On September 22nd there was a terrible terrorist attack in the Iranian city of Ahvaz which killed 25 innocent people and wounded 70 other people. This was universally reported in the West as having occurred at a “military parade”, when it was actually a parade to
commemorate the 1980 start of the Western-backed, Western-funded, Western-armed invasion which used Iraq to try to destroy the democratic 1979 Iranian Revolution.

But none of those accurate adjectives can be said in the West…no, no, no – it was just a no-reason-needed military parade, as if Iran was a warmongering nation prepping its fanatical people for imperialist adventures. (Iran has not invaded a country in well-over 200 years.)

The timing of the attack was obviously (though not primarily) a way to divert the world’s attention from the deadliest conflict of the last quarter of the 20th century. Instead of talking about what disaster and death was heaped on Iran from 1980-1988, it was Iranian “militarism” which was discussed and not anyone else’s.

But ho-hum, more misreporting on Iran. In other news: the sun rose this morning. This is just life for all socialist-inspired democratic revolutions – Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam, China, etc., have all had their sufferings ignored, their mistakes amplified and their successes denied. To even raise this point makes one an unthinking “apologist”, an Islamofascist, a totalitarian commie, blah blah blah.
The tragic event, and the subsequent false histories of the Western media, makes this an appropriate time to bring up what has become the most important literary reference for Iranians regarding the war – a book called Da. “Da” means mother in Kurdish, and not in Farsi. The book was written by a woman whose Iraqi Kurdish family had emigrated to Iran when she was a child.

How could the definitive account on the Iranian view of the Iran-Iraq War have been written by an Iraqi Kurd, and a female to boot?!

You would think Iranians hate Iraqis; you are certain that Iran hates women; and you assume that Iran has a war against the Kurds, just like Iraq, Turkey and Syria. If you assume everyone follows the dictates of capitalism’s identity politics, you likely would predict that this book is a litany of accusations and compiled hatreds towards Iran.

If you assume all these things it’s because you fail to realize that Iran’s 1979 Islamic Revolution was inspired by socialism, which demands a citizen and a government loudly banish racism from the public sphere. Much like this stoned surfer-dude American idiot who wrote an article titled Whoa. The Soviet Union Got Racial Equality Right Before America?, you are way, way, WAY off. (And when did America get racial equality “right”?)

For a comparison: Can anyone imagine that France’s definitive account on the Algerian War for Independence would come from a non-White? Their most famous work on Algeria is The Stranger by Albert Camus, who was an isolated-from-Algerians pied noir whose refusal to condemn French oppression was selfishly defined by the fact that he cared more for his mother’s comfort than a million dead Algerians. Heaven forbid that Madame Camus would have to relocate back to France, even if that meant ending a war and a 132-year occupation.... Camus’ view of morality is 100% rooted in Western capitalism individualism, after all, which is the reason its popularity still endures today.

But Iran had no problem making Da a huge best-seller despite the author’s Iraqi Kurdish roots; and, somehow, Iranian men took time out of their daily oppression of women to find out their thoughts and feelings on past experiences. The 700-page account of the war was read by everyone, including President Rohani.

The book is a memoir of Seyyedeh (indicating lineage from Prophet Mohammad) Zahra Hoseyni,
a teenager who was living with her extremely poor but tight-knit family on the border city of Khorramshahr. The city was the first to be sneak-attacked by the Iraqis, and the massacres and devastation wrought there would be reflected by a Farsi pun on the city’s name: “City of Blood”.

A memoir of the last, worst traditional war in our modern times

Sanjan Salimzadegan, who lost her right leg during the Iran-Iraq war, shows her artificial leg, as she weeps at the grave of her children who were killed during a chemical attack in Zardeh village in 1988. Vahid Salemi | AP

The book is not an easy read, as Hoseyni recounts one tragedy after another.

In short, for those attacked by Iraq the war was one day from hell after another, with each one worse than the next. Hunger, thirst, physical exhaustion, emotional exhaustion, the nightmares of screaming planes, repeatedly watching people go insane with the pain of mourning, every weary pause only giving rise to recent tragic memories, the constant filth and lack of clean water a bombarded people must deal with, actual nightmares when sleep does come, the perpetual sound of war which then makes silent pauses totally strange, and the constant, constant guilt of being alive combined with the knowledge that death from a shell could come at any moment.

So much of the book is something like a horror hallucination of the first few weeks of an unexpected, undeserved war, combined with a recounting of the vast citizen efforts to fight back.

Each according to their abilities, of course: Hoseyni is an young lioness fighting for the cubs of the Iranian nation and Khorramshahr. She accepts responsibility after responsibility, and even refuses to back down to proud & protective Iranian men in her insistence on going to the front to help amid the bullets and bombs. She volunteers as a corpse-washer, which turned out to be a never-ending job, and which is certainly a job few would want. Her beloved father and brother die at the front, but still she endures and gives, gives, gives. Everyone is looking at her and seeing a person with an iron sense of justice, duty and faith.
What I suggest makes this memoir so compelling and successful is that, in Hoseyni’s retelling, she remembers not only that every day was a living hell but that every moment within every day was a living hell. Hoseyni repeatedly talks about the constant abyss of mourning and horror opening up inside her at every moment; seemingly dozens of times a day she is assaulted by an event/tragedy/memory/feeling which could send a normal person to a hospital for weeks of recovery and therapy. It is unlikely that a memoir by a male would admit the incredibly sad emotions which any human would go through in Hoseyni’s situation.

And yet Hoseyni appeared to all as indomitable (even after she is wounded at the front). She simply said a prayer of “Ya Hossain” and rushed towards another difficult task nobody else wanted. She was the model defender of the nation – indeed, Iran’s war “Mother” is not even a “true” Iranian, in non-socialist logic — but the book reveals that she was able to live this ideal even though her feelings were the absolute opposite of proud glory.

Saying a prayer before a difficult task can go a very long way, but it’s this juxtaposition of a public persona of revolutionary steel combined with total inner crumbling which makes the book so compelling. How she could do what she did – when she could not even bring herself to eat, nor sleep, nor mourn day after day after day – is astounding and an inspiration to anyone sanctioned by injustice.

For those who are not just uninterested in religion but who also actively detest religion, I’m sorry to objectively report that a huge part of her strength came from her religious faith – she and her family were pious people who took their title of “Seyed” as a serious injunction to be moral examples. However, the family was also extremely politically aware and active – these were true revolutionaries; they were also so poor as to come from the “correct” class to qualify as a revolutionary, although such prejudices represent antiquated notions about who can or cannot be a socialist.

There is much to learn from the war memoirs from World War I, II, or the Holocaust, but Da is exceptional in that it is from our modern times. When she recounts her rage and disbelief at BBC Radio’s totally misguided coverage of the war, we in 2018 share her shock at “fake news”.

Da should be essential reading to any war hawk advocating invasion in any foreign country which
has had a socialist-inspired revolution, because you will be facing a very unique type of people. Whether it be the USSR, China, Vietnam, Korea or Iran, these are societies which cannot be divided into tribes or identities, as they have achieved socialist cultural unity:

“I saw myself as a tree with deep roots, resisting being pulled from the ground. How could I allow myself to be uprooted? Although born in Basra, I felt no attachment to the place. I loved Iran…my love for Khorramshahr overwhelmed all reason and logic.”

The Western capitalist and anti-multicultural societies of continental Europe cannot imagine that an immigrant is capable of ever feeling this way, and thus many there want immigrants expelled or at least segregated.

But the old tricks of divide and conquer, Balkanisation or the political segregation of Lebanonization will not work in socialist-inspired nations. The author recounts how Saddam Hussein tried exactly that – telling Iranian Arabs to join their Arab brother – but only the most reactionary fell for such a stupid worldview.

Hoseyni talks about the MKO/MEK terrorist group (and I am only talking about them because Western nations and their propaganda outlets keep pushing them back into the spotlight): stealing corpses to inflate their body counts for propaganda purposes, attacking people who disagreed with them at public debates, working as spies for Iraq and giving them coordinates of places to bomb, attacking ardent revolutionaries and then literally rubbing salt or pepper in their wounds out of sadism. The idea that the MKO isn’t detested by 100% of Iranians, and that they have a zero percent chance of ever being rehabilitated – much less being democratically elected into power – is totally, totally absurd to Iranians. Again, why would anyone even talk about them anymore? Oh yes, because they are propped by the West, Israel and Saudi Arabia.

She also talks about what an exceptionally politically-open society Iran was in the early days of the Revolution, and few non-Iranians know that much of this remains true today. Parliament was open to anyone to come observe and even shout disruptions, Khomeini held public audiences for two hours twice a week and received anyone and everyone, elected representatives were easily accessible and lived the common, poor lives of a nation under war. All of this is in stark contrast to the leaders of seemingly every Arab nation not named “Algeria”, and it also shows the democratic
bonafides, the more-than-majority support, of the Iranian Islamic Revolution: you can shudder at the word “Islamic” all you want, but the revolution was democratic in the truest sense of the word and no matter in what country that word is uttered.

Western culture is full of ‘war porn’, but Iran is not titillated by such things

An Iranian monument dedicated to Jewish citizens who lost their lives in 8-year Iraqi imposed war. Photo | IRNA

“The fall of Khorramshahr and the things I had experienced in the past weeks had made me more aware of how people suffered."

Such are the types of wisdoms Hoseyni tosses off, but there is no doubt that they are not false cliches for her, nor for millions of other Iranians.

It reminds me of a major problem with America and the West: they are so war-crazy, and yet everything they know about it – to anyone under 85 – is totally fictitious, video-game-like nonsense.

The American view of war is truly one constant cliche, where glory appears to be a feeling to run after but which Hoseyni proves it is actually the result of living through unwanted horrors and tragedies.

It’s true that the younger generation of Iranians has little memory of the sacrifices, bombardments and war rationing, but the way Iran and the US remember their war martyrs is so very different. Can you name one famous American solider who died in Iraq or Afghanistan? All I can think of is Pat Tillman, and that’s only because he was also an American football player (and who was killed by friendly fire). However, Iran is full of portraits and memorials to dead soldiers and even dead teenagers...one cannot even make a comparison of the
psychological/emotional/human gravity of war in the minds of the average Iranian versus the average American.

My point is that, for all their fighting, ever since Vietnam Americans have essentially been hero-worshipping an empty soldier’s uniform. Unless we are talking about rural Americans from their lower class, most Americans really have no personal/psychological connection to actual war, unlike Iranians.

Such people, like the 4-F Trump, grow enraged at taking anyone knee during the National Anthem to protest the undeniable mass incarceration/mass murder/mass oppression of an ethnic minority, but there is no truly human element present – their honouring is phony and faceless.

Say what you will about Iran, but you cannot say that.

Furthermore, Iranian martyrdom – where death is assured – is far, far different from the power-trip fantasies and motivations of the American soldier and the American chickenhawk playing Call of Duty video games.

For Iran war is not a glory, but a horror, and whatever sacrifices the nation must make due to the Western Cold war...at least it is better than the Hot War. Befuddled Western “analysts” of Iran cannot imagine this type of logic playing such a large part in Iranian policymaking because they have zero experiences and comprehension of any war which is not just on a two-dimensional screen.

Iran fights in places like Syria, Iraq an Afghanistan because their allies, cousins and cultural-cousins are being attacked, and also because justice itself is being attacked; America fights wars because it seems like fun, because they have such neat toys to play with, and they fight without gallantry and without esteem from the locals they claim to be “fighting with”. America massacres and plunders; Iran’s forces are far closer to Mao’s Long March injunction that soldiers should not take even a pin from locals they were trying to liberate from fascism.

Thirty years after the end of Iran’s “War of Sacred Defense” Iran’s “military parades” are attacked, but the world still doesn’t really comprehend exactly what the West is attacking in Iran. Da is an unsparing account of a civilian Islamic socialist revolutionary in wartime – reading this memoir
would certainly help Westerners understand what they remain up against as they keep trying to implode Iran’s socialist-inspired democracy.

Top Photo | A young shepherd watches a tank transporting trucks near the war-torn southern city of Ahvaz, Iran near the border with Iraq on April 17, 1981. Photo | AP

**Ramin Mazaheri** is the chief correspondent in Paris for PressTV and has lived in France since 2009. He has been a daily newspaper reporter in the US, and has reported from Iran, Cuba, Egypt, Tunisia, South Korea and elsewhere. His work has appeared in various journals, magazines and websites, as well as on radio and television. He can be reached on Facebook.

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