Contemporary Persian Poetry as History: On the Simultaneity of the Allegorical Construction of Nation and Individual Subjectivity in Early 20th Century Iranian Poetry

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Abstract

The ways through which literary texts can be read against their historical backgrounds have been the subject of several controversies since the beginning of the 20th century. This article, by focusing on the particular case of contemporary Persian poetry in the first half of the 20th century, aims at demonstrating the way historical processes are internally inscribed in the formal totality of the work and hence, not standing as external phenomena in relation to the text. Thus, by emphasizing the form and representational characteristics, this study offers readings of early 20th century Persian poetry in Iran and attempts to give an explanation of a double-faced phenomenon: The allegorical construction of the 'nation' on the one hand, and the representation of the individual subjectivity on the other. To approach this particular historical subject matter, this article focuses on the centrality of 'the homeland' in this specific literary discourse, and the particular manner in which it is being 'concretized' by establishing relations with various sign networks, alongside the change in 'the real' upon which individuals' subjectivities are constructed.

Keywords: Contemporary Persian Poetry, Nation, Iran's Constitutional Era, Allegory, Fredric Jameson, Individual Subjectivity

1. Introduction

> *Articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it 'the way it really was'. It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to hold fast that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to the historical subject in a moment of danger.[1]*
> Walter Benjamin, 'On the concept of History'

This Reading some moments of Contemporary Persian Poetry, neither as *things-in-themselves* nor as *reflections* of something external, but as history itself is what moves this essay forward. It would be bothersome and unnecessary to go through all the (probably) outdated debates, both on why literary texts are not isolated entities and therefore do not reveal their full meaning through de-contextualizing readings, and also on why there is nothing fixed outside of the text that it merely reflects. Putting these two negatively complementary positions aside, literary text can be treated as an actualization of the history itself, as a momentary spark of that history which is 'inaccessible to us except in textual form', 'history as an absent cause' (Jameson, 1981, p. 20). Not always history was as absent and inaccessible as it is in the present situation of the globalized

world, of the unprecedented ever-increasing distance between our direct experience and its conditions of existence. It is in this 'moment of danger' that historical 'realities', both those in the present and the past, no longer convey any immediate historical content of their own (which was always the case with literature), and instead, representations gain new significance.

Addressing the direct subject-matter of this study, contemporary Persian poetry itself enables this kind of approach, standing at the intersection of several conflicting historical processes: The emergence of Iran's modern nation-state with the Constitutional Revolution[2] and literature's roles in the process of nation-building, construction of modern subjectivities, and the final stage of the incorporation of the Qajar's territory into the modern *world-system* (to use Immanuel Wallerstein's term) as a periphery, to name a few. In his work, *World Literature and Hedayat's Poetics of Modernity* (2020), Omid Azadibougar has discussed how this historical context, Iranian peripheral modernity in particular, is inscribed within Sadegh Hedayat's novels and short stories and shaped their narrative. But aiming for explaining this phenomenon in the poetic field tends to be more problematic; since unlike novel, poetry has a deep history in Persian language. Thus, in the era of the construction of modern Iran, emerging forms and contents, or one might say new representational subjectivities, are in conflict with the pre-existing ones in the field of poetic production. This leads to a tragic situation for 'Iranian' poets in this particular era. At the one hand, they have mostly accepted (or—considering their historical situation—had to accept) a linear view of history based on an inevitable movement of history's wheels in the direction of constant progress; a linear view through which Iranian intellectuals at the time, find themselves thrown to a past, behind Europe or '*farangestān',* hence emerges the sense of 'backwardness' and 'decline'. On the other hand, at the same time, Persian literature in Iran, which in the literary discourse of the time mainly refers to Persian poetry, is one of the most central actants of the process of nation-building, as 'the national literature'; as a space that feeds the national imagination and functions as a sort of retrospective collective memory for the 'nation'. In this regard, even though the necessity of change in Persian poetry seems crucial for Iranian intellectuals (because the pre-existing poetical norms and values are seen as aspects of 'decline'), yet a sense of continuation should be preserved.[3] This is the tragic situation: the existing poetry is denounced but at the same time, Persian poetry cannot completely detach itself from such tradition. This situation raises a range of tensions, among existing forms and coming ones, or between the subjectivity that is being dissolved and the subjectivity(s) that is (are) emerging. This is not a stable situation though. These cohabiting forms/subjectivities have the tendency to reduce the tension and therefore merge into each other. This tendency triggers certain processes which are discussed interdependently in this essay; the *symbolic accumulation*, the change in the 'real', the fragmentation of time-space experienced by the subject, and the allegorical construction of the 'nation' and 'homeland' (*vatan*). The constellation constructed by these concepts, is aimed here to explain how individual subjectivity is being represented in Iran as a peripheral zone, and how this subjectivity (quite different from that of the core-countries in the early 20th century) from the first moment is bound to the allegorical construction of the 'nation' and 'homeland' (*vatan*).

2. Theoretical Discussion

The main theoretical premise of this article is that literary texts, by means of their form, carry within themselves precipitated and hidden historical contents which are not accessible to us, either through the direct significations of literary texts, or less so, in historiographical works. In this sense, literary text can be read as history itself- and not the history of literature- if treated in a way that provides the work with an appropriate language to manifest the historical moment it embodies. To use Terry Eagleton's allegory in *Criticism and Ideology* (1976), literary text resembles the seemingly aimless dance of a man in an environment. To be able to interpret such a ritual act, one must not focus on the isolated parts and separate details, instead the totality of this behavior, its form should be explored in relation to 'the nature of an environment which could motivate such behavior' (p.75). Literary text, as Eagleton explains differs from historiography by 'the absence of any historical real' to which the text refers, 'but it does, nonetheless, have history as its object in the last instance, in the ways apparent not to the text itself but to criticism' (p.74). The way in which the text is related to history is through its so-called 'freedom' and 'self-referentiality'. This constructed 'freedom' from the historical real is the reason that history is not 'presented' in the literary text as an immediate object, but 'represented'. Literary texts deal not with knowledge (as historiography does) but with 'truth'; and unlike knowledge's method which is to 'possess' its object, truth's method is 'self-representation, and is, therefore, immanent in it as form' (Benjamin, 1963/2003, p.30).

If the text is freed from any direct historical object, its form is determined and produced by (and reproducing at the same time) the history itself as the 'always absent cause'. Literary text, through its detachment from any particular 'real', once again to recall Eagleton's analysis in *Criticism and Ideology*, 'most significantly refers- refers, not to the concrete situations, but to an ideological formation (and hence, obliquely, to history) which "concrete situations" have actually produced' (p.74). Here, ideology refers to 'a set of discourses of values, representations, beliefs' (p.54) and narratives that interpret a person's direct experience in a particular way, and construct for individual subjects a particular imaginary relationship between social relations and their own direct experience (Althusser, 1995/2014, pp.181–82); In other words, ideology includes mechanisms that mediate, in a particular way, between individuals' daily experience and the social reality in which they are immersed. Therefore, literary text as an ideological production—not necessarily in a negative sense—represents certain modes of experiencing the 'reality' by individuals and the meaning of this 'reality' through its relation to the 'social relations' and collective existences.

3. The Confrontation of Two Different Ssubject-Worlds: A Dramatic Scene

The farmer tells the master under the whip is the name of a poem by Seyyed Ashrafedin Hosseini (1870-1934) known by his pen-name, Nasim-e Shomal, (one of the leading poets of the Constitutional period), written a few years after the Constitutional Revolution. This poem begins (or continues) after its narrative-dramatic title with the farmer's complaints:

> O tyrant, shall disaster be far from you
>
> Whip like an anchor, shall disaster be far from you
>
> We, the oppressed farmers, are in trouble every day
>
> Sometimes we are in the hands of our master, and sometimes the chief
>
> Have mercy on us, we are the servants of God
>
> Whip like an anchor on the helpless poor, shall disaster be far from you
>
> Whip like an anchor, shall disaster be far from you ... (Hosseini, 1989, p. 223)[4]

As seen in these early verses (*abyāt*), the main body of the poem, contrary to its title, is not narrative-dramatic by nature; most sentences contain general statements or judgments said by the farmer about the master. In the title, a dramatic scene is presented in which dramatic characters are representing different positions (the master and the farmer) in relation to each other, but as the poem continues, other verses do not further the scene, as if it was frozen in the title. In the main body of the text, we are faced with general propositions of the 'farmer' that express the farmer's view of the master's tyranny and have nothing to do with proceeding or expanding the narrative-dramatic situation, either in the form of external descriptions or internal impulses; verses such as:

> The honorable prophet, the one intelligent and virtuous
>
> Said that the product of cultivation is rightfully the farmer's
>
> That is, the product of these farms come from the farmers
>
> O enemy of the prophet, whip, shall disaster be far from you… (Hosseini, 1989, p. 223)

The rest of the poem is continued in such an atmosphere. But the highlight of this poem is its final sentence, which is written in prose and with the same form and image of the poem's title: 'The moment the master heard this poem, commanded to sew up the farmer's mouth with a big needle' (Hosseini, 1989, p. 224). This sentence and the title of the poem, both of which have a dramatic characteristic, are no additives that can be omitted from the poem, but inseparable parts of it; if we remove these two, we are left with a completely different text. What is most striking in the form of this poem is the fact that the narrative-dramatic parts of the work are located outside the main body of the poem—which is composed in a so-called 'semi-classical' format—and hence the poem's form is constituted by two semi-separate subject-worlds. The inner subject of the text, in the main body of the poem, is a farmer who is not only any different from other farmers, but even his viewpoint cannot be completely differentiated from that of the poet himself. For instance, the farmer in one of the verses says: 'We earned the Constitution, and this is finally the outcome/ As if our destination is determined to be as such, from the first day of the creation (*rūz-e alast*)' (Hosseini, 1989, p. 223). In such propositions, it is difficult to distinguish between the consciousness of the poet and that of the 'farmer'. Interestingly, in the whole main body of the poem, the 'farmer' refers to himself with the pronoun 'I' only once—while he uses the pronoun 'we' several times—and that is the only verse that has a narrative-dramatic tone: 'I am under the whip, you drink / Whip once and twice, shall the disaster be far from you' (Hosseini, 1989, p. 223). Altogether, it means that the main body of the poem represents an experiential space—and a kind of subjectivity—that is not fragmented and isolated; that is to say, not 'privatized'. The farmer's experiential space is not separated from other farmers and not even from the poet himself; therefore, to express this experience, there is no need to adopt an individual viewpoint with its appropriate fragmentary time-space. On the other hand, the opening and closing sentences are narrated from a particular point of view compatible with the experiential space of an individual subject.

If we describe the narrative characteristic in the modern sense as a temporal expansion (one might say, an expansion in 'depth') and the dramatic aspect as a spatial expansion (or an expansion in 'surface'), the latter dominates this work in two levels. One is more content-oriented, concentrated around the first and last sentences which describe a scene that includes dramatic characters ('the master' and 'the farmer'). Not accidentally, this dramatic confrontation is reproduced in the work, at a more formal level: at the level of two almost distinct subject-worlds cohabiting in the text: the subject-world of the first and last sentences and the subject-world of the main body. It is not surprising that prior to the establishment of a different subjectivity, in other words, before going into the temporal 'depth' of a different kind of subjectivity, a dramatic confrontation at the spatial 'surface', between the existing and the coming one is expected.

I am even tempted to say that the subjectivity represented by this poem and its form, more than anywhere else, manifests itself in the gap between these two types of subject-worlds. The truth lies in this opposition. Of course, this gap is never a gap between the 'old' and the 'new'; especially because the inner subject of the main body of the poem is significantly different from the inner subject of the poems of the main figures of Qajar era— for instance, Mirzā Habib-o-llāh known as Qā'āni (1808-1854), and Mohammad-Ali Sadehi-e Esfehāni, known with his pen-name Soroush-e Esfehāni (1813-1868)[5]—which precedes the Constitutional period. This difference is also reflected in the form of the main body of the poem, which tries to create different networks of symbols by disordering the classical modes of expression—including but not limited to, introducing informal language into the work, avoiding the usual rhetorical techniques available in the tradition of Persian classical poetry, and changing the rhyme.

The main body of the poem, under the pressure of an (yet) incommensurable subjectivity on its form, has inserted parts of it, while redefining it in its own environment, and of course, re-arranging itself accordingly; but another part has yet remained undissolved, manifesting itself in the first and last dramatic sentences. That is why in this poem we are confronted with a fragmented subject-world. This form in Constitutional poetry is not a singular phenomenon, but a meaningful collective trend, though having different appearances. In the works of poets such as Mohammad-Taqi Bahar (1886-1951), Mirzadeh Eshghi (1893-1924), and Aref Qazvini (1882-1934)[6] there can be noticed poems with a preface (*sābeqe*) which is inseparable from the main body of the work; in the sense that the preface is in a close dialogue with the main body of the poem, which if read separately, turns into a completely different work. This preface that often has a significant narrative-dramatic characteristic and embodies a different kind of subject-world structure from that of the main body, describes the 'scene' in which the main body is located. Moreover, it determines the signification of specific signs and references in the main text, all of which convey a totally different signified otherwise.

Obviously, this situation is not stable. The tension arising from this fragmentary subject-world, from these cohabiting subject-worlds, finds itself ways to sink into a lower level and therefore, triggers processes for achieving a new kind of synthesis in the work, for expanding the nexus of signs in the main body of the text and establishing new relations between represented objects, in a way that the semi-separate subject-worlds are unified and the confrontation 'scene' between different subjectivities gives way to deepening into a new kind of subjectivity.

4. Symbolic Accumulation and the Allegorical Construction of the 'Nation'

By symbolic accumulation, what is intended is a process through which existing signs, are displaced onto new contexts, where, by way of establishing new signifying nexuses, are accumulated with new significations, all the while that they are more or less disconnected from their older signified. This new context, either is a fragmented subject-world (such as what discussed in the previous section) or the objective context in which the poem is published (such as the magazine, the design of the page in which the poem is published and the visual signs juxtaposed with the poem), or in most cases, a combination of both. In one example, Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda (1879-1956), an Iranian poet, lexicographer, political activist, and journalist, or to put it another way, an Iranian 'intellectual' with its particular signification in the Periphery in general and in particularly Iran's Constitutional period, wrote and published an elegiac poem after the death of Mirzā Jahāngir Khān Shirāzi another Iranian intellectuals who was executed after Mohammad-Ali Shah[7] conducted a coup d'état against the Constitutional Revolution, bombarded the 'national' parliament's building and severely suppressed the leaders and supporters of the revolution. The poem appears in *Sūr-e Esrāfil* magazine for the first time, published between May 1907 and March 1909, of which Mirzā Jahāngir Khān himself was the founder, and, after his execution, Dehkhoda published three more issues in exile from Switzerland:

> O bird of the dawn! when this dark night
> has put aside its black deeds,
> and at the life-giving breath of the dawn
> slumber has departed from the heads of the sleepers,
> when the beloved of the indigo throne
> has loosened knots from her golden tresses,
> God in His perfection has become manifest,
> and the evil-natured Ahriman has withdrawn to its citadel,
> remember the dead candle, remember…(Dehkhoda & Shirazi, 1983, p. 285)[8]

This is the first section (*band*) of the poem which starts with recalling some signs and symbols from classical Persian poetry, more specifically from 'love' and mystical poetry in 'Iraqi style'[9]; signs such as 'bird of the dawn' (*morq-e sahar*), 'dark night' (*šab-e tār*), 'slumber' (*xomārī*), 'knots of the tress' (*gereh-e zolf*) and of course 'candle' (*šam'*). Although the poem noticeably deviates from classical Persian rhetoric, it is composed through recalling signs inherited from classical sign nexuses; interrelated signs which through reciprocal references to each other, at first glance, might seem to re-signify some familiar classical motifs in the work: 'the longing' for 'union' (*vesāl*) with the 'loved one' (*yār*), a 'night' (*šām*) opposed to the 'dawn' (*sahar*) and a 'candle' that saves one point of light in this 'dark night' (*šab-e tār*) and sacrifices its own life in this way,[10] and a 'garden' (*bāq*) currently under 'the chill of winter' (*sardī-ye dey*) that is expected to 'turn green again'. These oppositions are the main axis of the work; oppositions between 'night' and 'dawn', between 'union' and its familiar opposite—even if not directly mentioned in the text— 'separation' (*ferāq* or *hejrān*), between winter and spring, and in general, an opposition between the unfavorable present and a wished-for favorable future.

But to interpret the significations of these nexuses as we might interpret, for example, a poem by Hafez, is to miss explaining the poem in its totality, it is to completely ignore the context in which the poem is located; a context that is a part of the form and not something external to it. In its first publication in 1909, the poem accompanies a photo of Mirzā Jahāngir Khān—for whom the elegy is composed—and a caption:

> The martyr of the path to freedom and the sincerest defender of the homeland's rights, Mirza Jahangir Khan Shirazi, manager of the newspaper Sūr-e Esrāfil who, in the morning of *Jemad al-Ula* 24, 1324, was elevated to the rank of the martyrs (Dehkhoda & Shirazi, 1983, p. 284).[11]

Thus, the 'candle' here, refers, not to a mystical figure, but to 'the martyr of the path to freedom'. The 'garden' signifies, not the familiar image from classical Persian poetry describing various aspects of nature and paradise, but to a secular place

that the inner subject of the poem wishes to become 'green' again, a place which allegorizes 'the homeland'. The note, or one might say the preface, and the visual surrounding, have the force to push, to breathe new significations into the signs which—filled with different significations—had existed in Persian poetry for centuries. These new significations are collective in essence. Now, the 'dark night' (*šāb-e tār*) and 'the chill of winter' (*sardī-ye dey*) refer to the unfavorable historical situation of a collective being, namely to the situation of 'the homeland' (*vatan*). Likewise, 'union' and 'dawn' signify the end of this unfavorable situation. As one might notice, 'the homeland' is the central sign, or, to put it in post-structural terms, it is the central 'signifier' around which all the other signifiers cluster and gain their significance through this association.

The claim of the centrality of this sign—and of course its discursive complement, the 'nation' (*mellat*), in Constitutional Persian poetry, can be supported by investigating a wide range of poems from poets of all different and even opposing literary currents in this period.[12] However, the role of these literary currents drastically differs from each other, when observed to uncover their particular ways of filling 'homeland' with different significations. In the era in which the geopolitical zone called 'Iran' is being incorporated in the modern world-system and the nation-state of Iran is being constructed, 'homeland' is a center-point at which heavy socio-political discursive acts of opposing social forces clash. In other words, to internalize and understand 'homeland' and 'nation' differently is to pave the way for different political forces in this era. Therefore, while investigating through poems of this era, we are not dealing with a passive 'reflection' of, for example, how Iranian intellectuals understand the 'homeland', but how it is being constructed through active discursive actions. And it is almost always a conscious act, as this consciousness reveals itself when Aref Qazvini, who calls himself 'the poet of the homeland', says: 'I started composing the homeland (*vatanī*) songs at a time when one in ten thousand Iranians did not know what homeland means. They only thought that homeland was the city or the village where one is born!' (Qazvini, 2010, p. 252)

The mechanisms of the symbolic accumulation process through which 'the homeland' is being constructed (and some of its most close relatives, such as 'nation', 'Iran' and 'the country') consist of a few main ways: by likening it to a place ('home' (*xāne*), 'abode' (*kāšāne*), 'ruin', 'nest', 'ship', 'garden', 'plain' and 'field' (*dašt-o-daman*), 'meadow', 'farm'); 'animating' it (that is, the 'homeland') by way of likening it to an animal or a plant (such as 'eagle', 'wounded partridge', 'lion', 'tree'); and by personification (e.g. the 'homeland' as 'mother', a 'forlorn' (*bīkas*) or 'oppressed individual', 'beloved').[13] Attributing each of these signifying domains to 'the homeland' and its complement, 'nation', is to allegorize (and internalize) these collective matters in a relatively different manner. For the subjectivity of the individual to be nationalized, allegory plays a fundamental role; mainly because 'nation', and 'homeland' (when it is not anymore understood as where individuals are born), cannot be lived directly and concretely. These are among those phenomena that Fredric Jameson describes as realities that 'we can understand as abstract minds', but 'we are incapable of living directly in our individual lives and experiences' (Jameson, 1974, p. 169). But the problem arises when we come to such collectivities as 'nation'; mainly because collectivities, by nature cannot be conceptualized as abstract concepts—unlike what is at stake in philosophical thinking—neither could they be experienced concretely. Thus, for this dilemma of the inaccessibility of collectivities such as 'nation' to the direct experience and the urge for their concrete representation, there remains only an imaginary solution. This imaginary solution nowhere can be found better than in literature; for 'the literary text…, is characterized by a peculiar conjuncture of 'concrete' and 'abstract'. It resembles historiography in its density of texture, yet is analogous to philosophical discourse in the 'generality' of its object. It differs from both in taking this 'abstract' object as concrete'(Eagleton, 1976, p. 75).

As Jameson discusses in *Allegory and Ideology* (2019), another name of this imaginary solution which we can find in literary texts is *allegory*; since to represent a directly inaccessible collectivity by connecting it to concrete objects and establishing relations among them for the sake of constructing a narrative, cannot be called anything but allegorical. In this sense, allegory might be described as the act of rewriting a phenomenon or an event in the code of a different kind of phenomenon. That's why in any attempt to explain historical phenomena—except if one thinks that history is directly accessible—as Jameson himself puts it, 'allegory is always with us' (p. 207).

Based on the particular historical situation that this article attempts to describe, here it can be claimed that poetic texts constitute a suitable medium through which the allegorical construction of the 'nation' can be explained; not just by focusing on one particular text, rather by exploring the 'space' in which various poems of an era, by means of intertextual references, establish a process of symbolic accumulation which yields different, and even opposing, nation-building allegories, among which, of course, one version becomes dominant. Therefore, as discussed earlier, while different mechanisms of representing the 'homeland' in Constitutional Persian poetry are surely interrelated, but there are meaningful differences as well. On the one hand, signs such as 'house' or 'garden' construct a retrospective and nostalgic concept of 'homeland'; that is, since these two are beings whose existence tends to extend to the past, they impose their 'retrospectivness' on the 'homeland' as well. In this sense, it is as if the 'homeland' or a nation-state, which defines itself by a particular collaboration of geography, race, language, and religion, has an essence that has existed since immemorial times. But on the other hand, a sign like 'farm', signifying something periodic and transformable by nature, resists this nostalgia. As a result, 'farm', and its concomitant symbolic domain, have less retrospective potentiality than 'house' and 'garden'. But this retrospective potentiality reaches its climax in personification. When 'homeland' is allegorized through personification, related categories such as 'blood' and language also become parts of the subject's perception of 'homeland'. This is more the case with personifying the 'homeland' as 'mother' than with any other sign. Personifying 'homeland' as 'mother' projects its effect on the relationship of the 'nation' and 'homeland'. 'Nation' is understood as the 'children' of the 'homeland', with a shared race, culture, and language. Of course, as the Iranian historian, Afsaneh Najmabadi, warns, 'nation' does not signify the 'children' but 'sons of the homeland': 'the dominant family trope (for describing the homeland or *vatan*) was the sons of *vatan*, not the children of *vatan*. The nation was

overwhelmingly transcribed as *sons (abna')* of Iran, a male brotherhood of *vatani brothers (baradaran-i vatan)*' (Najmabadi, 2005, p. 119). Najmabadi explains how this issue becomes clearer when the contrast between 'sons' and 'daughters' appears in the text. The 'sons' must 'educate' the 'daughters of the nation', who are the 'the future mothers and teachers of sons of the country' (Najmabadi, 2005, p. 119). Thus, the formation of gendered positions, alongside the transformation of the family structure, are other layers of the process in which 'nation' is constructed.

5. The change in the structure of the 'real'

Another process to which the confrontation of the two subjectivities leads, is the change in the structure of the 'real'[14]. This process, more than being completely separate from the process of symbolic accumulation, is another perspective to the same phenomenon.[15] But, while in discussing symbolic accumulation, I was concentrated on exploring the process whereby already existing signs are re-organized, in this section, new objects that enter into the real are emphasized; mainly by being named and situated into the re-organized sign nexuses. Again, focusing on a poem—an ironic poem one might say—by Seyed Ashrafedin Hosseini, seems useful for my explanation:

> Wait, my dear, wait
> Wait, my dear, wait
> After this, Tehran becomes a paradise
> There will be a lot of bread in the stores
> Mutton will become cheap
> Problems become easier with patience…(Hosseini, 1989, p. 94)[16]

These are the first verses of the poem 'When bread and meat are expensive in Tehran, they command us to be patient' by Nasim-e Shomal. 'store', 'bread', 'meat', 'wheat', 'people', 'Qom'[17], 'spinach', 's*angak* bread'[18], 'baker', 'mutton', 'grilled chicken', '*šemrān*',[19] 'tablecloth', 'newspapers', 'news' and 'forest' mentioned in this poem, are either new objects in the structure of reality, or given new significations in a new context. Objects such as 'bread', 'wheat' and 'tablecloth' are from the second category that has been used frequently in classical Persian literature, but in different contexts and with different meanings, mainly in the mystical poetry and often in a metaphorical sense. These are objects from layers of the daily and immediate experience of the individual that have hitherto been absent from the structure of the 'real' manifested in Persian poetry. From this perspective, I propose the first aspect of the transformation of the structure of the real: the construction of the real surrounding an individual subject, or one might say, the construction of the 'private individual' itself; though in this poem, and most poems of this era, the inner subject of the text itself, does not still represent a fragmented individual subjectivity. Other than what discussed above, this aspect includes another mechanism; founding a basis for the fragmentation of the inner subject's apprehension of time and space relations; mainly by naming places and times that an individual subject might experience directly. 'Tehran', 'Qom', '*šemrān*', 'noon' and 'evening' are a few examples. In this context, 'noon' or 'evening' does not signify a typical time of the day, but a time which a private individual might directly experience:

> If you want to get good bread
> Wait from noon until evening
> If the baker throws stones and sticks at your head
> Wait, my dear, wait…(Hosseini, 1989, p. 94)

The process of the change in the real has a second aspect too; that is, naming the collectivities, whereby situating them in what is perceived as the real. Several collectivities are named in this poem of Nasim-e Shomal: 'people', 'Russians', 'Germany', 'Britain', 'enemy', 'mothers', 'girls', 'the poor', 'Kashan', 'Tabriz', 'shiraz', 'Isfahan', 'Zanjan' and 'Qazvin'[20], 'Farmers', 'workers', 'women' and 'toilers' are among other collectivities that in other poems from this era are named.[21] This process, that is, naming what is inside 'Iran' along with what is outside 'Iran' and opposing them—the names of the countries, Europe and '*farang*'[22]—are ideological mechanisms that aim to construct 'Iran' as a coherent unity; the former is positively defining it by filling it from inside, and the latter negatively, by determining its limits from outside, by naming what 'Iran' is not. Of course, as repeatedly discussed elsewhere the second process is the infrastructure of constructing a national identity.[23] This, alongside what discussed earlier as the dilemma of conceptualizing the 'nation' and the allegorical solution, is the context in which Jameson proposes his explanation for the construction of national identity:

My proposition consists in grasping national identity in terms of a cast of characters—sometimes large, sometimes small, just like concrete groups, families, and so on—whose imaginary presence defines the situation of the individual, who identifies it with this imaginary situation of his country or nation-state. It is not only in diplomacy, I think, that whole countries are taken to be allies (friends) or adversaries (foes): I want to assert these structures as existential ones, and indeed, as proto-narratives (Jameson, 2019, p. 207).

In Constitutional Persian poetry, 'adversary' (*xasm*), 'foe' (*adū*), 'foreigner' (*ajnabī*), 'outsider' (*bīgāne*) and 'enemy' (*došman*) are what 'homeland', 'us' and 'Iran' are formed against. These are 'others' against whom the 'self' is negatively defined. These oppositions imaginatively determine the boundaries of 'us'; or to put it in Étienne Balibar's words, internalize 'the external frontiers of the state' (see 95). Interestingly, 'foreigners' and 'outsiders', are not the Ottomans, 'Arabs'—all of whom are considered parts of the 'Orient' in the Orientalist discourse—but Europe or *farang* itself and European countries, above all England (*Engelīs*) and Russia (*Rūs*). Even if the Ottomans and the Arabs are defined as 'enemies', their enmity is projected to the Oriental past, in the form of the enmity between 'Iran' and '*Tūrān*'[24], the defeat of 'Iran' from Genghis Khan,

the Mongol emperor, or the defeat of 'Iranians' from 'Arabs' in 7th century.[25] What situates each of these 'nations' or 'characters' at their 'appropriate' position in a narrative order, is a particular collaboration of the three wheels of nation-building (race, language, and religion) and what Jameson calls 'geography'[26], in which one of these constituent parts is foregrounded. While geography plays a more fundamental role in representing 'Europe', 'England' and 'Russia', race is the axis for differentiating 'Iranians' from 'Arabs' and 'Turks'. In other words, the opposition to *farang* is rather a spatial ('dramatic') distinction and to 'Arabs' and 'Turks' a temporal ('narrative') one. It's not surprising, since, on the one hand, individuals living in the Iranian zone at the time, experience their 'dramatic' confrontation with 'foreigners'—namely British and Russian (indirect) colonizers—in their immediate experience,[27] and on the other hand, under the domination of Orientalist discourse they differentiate their own nationalized identity from that of 'Arabs' and 'Turks' by re-organizing the historical narrative in a way that 'purifies' them from the 'Semitic' element.

Though this process is allegorical—as pointed out in the discussion about the three main mechanisms of symbolic accumulation surrounding 'homeland'—allegorical construction of the nation cannot be reduced to the relations among these cast of characters and the narrative they construct. It's more reasonable to see this process as the foregrounded layer of a multilayer structure whose background layers are the various sign nexuses related to 'homeland' and 'nation' in the process of symbolic accumulation. The 'homeland', while keeping its relations to 'foreigners', 'foes' and 'friends', can be a 'farm' that 'we' all 'farmers' have to work on to make it flourish, or so differently, an 'oppressed mother' that 'we' all 'children' or 'sons' have to defend.

The new signifying potential of 'homeland' and 'nation', is the result of an unequal interaction among these different allegorical layers; non-equal in the sense that, one layer might be more determining than others, depending on the particular 'nation' that we are attempting to explain its allegorical construction.

6. The Simultaneity of the Construction of the Individual Subject and the New Collectivity

The construction of the real surrounding an individual subject and naming the collectivities; these two simultaneous aspects of the change in the real that exploring the Persian Constitutional poetry brings into sight, recall the claim mentioned earlier in a different tone; that here, the construction of the individual subject—or to be more precise, 'private' individual subject-, and that of the nation seem to be different appearances of the same process. It should be noted that the poetic works discussed so far, while being the first sparks of the individualization of the subject (privatization of the individual), yet do not represent an individual subject themselves; that is to say, it is not the separate experience of an individual inner subject that is the text's source of coherence, but the social reality to which the text almost directly refers.

It is in the last years of the period of this study—namely from 1915 to 1925—that poetic works representing an individual subject, appear; or to be more cautious, their appearance is not an exception anymore; one of which is *The Poet's Sorrowful Story* (1915), a poem by Mirzadeh Eshghi. In this poem, the experience of the 'poet', which according to Eshghi's introduction is the experience of 'all periods of misery' in his own life, is narrated (Eshghi, 1972, p. 316). Although the poem is narrated from an external viewpoint, it focuses on the character of the 'poet'. At the departing point of the narrative, a scene is described:

> At the end of the street there can be seen
> A ruined building in Tehran, outside of the city
> The fog has spread, from the fractures of the willow branches… (Eshghi, 1972, p. 316)[28]

Here, the ruined building, the street, and even the willow tree are parts of a fragmented place, and they all are located outside of Tehran, and not a 'city' in general. 'A twenty years old poet' enters this ruin in the middle of the night, and the narration, after describing his appearance, leads us through his individual experience with a temporal turn: After a long time of hunger, for dinner

> Eaten a half-bread, secretly behind the alley
> Trembling and exhausted, sucks his finger
> Out of longing for a remedy… (Eshghi, 1972, p. 316).

Going to the temporal depth of the twenty years old poet's experience is possible because he has occupied a different subject position from that of the narrator; for when the narrator, after describing his entry to the ruins at midnight, turns to the time he has eaten a half-bread for dinner, it means he is recognized as an individual subject—whose experiences can take a narrative form and therefore have a temporal depth. This is contrary to the relation of the narrator and the farmer in the main body of Hosseini's poem, *The Farmer Tells the Master Under the Whip*.

As the poem continues, after a sudden silence, he starts to cry overwhelmingly and covers himself with his robe and a stone was his pillow. But the ending point of this poem is where the two sides of the change in the structure of the real intersect; that is, where the new collective suddenly appears from within the immediate experience of the individual inner subject of the work. And this is the moment when the reader, realizes that this 'twenty years old poet' is experiencing this misery, because of the love he has for the 'homeland' and yet the 'homeland' is the source of his life's purposefulness or one can say, the source of the 'meaning' for his immediate experience as an individual:

> Although, as a result of his love for the homeland
> he chose ruins, in this ruined homeland
> And yet, doors and walls hear
> This moan of him, from the night to the dawn:

'If on the homeland's soil, I spend the night to the dawn like this
What on earth can I do, when the homeland's soil is gone?' (Eshghi, 1972, p. 316)

This final intersection of the individual and the collective in *The Poet's Sorrowful Story*—which as the poet claims, is the story of himself— can be assumed as a pre-moment for Jameson's assertion in his essay on 'third world literature'; that 'the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third world culture and society' (Jameson, 1986, p. 69) ; pre-moment in the sense that, here in this poem and its other contemporaneous poems sharing this characteristic,[29] it's not that the individual's story is an allegorical representation of the collective, but the individual is the collective itself in the first place.[30] In this case, there is no need for individuals to, using Balibar's term, be 'nationalized'; they are recognized as individuals because they are nationalized in the first place. Individual subjects in this context, in the very birth-moment, realize themselves, not based on the ideology of liberal individualism (including narratives and systems of ideas centered around 'individual freedom', 'free will' and so on), but in relation to what encircles it from 'outside' (the other 'nations', the 'world powers', 'the colonizers'). From the moment of departure, what is placed against these 'others' and 'outsiders', is not the individual 'I' but 'us'; that is to say, 'twenty years old poet' finds his individuality in the collective, his home in the street.

7. Conclusion

For the purpose of demonstrating the construction of the modern subjectivity, and 'nation' as a dominant form of collective existence in the Iranian territory at the moment of incorporation into the modern world-system, this article started with an explanation of the formal totality of poetic texts with a fragmentary form. *The farmer tells the master under the whip* a poem by Seyyed Ashrafedin Hosseini was one of these works in which two confronting subjectivities are manifested; one that has a tendency toward an individual subjectivity and reveals itself in the parts written in prose, and another, represented in the main body of the poem relatively aliging with the pre-existing formal norms, in which different individuals seem to share a mutual viewpoint and live the same world.

This cohabitation of fragmentary forms, read as an embodiment of the sudden changes in the historical situation with which Persian poetry at this time is confronted, results in processes seeking to reach a new synthesis, that is to say a new subjectivity, one of which is the *symbolic accumulation*. This process triggered by the juxtaposition of apparently 'old' signifiers with new contexts, leads to the establishment of new relations among various signs centered around 'homeland' (*vatan*). Focusing on this process, various multilayer mechanisms were explained through which 'nation' is allegorized, each having certain ideological consequences with regard to the ways of understanding 'nation'.

Moving away from this concept, the change in the structure of the real surrounding the inner subject of the text was discussed; a process of incorporating new daily life objects into the poetic discourse of Persian poetry at the time that, along with the allegorization of the 'homeland', paved the way for the realization of the aforementioned synthesis; for a poetic text in which an individual subject is experiencing his or her own individualized life, and simultaneously, 'homeland', accessible through the *symbolic accumulation* process, plays the role of a dominant subtext for that direct experience. This synthesis is represented in *The Poet's Sorrowful Story*, a poem by Mirzadeh Eshghi, based on which it was explained in this article that how 'the individual' and 'the collective' seem to be closely interrelated in Iranian poetry as a periphery, at the historical moment under study.

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Endnotes

[1] (Benjamin, 1972/2006, p.391)

[2] The term 'Constitutional revolution' [*enqelāb-e mašrūte*] refers to Iran's revolution in 1906. This revolution which was mostly led by a collaboration of the middle class, religious leaders, local merchants, and elite intellectuals, conditioned the power of the king (Shah) by establishing a parliament and the 1906 constitution. The Constitutional period is assumed to signify the span from the last years of the 19th century up to the middle of the third decade of the 20th; before the first Pahlavi replaces Qajar dynasty in 1925. For more explanation about the Constitutional revolution: See (Abrahamian, 1982, pp. 50-102; Chaquèri, 2001, pp. 97-114).

[3] As a sort of metaphorical solution for this tragic situation, Mirzadeh Eshghi (1883-1924) one of the poets and intellectuals faced with the dilemma, described his contemporary Persian literature as a 'very beautiful piece of painting' which 'has passed several centuries from its life' and 'the color of the time's flow' has covered it, therefore 'there is no doubt that it needs to be furbished' and by means of 'a new style, polished' so that 'it achieves its first status and formation again' (Eshghi, 1972, p. 260).

[4] My translation

[5] These two poets are main figures of a poetic movement, dominant in 19th century's Persian poetry in Iran that seeks to 'return' to old traditions of Persian poetry, namely to the two major collective styles known as 'Xorāsāni' and 'Erāqi style' (L. Hanaway, 1990, p. 59). To be sure, this movement's name, contrary to its appearance, is an act of redefining the past in accordance to the present historical context more than referring to an objective phenomenon in the past,

[6] Examples can be found here: (Eshghi, 1972, pp. 281, 283, 306); (Bahar, 2009, pp. 56, 60, 122); (Qazvini, 2010, pp. 54, 108, 137, 144, 149)

[7] Mohammad-Ali Shah Qajar (1872-1925) was the Shah of Iran after the death of his father, Mozaffar od-Din Shah who signed the Constitution of 1906, five days before his death. Though Mohammad-Ali Shah with the help of his foreign supporters (mainly Russia) and the social base of the monarchy (*Saltanat*) inside Iran suppressed the Constitutional Revolution only two years after its establishment, the revolution was revived with the resistance of armed constitutionalists in relatively peripheral regions of Iran and their arrival at Tehran in 1909 (Abrahamian, 1982, pp. 92–101)

[8] Translation from (Karimi-Hakkak, 2012, pp. 70–71)

[9] 'Iraqi style' or 'the style of Iraq' refers to an era of classical Persian poetry from the 12th up to the 15th century which is assumed to be accompanied by the appearance of 'sufi' and mystical poetry, the dominancy of *ghazal* over *qasideh* and its main figures are known to be Sanai, Rumi, Sa'di and Hafez. See (Bruijn, 2015).

[10] One example from classical Persian poetry is a poem by Hafez within which the internal writer, as the lover, likens himself to a candle that burns and gradually disappears in 'the night of separation' (*šab-e hejrān*) but still faithful to and longing for the 'union' with the beloved who is the internal audience of the poem. See (Hafez, 1984, p. 594).

[11] Translation from (Karimi-Hakkak, 2012, p. 293)

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[12] Examples can be found here: (Hosseini, 1989, pp. 17, 50, 79, 132, 144, 182); (Qazvini, 2010, pp. 66, 90, 161, 306, 313); (Bahar, 2006, pp. 54, 95, 175, 185); (Iraj-Mirza, 2008, pp. 81, 229); (Lahouti, 1998, pp. 44–47, 76, 149, 316); (Eshghi, 1972, pp. 309, 316, 322); (Farokhi Yazdi, 1985, pp. 5, 70, 90, 119)

[13] See the previous footnote.

[14] The 'real' here, by no means, refers to the Lacanian usage of the term. By 'real', what is intended is 'reality' as it is constructed in a dialectical relation to the subject. The reality in this context is symbolic itself.

[15] On the one hand, when 'homeland' and 'nation' are being given new significations, as a consequence is the change in the real in which the individual's life is situated. On the other hand, symbolic accumulation is not a one-way street through which only the signification of one side (here 'homeland' or 'nation') of the newly established relations change; rather, all other signs that are similarly situated within a network of signs also undergo a semantic transformation. In Dehkhoda's poem, when 'the dark night' is attributed to the historical situation of the 'homeland', it is not only 'homeland' (*vatan*) that is re-signified, but the 'night' and 'darkness' too are given new significations. In other words, when the not-directly lived 'homeland' is represented 'concretely' using signs that are present in the immediate experience of an individual, in addition to the 'homeland' itself, all the 'concrete' signs change signification as well, and hence the individual keeps close ties with the collective.

[16] My translation

[17] One of the major cities in Iran

[18] A special kind of bread baked in Iran's area.

[19] A district in Tehran

[20] Although these are the names of cities in Iran, they are collectivities at the same time; in the same way that 'Iran' is the name of a country and also a collectivity when linked to 'nation'.

[21] Examples can be found here: (Eshghi, 1972, p. 295); (Qazvini, 2010, pp. 57, 77, 223)

[22] A term referring to Europe in the historical period under the focus on this article.

[23] One example is Balibar's essay, 'The Nation Form: History and Ideology' (1991), as he explains 'that Ideological form (that 'interpellates' individuals as subjects) must become an a priori condition of communication between individuals (the 'citizens') and between social groups—not by suppressing all differences, but by relativizing them and subordinating them to itself in such a way that it is the symbolic difference between 'ourselves' and 'foreigners' which wins out and is lived as irreducible' (p. 94).

[24] '*Tūrān*', whose people are referred to as 'Turks', is depicted as the main enemy of 'Iran' in Ferdowsi's *Shah-nameh*.

[25] See for example: (Qazvini, 2010, p. 284)

[26] In *Allegory and Ideology* (2019), he proposes language and geography as the main bases for the nation's cohesion as a collectivity (p. 199).

[27] As Ervand Abrahamian explains in *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (1982) by the beginning of the 18th century, Russia and Britain's impact on Iran—back then not a nation-state—began by their military invasion of Iran and consequent treaties (in 1813, 1828, 1857) as the result of which Iran lost significant regions of its territory. These treaties were followed by 'a series of commercial capitulations to Russia and Britain. These capitulations enabled the two powers to open consular and commercial offices anywhere they wished, and exempted their merchants, not only from high import duties but also from internal tariffs, local travel restrictions, and the jurisdiction of the Shari'a law court'. This in turn, as Abrahamian explains, leads to the construction of a middle class whose interests and social life are threatened and constantly affected by this external force; though, since most of the social groups at the time, feel the presence of privileged 'foreigners' in their immediate experience, this confrontation is not at all limited to the middle class (pp. 50–51).

[28] My translation

[29] Other examples can be found here: (Lahouti, 1998, pp. 300, 302, 305); (Eshghi, 1972, pp. 259, 306); (Qazvini, 2010, p. 197); (Bahar, 2006, pp. 23, 236)