

Comparative Study of Postwar Literature (Iranian Holy Defense and Vietnam's War) Komunyakaa's and Aminpour's Poems

Authors: Kian Pishkar¹, Taif Abdulhussein Dakhil², Nooshin Nasery³

Abstract

The comparative study tries to find the common points in two different authors' works and in this kind of studying so many other common but the hidden points may be revealed. postwar literature is somehow one of the best literary genres for finding the common factors and features that the poets have tried to present in their works elements such as desire to be winner, cruelty, inhumanity, and absurdity of the war. The Iranian poet late Qaisar Aminpour (1961-2007) and Yusef Komunyakaa (1947) from Bogalusa, Louisiana, are among the great American and Iranian poets whose works so many times have been interpreted and analyzed. The finding the outstanding and the most important points and themes in the postwar poems of these two poets is the main aim of this literary comparative study.

Keywords: *Comparative study, postwar literature, Komunyakaa, Aminpour.*

Introduction

The Impact of Internet Banking on Financial Performance: The Case of French Banks

The eight-year war, years of the Holy Defense were not the only great position for Islamic soldiers on the right-against-wrong fronts; because alongside them, the cultural community, and especially the poets, had a different but equally effective weapon in their hands, and it was the pen. The contemporary history of Iran is full of resistance, self-sacrifice and stability in the path of freedom and liberty of Iran, which was suddenly attacked by Iraq's regime, was tied to the most important mission of revolutionary literature and the most influential current of those years, the poetry of the revolution.

Qaisar Aminpour

The Iranian poet, Qaisar Aminpour (1961-2007) is known as one of the best of the holy defense literature writer, who with his brilliant works and magical pen, sang in the recording of the holy defense and eight-year imposed war and the following years with such concepts as emotion, commitment, love, ideal and peace, proved his great talent in this field. He is as one of the guides of the right path of the flow of holy defense poetry forever in the history of our country's literature. Aminpour was a contemporary and influential poet whose belief in the identity of the revolutionary people on the one hand and his commitment to the epic creation of Islamic warriors on the fronts of right against wrong on the other, caused passivity to be forgotten along with literature.

By composing the poetry of the Eight-Year War, he made the epic of the Holy Defense and the years that followed with the nature of a poem about the war on the Iranian literature forever will be everlasting. In fulfilling his mission and ideal, Aminpour was one of the poets who on the fronts of right against wrong, he whispered the passion of epic and hope for the heroes, and the fire of love for the full support of the people. To keep alive the people of the revolution and this land who sacrificed their lives for the freedom and liberty of Iran. Perhaps the best word to describe Qaisar Aminpour's image of as a poet of holy defense is in Morteza Kakhi's words as a literary critics and friends of Qaisar Aminpour, where he called Aminpour the king of war poets. But besides the fact that we can call the emperor without any doubt the king of war poets; We cannot simply ignore the fact that in the most epic and martial poems of Aminpour's holy defense/ war literature, the bright colors of peace can also be observed and in a way he can also be called

¹ Assistant Professor of English language and literature, Islamic Azad University Jieroft Branch; Kian.pishkar@gmail.com.

² Dijlah University Cllege; Taif.abdulhussein@duc.edu.iq.

³ Lecturer of English language and literature, Islamic Azad University Jieroft Branch; n.nasery2013@gmail.com.

a poet of peace. In fact, Aminpour's poetry from two angles of idealism and commitment undoubtedly made it possible to create a flow of holy defense/war literature.

Aminpour's poems, like those of his companions in this age and time, had a clear and unequivocal view to reflect and increase the enthusiasm and motivation among the soldiers on the one hand and on the other hand among the youth and men who in the form of popular forces and Basij consciously and with a sublime ideal. For this reason, Aminpour's poems in the first years of the epic of the eight years of the holy defense/war literature, using a sharp rhythm, a clear and passionate language, were close. Like one of his masterpieces that he wrote:

Suddenly, they proudly attacked
They drove the tornado around
They washed the earth overnight with blood
They raised their swords to the sky
They kept their promise and left
They left but always stayed

In the face of this sonnet, every audience is confronted with more masculine men than any interpreter and exponent of the concept of masculinity who, with a steely spirit, a loving heart and a fearless secret, had only one goal in order to stay on the path of their country's honor. He was referring to a land that has always been tied to the freedom of Iran and Iranians. For this reason, in many poems of the first years of Aminpour's poetry in line with the era of holy defense, we rarely see the first-person narrative and "personal self" of the poet, and he tries to express the concept of resistance through his poetic art and aesthetic look. Interpret the epic this time in the coming together of Iran and Iranians for the victory of the right over darkness in the form of "becoming us".

Qaisar Aminpour has left us many works in the form of books, which are the most important collections of poems that have been published in the field of holy defense poetry:

I wanted to
Say a poem about war
I can not see
I no longer have the pen of my heart
I said :
The pens must be dropped
Cold weapons are no longer effective
A sharper weapon must be picked up
A must for war
I read from the barrel of the gun
- With the word bullet -

I wanted to
Say a poem about war
A poem for my city - Dezful –
I saw the word "missile"
Should be used
But
Rocket
The beauty of my words diminishes
I said that my poem is incomplete
Which is not better than city houses
Leave my poem too
Because people's earthen houses
Be crushed and bloody
It must be said that it is an earthy and bloody
poem I have to recite the poem of anger
Eloquent poetry shout –

Although unfinished ...

Wartime poetry is the poetry of passion and motivation. The poetry of holy defense has had its ups and downs. " Aminpour " like other poets of this path, at the beginning of the path, considered creating enthusiasm and motivation among the youth to rush to the front lines of war. As his poetic duty and using his accurate knowledge of the rhythm of words, found his way in this Smoothed the route:

Suddenly, they proudly attacked
They drove the tornado around
They washed the earth overnight with blood
They raised their swords to the sky
They kept their promise and left
They left but always stayed (Aminpour, 1989: p. 41)

In these sonnets, the poet speaks of a one-handed and fearless group, a group that have united to achieve their goal. In such poems, usually "I am personal" is not very important and is seen only in the position of moving to "us".

Yusef Komunyakaa

Yusef Komunyakaa (1947) from Bogalusa, Louisiana, a poor and impoverished neighborhood in the Deep South which was full of poetically inspirational nature, yet dominated by a "Calvinist work .ethic". He spent his childhood surrounded by people who believed if they worked hard enough, they would get ahead in the "American Dream". Although this ideology often caused conflict between the intellectually driven Komunyakaa and his carpenter father, the writer uses many childhood experiences to inform his work. Familial relationships, his maturation in a rural Southern community, and the musical environment afforded by the close proximity of the blues and jazz center in New Orleans provided inspiration for much of his poetry, including some of those written about his experiences in the Vietnam War. Komunyakaa vividly evokes his childhood in Bogalusa, Louisiana, once a center of Klan activity, and later a focus of Civil Rights efforts.

Reports of the War back in the States often left Black soldiers feeling invisible or at least unimportant to America's effort overseas. According to one correspondent's writing about Vietnam, "Anyone with white skin caught outside protected areas after dark is courting horrible death".

In spring of 1984, fourteen years after Komunyakaa's participation in the Vietnam War, the poet began renovations on an old house in New Orleans. While removing layers of plaster to uncover the house's original oak walls, Komunyakaa suddenly became inspired by this metaphorical "peeling away," as previously suppressed images of war surfaced in his mind. With the humid Louisiana air as a backdrop, Komunyakaa descended his ladder and gave instantaneous birth to the poems "Somewhere Near Phu Bai," "Starlight Scope Myopia," and "Missing in Action." Although Komunyakaa had begun writing during his tour of duty in Vietnam, it took the author almost a decade and a half before his memories of War became lyrical subject matter that he could transcribe onto paper. Komunyakaa had suppressed these violent images. In "Control is the Mainspring," he writes, "I had purposefully evaded Vietnam related literature and had seen only one 'Vietnam War' movie" (Blue Notes 14). Like other survivors of the War, Komunyakaa spent years trying to forget the traumatic events he experienced during his time in the military. Ironically, in the years since 1984, he's done his best to make himself and other people remember.

This experience allowed Komunyakaa to master a journalistic style which he would later use in poetic efforts to assess objectively the time he spent engaged in warfare.

For Komunyakaa, it took fourteen years to "get down to the guts of the thing" and begin writing poetry about the Vietnam War. However, this poet, however is not alone in his struggle with violent wartime material. Literary critics have often cited the difficulty of assimilating the Vietnam War into poetry. Jeffery Walsh, for example, has argued that "poetry of a traditional kind has proved inappropriate to communicate the character of the Vietnam War, its remoteness, its jargonised recapitulations, its seeming imperviousness to aesthetics" (Walsh 204). In "Untitled Blues," Komunyakaa catches himself trying to "look into the eyes/of the photo, of a black boy/ behind a laughing white mask" (3-5). When asked about the prevalence of racial psychological warfare in an interview with William Baer, Komunyakaa responded: ". . . the Civil Rights Movement was going forward back home, along with the anti-war movement. So the problem was very much alive for the black GIs, and there was always a discourse". A black GI in the historical narrative *The Courageous and The Proud* claims: Our mighty [white] leaders talk about patriotism, which is supposed to be the foundation stone of our nation. But those leaders can't understand that there is a lot of unrest among Negro people because of their treatment in America ... how am I, as a Negro, supposed to feel about going to a place where I got a good chance of not coming back, and if I do get back, I'm still treated like a second-class citizen? Whereas the previous poets had challenged the abstractions of the War with the personal experience of racism at home, Yusef Komunyakaa had to begin with the experience of the Vietnam War as well. Like Komunyakaa, most soldiers who fought in the Vietnam War came from lowermiddle and working-class families. Although the war in Vietnam was presented as necessary for the national interest, comparatively few men from other social classes were forced to fight it. Those who served in Vietnam between 1965 and 1969 were America's "expendables" (Polner 162). Under the conditions of War, Komunyakaa claims that racial distinctions become blurred.

"You are only trying to stay alive.

You're going to try to protect your fellow soldiers,

black or white" (Baer 3).

This statement proved true in the heat of the battle, yet racial division and discrimination still occurred in the private lives of soldiers.

The poem "Tu Do Street" focuses on this dual theme of segregation and intimacy shared by white and Black Americans fighting in Vietnam. He begins the poem, "Music divides the evening" (1). This division, this sense of separation, exists not only between the musical tastes of black and white soldiers, but between wartime enemies as well. Komunyakaa shows this "division" to be a biased racial attitude that soldiers have carried with them to Vietnam. Although "Tu Do Street" alludes to a potential "brotherhood" between Caucasian and African American soldiers, it places Vietnamese prostitutes, not the sharing of near-death experiences, at the root of the soldiers' integration. As these men enter private rooms with the women, they too seek a womb-like place of protection and security. The poet emphasizes lines drawn and broken, creating a lyrical maze that fantastically leads American soldiers underground quite possibly with the Viet Cong and prostitutes, while sensibly leading them back home with each other. According to Vietnam and Black America, this segregation was not at all uncommon. "Black soldiers, attracted by common music, language, or hate, live when they can in black hootches and spend their off-duty time together in black dominated 'soul' bars". The prominence of Black nightclubs and African Americans' desire for a sense of their own identity appears again in Komunyakaa's poetry, namely, "Hanoi Hannah." Employing every tactic available to them to undermine the morale of the American troops, the North Vietnamese employed this female radio DJ to produce homesickness by specifically playing black music and commenting on the irony of African Americans' fight in Vietnam, a dual strategy captured by the poet:

Ray Charles! His voice

Calls from waist-high grass,

& we duck behind gray sandbags.

"Hello, Soul Brothers. Yeah, Georgia's also on my mind."

"You're dead as King today in Memphis."...

"It's Saturday night in the States. ...

Soul Brothers, what you dying' for?" (1-3, 21-22, 27)

This question, asked by Hannah in fluent Black English, preys upon African-American soldiers' ambiguous position in the war.

In reference to "Hanoi Hannah," Kevin Stein writes: [Komunyakaa's] poems become politically charged, though always understated, as he offers a black American's perspective on psychological warfare strategies that accentuate racial division. (6) 44 Like many of the writers of the Black Arts Movement, Komunyakaa feels guilt about the Vietnam War and sees the necessity of political and social change in America. However, he believes that what is needed to accomplish this change is no longer an explicit challenge to white authority shocked by confrontation but instead lyrical sensitivity. The fact that Komunyakaa waited almost two decades to publish poems on Vietnam differentiates him not only from other veteran poets but also from the Black activist poets of the late 1960s and early seventies.

According to Richard K. Barksdale: . . . in some of the poetry of recent young Black writers there is a broad humanistic concern that breaks through the cloud-cover of confrontation rhetoric to pin-point the evils of the times, to subject these to trenchant political analysis, and to pronounce their desperate remedies for mankind's moral and spiritual salvation. (Modem Black Poets 161) Certainly, Black soldiers remember Vietnam differently than their white counterparts. The Confederate flags that fly in "Re-creating the Scene" and the Viet Cong leaflets that read "VC didn 't kill Martin Luther King' in "Report from a Skull's Diorama" provide visual representations of what it must have been like for an African American in the War.

Aware of the hypocrisy of treating the Vietnamese as both enemies and lovers, Komunyakaa compares the actions of the American soldiers with those of the Biblical character, Judas. According to Vietnam and Black America, this segregation was not at all uncommon. "Black soldiers, attracted by common music, language, or hate, live when they can in black hootches and spend their off-duty time together in black dominated 'soul' bars" (213).⁴³ The prominence of Black nightclubs and African Americans' desire for a sense of their own identity appears again in Komunyakaa's poetry, namely, "Hanoi Hannah."

Statement Of the Problem

The post/war literature is one of the divisions that in all of the world in different division and subdivisions have been reflected and this reflections were mirrors for soldiers and refugees pains, and suffering. The comparative literature tries to show the similarities and differences of emotions and sensation that witnesses of the wars (soldiers and refugees). Iranian eight years Holy Defense (The first Persian Gulf war or as it is known as the Imposed War) was a great source of inspiration for the Iranian poets to show Iranians' innocence and loneliness at the front of universal imperialism. The Vietnam War also shows Vietnam's sinless and innocent people who tried to protect themselves against invaders. Aminpour's and Yusef Komunyakaa poetry try to be an epic like resistance that Iranians and Vietnams had against the invaders.

What African American participation in the Vietnam War really meant. Yusef Komunyakaa, writing from a veteran's perspective almost two decades later, showed how the Vietnam War both blurred and emphasized the racial divisions between Black and white soldiers, along with the Vietnamese people themselves. Komunyakaa implies that the discrimination of Black Americans was not only initiated by whites, but also influenced the Vietnamese civilians whose rights they tried to defend. In "To Du Street," the female Vietnamese bartender doesn't know if she should serve a drink to Komunyakaa because he is Black. Just as many former American presidents had done, she "skirts each white face for approval" (13) before accepting Yusef as deserving of her service. The possibility remains, however, that her biased actions stemmed from Vietnamese culture itself.

Research Questions

What are the similarities of post/war literary works?

How the effects and problems of post/war have been reflected in poetries?

Conclusion

Komunyakaa's poetry mostly resists the need for words to act as "fists" and "daggers." Instead of proposing the violent overthrow of white racist government and suggesting the moral superiority of Black suffering as the call to explicit direct political action, Komunyakaa's poems lean more towards the philosophy of integration, peace, and equality. Although Komunyakaa undeniably addresses the issues of racial oppression, much of his work portrays nature itself as a brutal yet beautiful force and questions the ability of humans to acknowledge that natural duality, the capacity to create beauty and the capacity for brutal destruction, within themselves.

By using literary techniques unique to the Black Aesthetic and the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s, these poets lyrically showed how Black involvement in the War aided the dominant white culture in its attempt for racial genocide. While Baraka related the oppressed condition of the African American to that of oppression in Third World countries, Nikki Giovanni wrote to prove that the War was a waste of Black youth that could better be used in the struggle for Civil Rights in the United States.

Aminpour portrayed the objectivity and reality of society. Especially for the adolescent and young generation who in those years were either not born yet or if they were born at a young age did not have memories, and mentality of those years. So this time, in order to keep alive the eight-year epic of the Holy Defense, the mission of the poets was to educate a generation to be one of their most important role models; May there be fathers, mothers and the past who simply lost their lives and worked hard to establish Iran. Aminpour's pen, along with his always honesty with poetry, began to create hope and reflect on epics

that evoke concepts such as self-sacrifice, martyrdom, perseverance and resistance. The concepts that the teenagers and young people of the post-war years were supposed to depict in the shadow of fear of rain rockets and escape from the red sirens

While many writers of the 1940s called for an end to "race-consciousness" in African American poetry (Bibby 40), the Black Arts Poets of the 1960s reclaimed the right to express, with artistic pride, their Blackness. Their images, language, and subjects were cast in ways that appropriated the discourses of liberation and revolution generated through the U.S. intervention in Vietnam. Undoubtedly, the works of Baraka, and Giovanni used this "blackness" as both a cultural and physical sign synonymous with corrosive power aiming to destabilize the legacy of white dominance. Along with Yusef Komunyakaa, who wrote about the war from a veteran's perspective almost two decades later, these poets linked themselves with the Vietnamese people on the common basis of dark skin and the experience of racial oppression. They portrayed this "epidermal difference" as the factor connecting all people of color subjecting them to oppression by white U.S. imperialism. Peter X articulates this position in Black Vanguard:

Black is the basic of all colors; all colors come from black. White is the absence of color - no color. If the persons who are blond and light-skinned, brunette and dark-skinned, or red-haired and freckled can call themselves white, why can't we, who are black, brown, yellow, and red call ourselves black? Komunyakaa undoubtedly felt the influence of Baraka, Giovanni, and other anti-Vietnam War poets of the Black Arts Movement. However, Komunyakaa chooses to leave his militancy in the jungles of Vietnam, and captures the participation of Black soldiers of the Vietnam War through a personal, veteran's perspective. While his comparison of the Vietnamese woman with "a tom water flower" will probably not stop the United States from entering another brutal conflict, its image imprints itself upon minds and asks readers to continue to question the traditional concept of "enemy."

Bibliography

- Ashford, Tomeiko. Biography of Yusef Komunyakaa. 19 July 2000 .
- Aubert, Alvin. "Stars and gunbarrels- Neon Vernacular: New and Selected Poems by Yusef Komunyakaa. African American Review 28:4 (1994) : 671-673.
- Baer, William. "Still Negotiating with the Images: An Interview with the Images." Kenyon Review 20.3 (1998) : 5-21.
- Baraka, Amiri. The Autobiography of Leroi Jones. New York: Freundlich Books, 1984. Bascom, Lionel C., ed. A Renaissance in Harlem. New York: Avon Books, 1940.
- Bennet, Bob. "It is time for Action., Black Fire. Ed. Leroi Jones. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1968. 247. Bibby, Michael. Hearts and Minds. New York: Random House, 1990.
- Blumberg, Rhoda Lois. Civil Rights: The 1960s Freedom Struggle. Boston: Wayne Publishers, 1984. Bontemps, Arna, ed. American Negro Poetry. New York: Hill and Wang, 1963.
- Brooks, Gwendolyn. The World of Gwendolyn Brooks. New York: Harper and Row, 1971 .
- Brooks, Gwendolyn, et. al, A Capsule Course in Black Poetry Writing. Detroit: Broadside 49 Press, 1975. Brown, Sterling. The Collected Poems of Sterling A. Brown. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1980. Byrd, Barthy. Home Front: Women and Vietnam. Boston: Shameless Hussy Press, 1986.
- Cahill, Susan, ed. Writing Women's Lives. New York: HarperCollins, 1994. Casey, Michael. Obscenities. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1972. Carmichael, Stokely and Charles V. Hamilton. Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America. New York: Vintage Books, 1967.
- Cartey, Wilfred G. Black Images. New York: Teachers College Press, 1970. Cleaver, Eldridge. Soul on Ice. New York: Delta, 1968.
- Conley, Susan. "About Yusef Komunyakaa." Ploughshares 23.1 (1997): 202- 208. Coombs, Orde, ed. We Speak as Liberators: Young Black Poets. New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1970.
- Cooper, Wayne. The Passion of Claude McKay. New York: Schocken Books, 1973.
- Davis, Peter. "The US Image We Still See - Ruefully, Usefully - Is That of a Failed Imperial Power: Vietnam: A Cracked Mirror." The Nation 270:19 (2000) : 18-24.
- De Santis, Christopher, ed., Langston Hughes and the Chicago Defender. Urbana: University Of Illinois Press, 1995. Dickenstein, Morris. Gates of Eden. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.

- Diggins, John Patrick. *The Proud Decades: America in War and Peace*. New York: 50 W.W. Norton, 1988. Drinan, Robert F. "When Will The American Conscience Demand Justice for Vietnam?" *National Catholic Reporter* 36 (2000) : 16-20.
- Douglass, Fredrick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave*. Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1993.
- Echols, Alice. *Daring to be BAD: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1980.
- Evans, Mari. "Status Symbol." *I am the Darker Brother*. Ed. Arnold Adoff. New York: The MacMillan Co., 1968. 92. *Eyes on the Prize II: America at the Racial Crossroads: 1965 to 1985*. dist. PBS Video, Videocassette. 1989.
- Fayer, Steve, and Henry Hampton, eds. *Voices of Freedom*. New York: Bantam Books, 1990.
- Feinstein, Sasha, and YusefKomunyakaa, eds. *The Jazz Poetry Anthology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991. Fowl~r, Virginia. Nikki Giovanni. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992.
- Franklin, V.P. *Living Our Stories. Telling Our Truths*. New York: Schribner, 1995. Fried, Richard M. *The McCarthy Era in Perspective: Nightmare in Red*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Gartner, Scott Sigmund. "Body Counts and 'Success' in the Vietnam and Korean Wars." *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 25 (1995) : 377-392.
- Gates, Henry Louis. *The Signifying Monkey*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. 51 Gibson, Donald B., ed. *Modern Black Poets*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: PrenticeHall, Inc., 1973.
- Gilbert, James. *Another Chance: Postwar America 1945-1985*. Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1986.
- Gitlin, Todd. *The Sixties: Years of Hope. Days of Rage*. New York: Danlan Books, 1984.
- Nikki. *Gemini*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1985. ---. *Shimmy Shimmy Like My Sister Kate*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996. Gotera, Vincente. "Depending on the Light": YusefKomunyakaa's *Dien Cai Dau*." *America Rediscovered* (1990): 282-299.
- Halstead, Fred. *Gls Speak Out Against the War*. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970.
- Harper, Philip Brian. "Nationalism and Social Division in Black Arts Poetry of the 1960s." *Critical Inquiry*. 19.2 (1993): 234-256. Hass, Robert, and YusefKomunyakaa. "How Poetry helps People to Live Their Lives." *American Poetry Review* 28.5 (1999): 21-28.
- Hening, George C., *America's Longest War*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986.
- Hindley, Meredith. "The Furious Flower: Black Poets Discuss Their Craft." *Humanities* 15.5 (1994): 28-31 . Hoff, Joan. *Nixon Reconsidered*. New York: Basic Books, 1994.
- Hogan, Homer, ed. *Poetry of Relevance*. Toronto: Methuen, 1970.
- Horowitz, Daniel. "Rethinking Betty Friedan and The Feminine Mystique: Labor Union Raicalism and Feminism in Cold War America." *American Quarterly March* 1996 : 8-29.