, and even the different kinds of entertainment and recreation that they choose.

The core of the binary approach of Behrangi has been described by the toy camel, when in Latif's dream the camel speaks to the main character of the story to portray a picture of Tehran. The toy camel says:

“Latif, my boy. Tehran has two parts, each with its own characteristics. North and South. The North is clean, but the South is full of smoke, filth, dust and dirt, because all the worn-out buses operate in that section. All the brick kilns are in that section, and the diesels and trucks come and go from there. Many of the streets in the south aren't paved; the dirty putrid water in the open sewage gutters of the north flows downhill to the South. In short, the South is where the poor, hungry people live, and the North is the area of the rich and powerful. Have you ever seen the ten story marble buildings in 'Hasirabad', 'Naziabad' and 'Haji Abdol Mahmud Avenue'? In these buildings are the elegant shops of the rich, who own luxurious automobiles and dogs worth several thousand tomans.”<sup>1</sup>

The striking contrast between different economic, social, cultural classes has been repeated again and again throughout the story. In order to avoid a tedious interpretation of the narrative, one of these polar oppositions which seems more interesting has been chosen and analyzed in this part. This polar semantic opposition is in terms of the picture of a modern and a traditional woman which are portrayed by Behrangi.

It is interesting to see how Behrangi, as a modern intellectual, has a reactionary perspective towards a modern woman in the context of Iran in the 1960s and 1970s. His offensive outlook towards a woman of higher economic or social class is manifested by the way women of this type communicate with Latif as the main character and the narrator of the story. These modern women are seen and characterized by Latif as disagreeable or superficial figures and the emphasis is specifically on their physical appearance. Moreover, as it was described in the previous parts, because of the structure and style of the story, and since the only reality is the one which is seen and explained by Latif, this negative image of a modern woman is intensified by the author throughout the story.

The image of a modern woman in '24 restless hours' is portrayed as a woman with “bare arms and legs, wearing high heeled shoes,... [and] holding the puppy's leash... As she passes... [others] smell her lovely perfume”.<sup>2</sup> It may not seem a negative outlook at first glance, but when this picture is in comparison with the way Latif thinks of his mother, the alienation of the image of the modern woman will be more prominent.<sup>3</sup>

There is a clearer example in the story in this regard, when Latif is struck by a car while he crosses the street. The driver is characterized by Latif as “a heavily made up old woman... [who is] sitting behind the steering wheel, and a huge, collared dog curls up at her side looks out and barks”.<sup>4</sup> This woman talks to Latif in a discourteous and impolite way. Additionally, there is not any trace of compassion or kindness in her behavior towards the child. It seems that there is a deep reciprocal hatred between them, at least as it is depicted by Behrangi. The violent feelings of Latif are noticeable too. He says:

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 8, 9.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16.

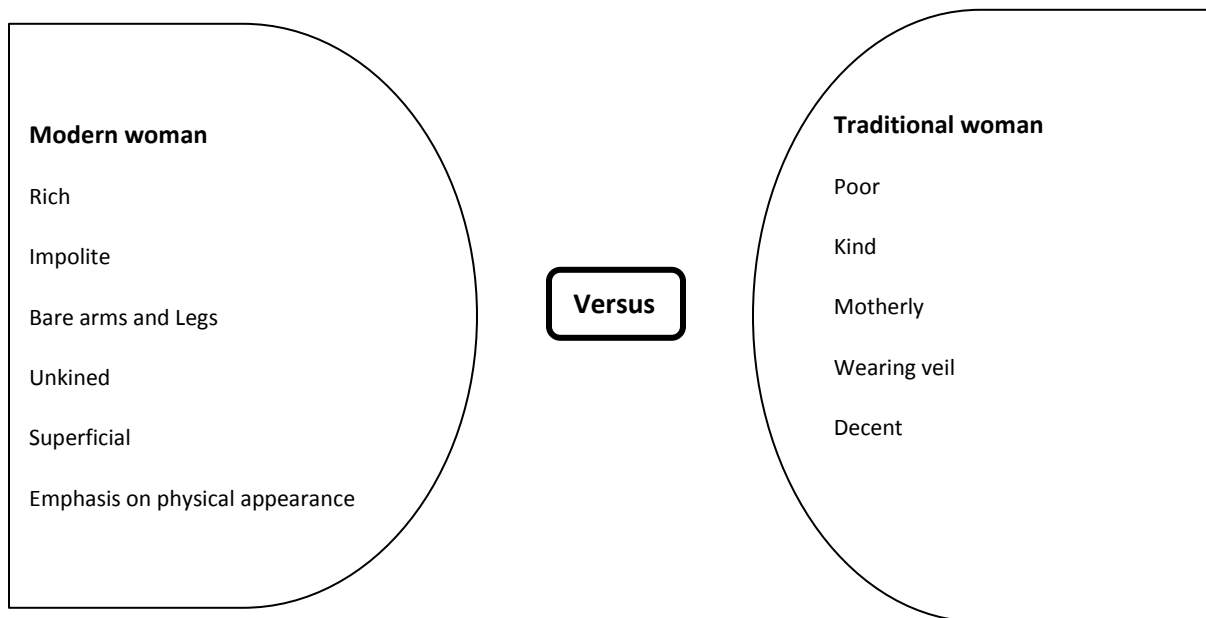
<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6.

“Suddenly I felt that if I didn't do something immediately - like break all the glass on the car - I would burst from the force of my anger and never be able to move from this spot.... I spit in her face, swore at her several times, and then ran off.”<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, the character of Zivar, who does not attend directly in the story, is depicted as an image of a traditional woman. This traditional woman probably belongs to a lower social or economic class: for instance, she could be “a... lottery ticket vendor who... wears a ragged veil... covers her knees with her dirty veil”<sup>2</sup> and speaks rarely. So the polar opposition and an alignment in parallel with it, is formed by Behrangi regarding the image of an Iranian woman in this story.

The polar opposition and the dualism of modern/traditional woman, and the alignment in parallel with them can be illustrated like this:

Figure 4.



<sup>1</sup> ibid.,p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> ibid.,p. 12.

**It can be the sign of deep-rooted contradictions between the modern and traditional roles and image of women in the Iranian public realm in the 1960s and 1970s. It is also interesting to see that the approach of Marxist intellectuals like Behrangi regarding the modern image of women in Iran is more in harmony with the religious fanatic parts of society. Is the traditional image not very similar to the ideal image of a woman which was depicted by Islamists after the revolution in 1979?**

## Chapter VI

### Conclusion

Man is not by nature political. Amongst other social animals, however, only humans can be political.<sup>1</sup> Only humans have the capability of speech and action in the public sphere. It is their unique attribute that they can participate in public life as free and equal citizens, despite this fact that they are naturally different from each other.<sup>2</sup> They can sit around a table and from different locations and angles enter into dialogue with each other.<sup>3</sup> Through this capability of political action, free and equal citizens create a particular kind of non-violent power, which is totally different from the pre-political force and violence.<sup>4</sup>

When the public realm is declining and crumbling under the pressure of an absolutist regime, when “suddenly... the table vanishes from the [citizen’s] midst...”,<sup>5</sup> the politics will lose its non-violent features. This condition leads to two inevitable consequences: 1. The antagonistic features of the political, which cannot be removed altogether, will penetrate into unpredictable realms which seem totally irrelevant to politics at first glance,<sup>6</sup> and 2. The fragility of the public realm does not lead to total silence. It means that, since “only sheer violence is mute”,<sup>7</sup> people still communicate with each other and try to manifest their political demands, but in an indirect and unclear way.

Under such circumstances, politicization of non-political realms occurs. This process in non-democratic societies has its distinguishing characteristics. Social agents and actors, in the declining public sphere of a non-democratic society, act and speak within the unusual and obscure realms, and use complicated and ambiguous language to vocalize their public demands, to escape the censorship of the absolutist regime. In such societies, the arena and the way of manifestation of political demands possess the quality of the private realm, at least in its Arendtian sense.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, London & Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>6</sup> Chantal Mouffe, *On the political*, translated into Persian by Mansoor Ansari, Tehran: Rokhdad-e-no, 2011, pp. 15-26.

<sup>7</sup> Arendt, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

According to Arendt, the private realm is “the realm of deprivation<sup>1</sup>... deprivation of objective relationships to others<sup>2</sup> .... [realm of] necessity, sacredness, darkness”.<sup>3</sup> It is the realm of inequality and monopoly of power.<sup>4</sup> Arendt emphasizes that the private realm has great significance in the human social life, but when public demands manifest themselves in domains which have the same characteristics as the private domain, it means that they will “be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others...”.<sup>5</sup> It means that the public issues which are inseparable from public good will be expressed “... without significance and consequence to other people”.<sup>6</sup> Politicization of non-political realms in a non-democratic society means that speech and action in the declining public sphere lack transparency and clarity. Political activity will be deprived of the “bright light of the constant presence of others on the public scene”.<sup>7</sup> In the declining public sphere, pluralism, freedom and equality of participants in the dialogue will be meaningless. Antagonistic features of the political penetrate into the public language and realm.<sup>8</sup> In other words, when the table is disappeared, the agents address others from the pulpit, and dialogue turns into a monologue.

In the case of Iran in this research, it has been shown how the children’s literature has been politicized. How the realm of children’s literature, which is the realm of education, gaining knowledge, and entertainment, turned into the realm of ideological indoctrination. In the example of Samad Behrangi, it has been described how this dissident intellectual has vocalized some of his political tendencies through his two short stories. Semiotic interpretation of these texts revealed some of this author’s political and social criticisms and approaches. Behrangi as a writer has accepted the role of an ideologue rather than an artist, a teacher, or an educator. On the other hand, as a dissident intellectual, he seems incapable of a multi-dimensional perspective. The structure and the style of Behrangi’s narratives are the repetition of the pattern of Pahlavi’s regime. His two stories are monologue, and both have intolerant and inflexible outlooks towards the other different attitudes. Samad does not seem very keen on rebuilding the Arendtian table, he was more eager to construct a rhetoric tribune.

---

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> Mouffe, *op. cit.*, pp. 15- 26.

Something, at least according to the historical experience of the Iranian people, seems obvious: politicization of children's literature in Iran (1963- 1979) was not a useful instrument even to serve the political purposes of those intellectuals who utilized it. In some cases, even the name of the publisher, 'Socialist Worker Publication' for instance, indicated what was the political tendencies behind the curtain of the juvenile story or poem. The leftist groups, however, were amongst the first supporters of the Iranian revolution who were excluded and eliminated from the political scene by Islamic extremists after the Iranian revolution in 1979.

It is the tragic fate of those people who are deprived of transparent dialogue in the public arena as mature adults. It is a tragic situation that the competent and qualified members of society have to use childish language to be able to give expression to their public demands. Using children's literature as a political instrument and the politicization of the children's literature, at least according to semiology, can be a sign in itself. It is the clearest sign of the immaturity, callowness and crudity of politics in the declining public realm of Iran, which still continue unabated. The Iranian people are still storytellers in the declining public realm of their country, but does it lead to democracy? It does not seem so, unless "all stakeholders in the Iranian public sphere... learn to tell their own stories, as well as to listen to those of others..."<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Ramin, Jahanbegloo, and Nojang Khatami, 'Acting under Tyranny: Hannah Arendt and the Foundations of Democracy in Iran', *Constellations*, Volum 00, Number 0, 2013, p. 16.

**Appendices: additional pictures**



**Last page of the book:**

**“Where are you little Hassan?” by Mohammad Parnian**

**Illustrated by Mohammad Parnian**

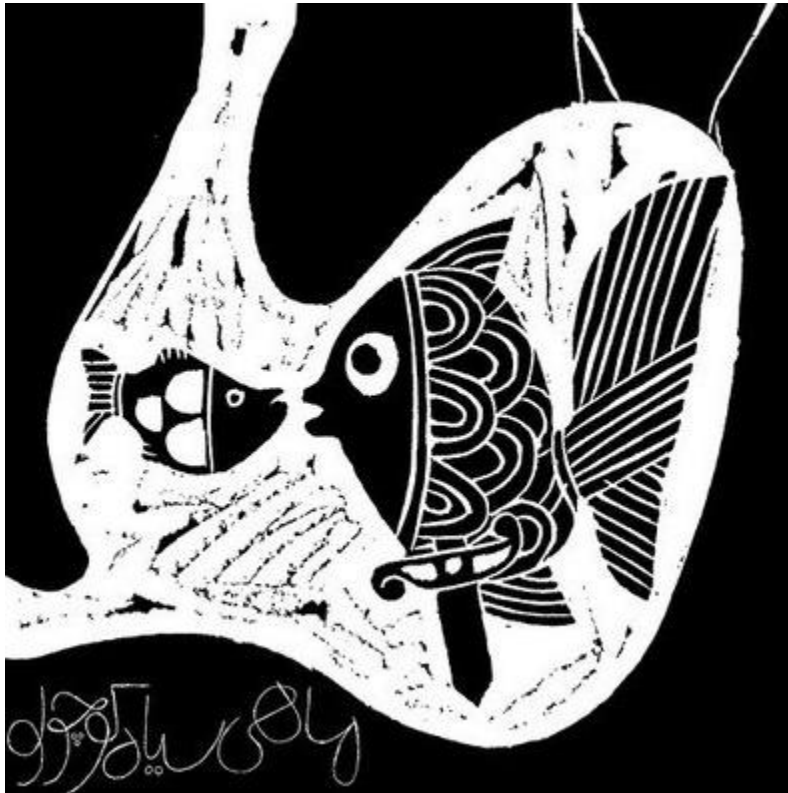




**The front page of the book:**

**“The Little Black Fish” by Samad Behrangi**

**Illustrated by Farshid Mesghali**



**From the book:**

**“The Little Black Fish” by Samad Behrangi**

**The little black fish in the stomach of the heron**

**Illustrated by Farshid Mesghali**

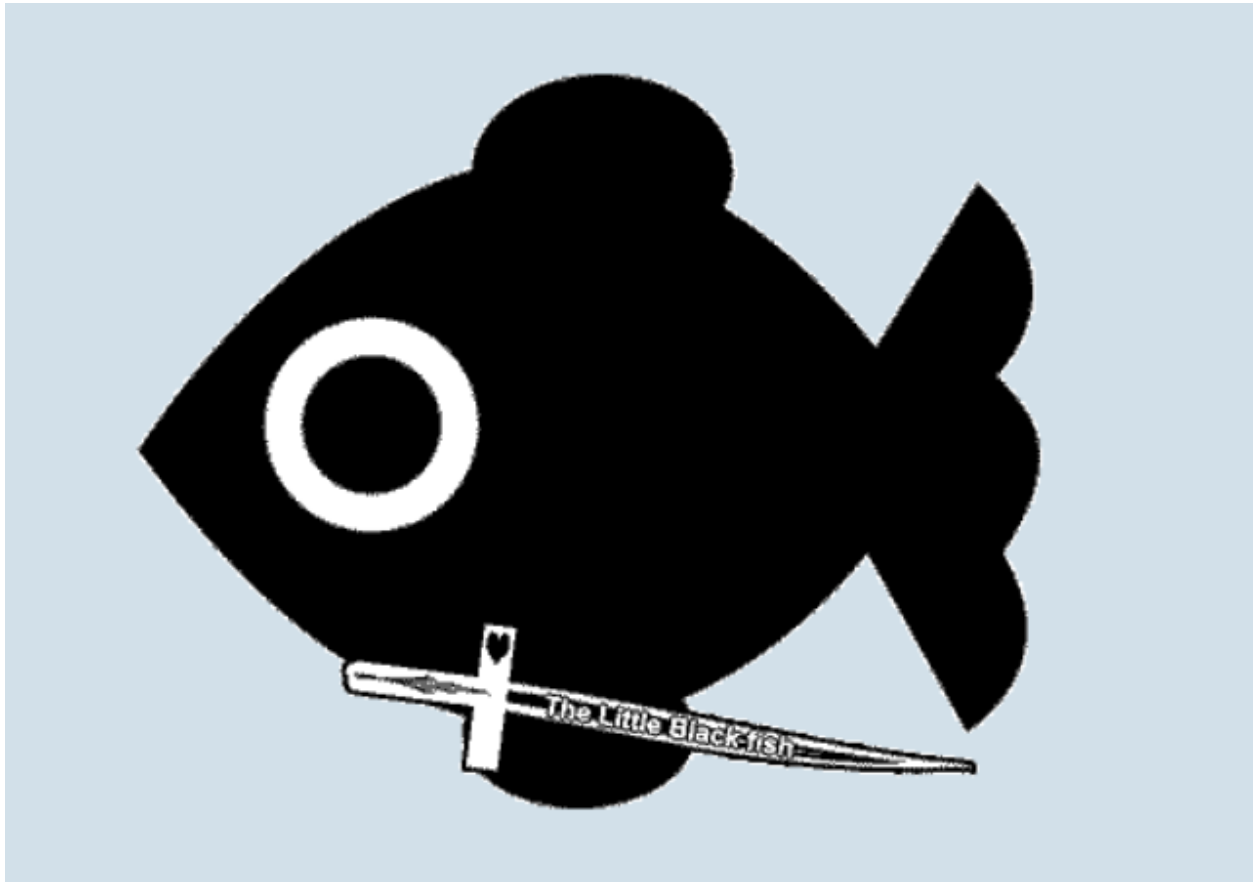


**Last picture of the book:**

**Narrator and twelve thousand of his/ her audience. Only little red fish has been affected by the tale.**

**“The Little Black Fish” by Samad Behrangi**

**Illustrated by Farshid Mesghali**



From the book:

"The Little Black Fish" by Samad Behrangi

Unknown designer

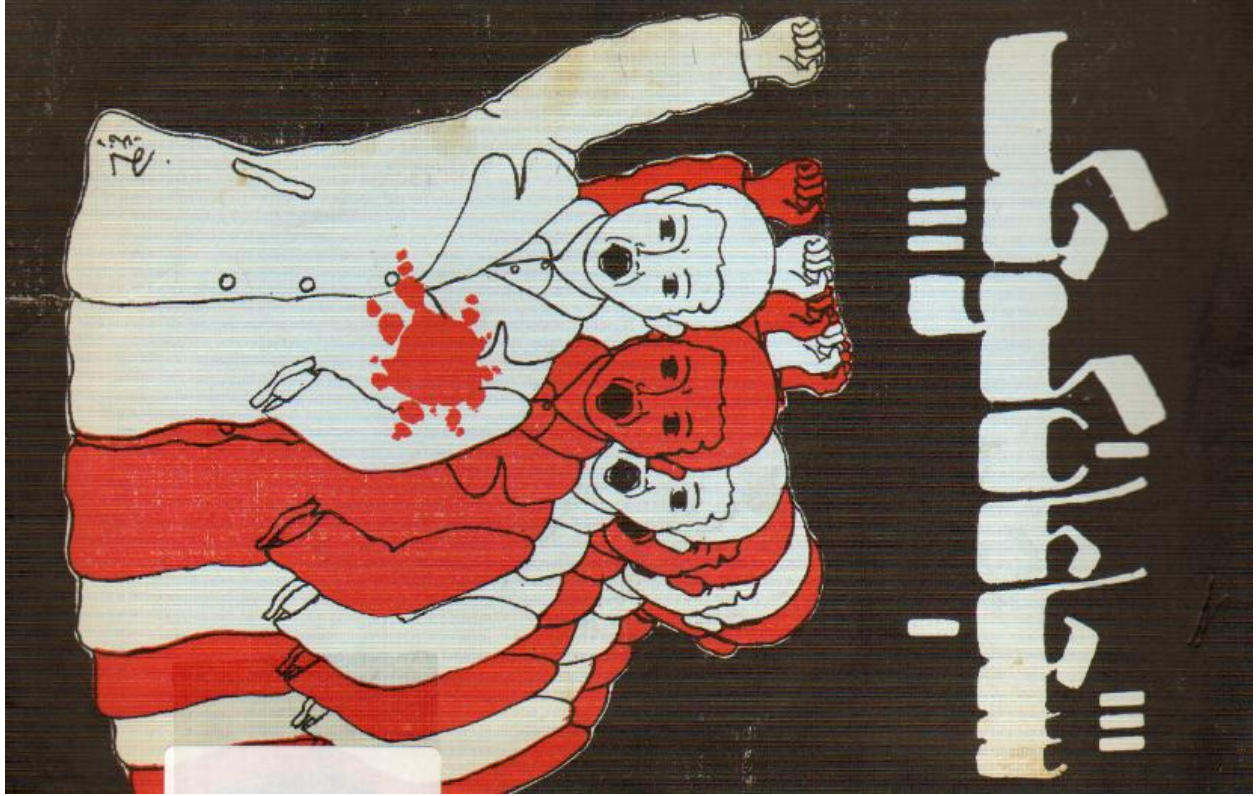


Front page of the book:

“The Pain of a Worker” by M. J. Khampichi

Unknown designer





Front page of the book:

“Little Brave Children” by an unknown writer

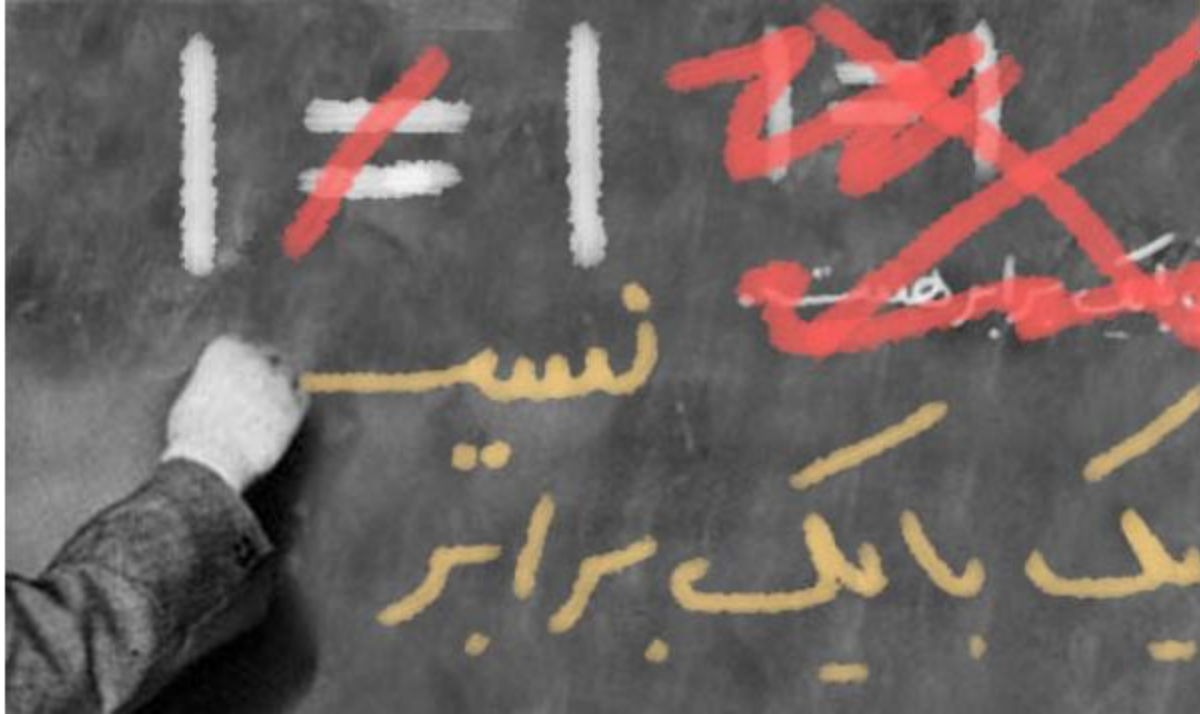
Illustrated by Azadeh R.



The front page of the book:

“A boy as dark as night” by Mohammad Reza Sharifinia

Illustrated by Mohammad Reza Sharifinia



From the book:

“One is not equal to one” by Khosrow Golsorkhi

Unknown designer



## REFERENCES

1. Abrahamian, Ervand. *Iran Between Two Revolutions*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982.
2. Abrahamian, Ervand. 'Oriental Despotism: The Case of Qajar Iran'. in *The International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*. No. 5. 1974.
3. Ajoodani, Mashallah. *The Iranian Constitution*. Tehran: Akhtaran Press, 2002.
4. Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958.
5. Barthes, Roland. *Elements of Semiology*. trans. by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. New York: Hill and Wang, 1967.
6. Bashiriye, Hossein. *Introduction to Political Sociology of Iran; the Islamic Republic era*. Tehran: Negah-e Mo'aser Institution, 2002.
7. Bauer, Martin W. and Bas Aarts. 'Constructing a Research Corpus'. in *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: a practical handbook*. ed. by W. Bauer and George Gaskell. London: Sage publication, 2000, pp. 19- 37.
8. Bauer, Martin W. George Gaskell Martin and Nicholas C. Allum. 'Quality, Quantity and Knowledge Interests: Avoiding Confusions'. in *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: a practical handbook*. ed. by W. Bauer and George Gaskell. London: Sage publication, 2000, pp. 3- 17.
9. Behrangi, Asad. *The complete works of Samad Behrangi*. vol. 1, Tabriz: Behrangi, 2002.
10. Bryan, Alan. 'Quantitative and Qualitative Research: Further Reflections on their Integration'. in *Mixing Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Research*. ed. by Julia Brannen. London: Ashgate, 2003, chapter 3, p. 57- 78.
11. Chandler, Daniel. *Semiotics: the Basics*. London: Routledge, 2002.
12. Culler, Jonathan. *The Pursuit of Signs*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981.
13. Gripsrud, Jostein... [and others]. 'General introduction'. in *Discovering the public sphere*. Vol. 1. Los Angeles : SAGE, 2011.
14. Gripsrud, Jostein... [and others]. 'Introduction: Discovering the Public Sphere'. in *Discovering the public sphere*. ed. by Jostein Gripsrud, Halvard Moe, Anders Molander and Graham Murdock. vol. 1. Los Angeles : SAGE, 2011.
15. Habermas, Jurgen. 'Civil society, public opinion, and communicative power (1992)'. in *The Public Sphere*. ed. by Jostein Gripsrud, Halvard Moe, Anders Molander and Graham Murdock. vol. 1. Los Angeles, London: SAGE publication, 2011.

16. Habermas, Jürgen. 'The Public Sphere: an Encyclopedia Article (1961)'. in *The Public Sphere: Discovering the Public Sphere*. ed. by Jostein Gripsrud, Hallvard Moe, Anders Molander and Graham Murdock. Vol. I. London: SAGE Publications, 2011, pp. 171- 179.
17. Habermas, Jürgen. 'Towards a Critique of the Theory of Meaning'. in *Communication Theories: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*. ed. by Paul Cobley. vol. II. London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 201-224.
18. Habermas, Jürgen. *The structural transformation of the public sphere : an inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. trans. by Thomas Burger; with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge : Polity, 1989.
19. Halliday, Michael A. K. 'Language as Social Semiotic (1978)', in *Communication Theories: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*. ed. by Paul Cobley. vol. II. London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 33- 54.
20. Hammersly, Martin. 'Deconstructing the Qualitative- Quantitative Research'. in *Mixing Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Research*. ed. by Julia Brannen. London: Ashgate, 2003, chapter 2, pp. 39- 55.
21. Heywood, Andrew. *Politics*. third edition. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
22. Hjelmslev, Louis. *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*. trans. by Francis J. Whitfield. London: the University of Wisconsin Press, 1969.
23. Homaun Katouzian, Mohammad. *The Political Economy of Iran, from the Constitutional Era until the end of the Pahlavi's dynasty*. translated into Persian by Mohammad Reza Nafisi, Kambiz Azizi. Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz, 2000.
24. Humayoon Katouzian, Mohammad. *The Dialectic of State and Society; theory of History and politics in Iran*. translated into Persian by Alireza Tayyeb. Tehran: Ney Press, 2001.
25. Hunt, Peter. 'Introduction: the World of Children's literature studies'. in *Understanding children's literature: key essays from the second edition of The International companion encyclopedia of children's literature*. ed. by Peter Hunt. London: Routledge, 1999.
26. Jahanbegloo, Ramin and Nojang Khatami. Acting under Tyranny: Hannah Arendt and the Foundations of Democracy in Iran. Constellations Volume 00, Number 0, 2013.
27. Jensen, Klaus Bruhn. *The Social Semiotics of Mass Communication*. London: SAGE Publications, 1995.
28. Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means*, London: SAGE Publication, 1996.
29. Jones, Paul. 'Beyond the Semantic Big Bang: Cultural Sociology and an Aesthetic Public Sphere (2007)'. in *The Public Sphere: The Cultural Public Sphere*. vol. III, edited by Jostein Gripsrud, Hallvard Moe, Anders Molander, and Graham Murdock, Los Angeles : SAGE, 2011.
30. Wittfogel, Karl. *Oriental Despotism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975.
31. Lesnik- Oberstein, Karin. 'Essentials: What is Children's literature? What is Childhood?'. in *Understanding children's literature: key essays from the second edition of The*

- International companion encyclopedia of children's literature*. ed. by Peter Hunt. London: Routledge, 1999.
32. McGuigan, Jin. 'The Cultural Public Sphere (2005)'. in *The Cultural public sphere*. vol. 3. Los Angeles : SAGE, 2011.
  33. Mohammadi, Mohammad Hadi and Ali Abbasi, Samad the Structure of a Myth, Tehran: Chista, 2001.
  34. Mouffe, Chantal. *On the political*. London: Routledge, 2005.
  35. \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_. *On the political*. translated into Persian by Mansoor Ansari. Tehran: Rokhdad-e-no, 2011.
  36. Nowzari, Hossein-ali. *Rewriting Habermas*. Tehran: Cheshme Press, 2002.
  37. Oberstein, Karin Lesnik. 'Essentials: What is Children's Literature? What is Childhood?'. in *Understanding children's literature: key essays from the second edition of The International companion encyclopedia of children's literature*. ed. by Peter Hunt. London: Routledge, 1999.
  38. Penn, Gemma. 'Semiotic Analysis of Still Image'. in *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound*. ed. by Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell. London: SAGE Publications, 2000, pp. 227- 245.
  39. Sarland, Charles. 'The Impossibility of Innocence: Ideology, Politics and Children's Literature'. in *Understanding children's literature: key essays from the second edition of The International companion encyclopedia of children's literature*. ed. by Peter Hunt. London: Routledge, 1999.
  40. Schmitt, Carl. *The Concept of the Political*. trans. by Matthias Konzen and John P. McCormick. the expanded edition. Chicago and London: The University Of Chicago Press, 2007.
  41. Shafiei Kadkani, Mohammad-Reza. On *Defamiliarization*. Bokhara. No. 89- 90. Jan. 2013.
  42. Soroush, Abdolkarim. 'civil society and its relationship with religion'. in *Civil Society and Today's Iran; collection of articles*, Tehran: Naqsh-o-negar Press, 1998.
  43. Taaher Ahmadi, Mahmud. 'from Children's Book Concil to the Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Adolescents (1963- 1979)', in *The Jurnal of Treasure Documents*, no. 51 and 52, autumn and winter of 2003.
  44. Tabatabaii, Javad. *Decline of Political Thought in Iran; a speech on theoretical decline in Iran*, Tehran: Kavir, 2006.
  45. Tabatabaii, Javad. *Introduction to Theory of Iran's Decline*. Tabriz School and Modernity principles. Tabriz: Sotoodeh, 2005.
  46. Tonnies, Ferdinand. 'Excerpt from Critique of Public Opinion (1922)', in *The Public Sphere: Discovering the Public Sphere*. ed. by Jostein Gripsrud, Hallvard Moe, Anders Molander and Graham Murdock. vol. I. London: SAGE Publications, 2011, pp. 53-71.

47. W. Bauer, Martin and Bas Aarts. 'Constructing a Research Corpus', in *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound: a practical handbook*. ed. by W. Bauer and George Gaskell. London: Sage publication, 2000.

Translation of Samad Behrangi's stories into English:

*The Little Black Fish*: [www.iranchamber.com/literature/sbehrangi/.../the\\_little\\_black\\_fish.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/literature/sbehrangi/.../the_little_black_fish.php)

*24 Restless Hours*: [www.iranchamber.com/literature/sbehrangi/works/24\\_restless\\_hours.php](http://www.iranchamber.com/literature/sbehrangi/works/24_restless_hours.php)