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The American University in Cairo
School of Global Affairs and Public Policy (GAPP)

PLAYING AGAINST THE RHYTHM:
THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER AND PERFORMATIVE SPACE IN IRAN

A Thesis Submitted to
The Department of Middle East Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

by Leila Rafei

(under the supervision of Dr. Amy Motlagh)
April 2012

ABSTRACT

Playing Against the Rhythm:
The Intersection of Gender and Performative Space in Iran

by Leila Rafei

The American University in Cairo
Supervisor: Dr. Amy Motlagh

Since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, women have been legally prohibited from singing or playing a musical instrument solo in public. The government has sought to control women's performative space by using concepts of permissibility and ideological compatibility. In the past decade, however, Iran has seen the birth of an underground music culture, in which women sing and play illegally. Underground and diasporic female musicians have carved new spaces that subvert state regulations on cultural purity and nationalism, deterritorializing and deconstructing notions of national space and culture. Women musicians have thus demonstrated the failure of the state to successfully regulate performative space.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

*I come from a land of dolls
I smell of the night,
I come from the dream*

*This is me, I am a lone woman,
On the brink of a cold season¹*

Greeted by the steady plucking of the Persian *tār* and a welcoming applause, a man takes the stage and bows. *Bīchāri h dilam* (my poor heart), he sings, his voice wavering with emotional intensity, growing louder and more theatrical as his song progresses. His hands and arms flail and grasp the air, or perhaps a symbolic heart, bringing to mind the ecstatic lamentations of a Shi'i mourning ritual. Row upon row of men clad in white watch stoically, fixed to their chairs in the audience. The song ends and is met with applause, he bows, and as the music fades out another stage comes into focus. On this one, a woman shrouded in black stands before a darkened and empty auditorium, her back facing the camera. An eerie, seemingly inhuman sound emanates from her, like a swarm of bees. Her voice grows more odd and frenzied, taking various animalistic tones—at once a stampeding herd, a bleating sheep, and the aural frenzy of a jungle. With closed eyes, one might imagine to be standing beneath a leafy rainforest canopy, hearing the instinctual cries of unthinkable creatures. But this is no rainforest. The woman finishes her song with a jarring silence, still facing the empty room. On the adjoining screen, the male singer stands, bewildered. A visual and sonic blankness reverberates. What exactly did the man—and the viewer—just witness?

Such is the story of Shirin Neshat's *Turbulent*, a short film that explores the dynamics of gender and performance in Iranian society through a musical lens. Using music to understand the

¹ Lyrics from the song “Arūsak Kūki” by Ghogha, translation mine.

scope of gender is not limited to metaphor, however. The art of music has been overtly entwined with the politics of gender, culture and nation for centuries. Only recently, though, has music's role as a cipher for social mores become a blatant part of public discourse and legislation. Since the 1979 revolution, women have been banned from singing solo or performing music in public without the accompaniment of a musical or choral ensemble. This law is clearly multi-dimensional. Why, exactly, are women musicians and singers specifically targeted as unlawful trespassers into the public domain? What constitutes the public domain? And how is permissibility carefully designated on a basis of context? Does the law have any bearing on the reality of women performers? The many questions that arise from this particular bit of legislation testify to the complex and convoluted perceptions of music and gender in Iranian society, as well as the often-contradictory realities of everyday life. Despite the law, women musicians still perform in Iran, albeit within their own carefully designated spaces.

Binaries are a key concept in this discussion, for all of the issues involved rest upon constructed oppositions. Gender is binarized between male and female. Space can be binarized between public and private. Nation can be simplified as "us" versus "them," due to its relational nature.² Women's musical performance exemplifies the deconstruction of these binaries by flouting gender-specific censorship, occupying a paradoxically liminal performance space, and blurring dominant concepts of

² Harrison, Simon. "Cultural Difference as Denied Resemblance: Reconsidering Nationalism and Ethnicity," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 45.2 (2003): 343.

musical nationalism vis-à-vis cultural authenticity. Moreover, within the world of Iranian women musicians, there lies an apparent dichotomy between musicians with legal permission (*mujaviz*) to perform and those without—commonly known as underground musicians. By imposing a system of strict artistic regulation, the Iranian state has attempted to create a binary opposition in cultural production. Artists are accordingly legal or illegal, mainstream or underground. The binary further rests on notions of cultural purity and on the Islamic hierarchy of sound; and the implication is that “good” music is moral and nationalist, in contrast to its illegal opposite. Does this binary stand beyond the law? The realities of Iranian music are more complicated and difficult to categorize. Moreover, such regulations underestimate the inherent subversive power of music, which resides in its fluidity; music is constantly evolving, eclectic and open to personal interpretation. This fluidity is also evident in other art forms such as literature, film, and visual art. Music, as an art, is not easy to regulate, define and categorize, and its reception in society is highly political. When Western music was banned in Iran in the 1980s, even the most apolitical bubblegum pop songs carried a tremendous subversive power where they flourished on the black market. Today, Western-style pop has been legalized, and peppers the charts of the imposing regulatory body, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (*Vizarat-i Farhang va Irshad Islami*), henceforth referred to as *Irshad*). Accordingly, pop music has lost its subversive power, which has now shifted to unlawful genres such

as rap, heavy metal and indie rock. Moreover, amidst the globalized Internet and social media, artists' exposure to a vast variety of influences means that genres are not as clearly defined as cultural regulations imply. These regulations therefore have failed in affecting a state-approved artistic climate in Iran. Their ideological basis, however, is full of cultural and political context. Why is music so problematic? And why are women musicians doubly so?

The evolution of women's performative space has subverted spatial constructions. In conventional spatial organization, public and private spaces are dichotomized: the public is a male domain, and the private is associated with femininity. Women's performance has customarily been relegated to private spaces, which allow for more personal expression within codes of familial privacy. However, this simplistic dichotomy does not hold upon deeper study on women's performative space. In actuality, spaces in which women's voices are accepted are often liminal, neither public nor private. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which revolutionized public and private space in Iran, the private sphere has been used as an area for social transgression. In the case of women and underground music, this means that private homes are now avenues for musical performance on the Internet and in underground concerts. These performance platforms serve as substitutes for public space, and therefore bring the public within private grounds via the audience. On the Internet, the audience is global and infinite; in underground concerts, the audience often consists of anyone able to pay the ticket price.

The private has thus become partially public, and liminal in essence. This reorganization of space has had a profound effect on women in music, who have negotiated spatial and performance regulation to create new avenues for performance of the female voice.

Moreover, the rapid nation-rebuilding embarked upon by the Islamic Republic plays a central role in constructing acceptable performative spaces for women. While the government can discredit women's music through an array of social, cultural and religious factors, the use of nationalist symbols serves to legitimize it in public settings. As such, Irshad has delineated a set of permissible spaces for women musicians. These spaces are infused with themes of nationalism, such as religion, epic poetry, and government, and tie in women and music's roles in nation-building. Notions of cultural authenticity and paradigms of femininity are dispersed throughout these spaces. However, the advent of the grassroots music movement and the underground scene has subverted the state and its regulations on contextual permissibility by deterritorializing cultural spaces and forging new concepts of musical nationalism. The Internet, for example, has aided in reformulating notions of musical authenticity by connecting users with diaspora communities and global culture. In effect, music and place are no longer strictly bound to a territorial identity, thereby complicating the cultural policies of Irshad that aim to tie music to nation. Moreover, the underground scene has essentially subverted regulations on women's music and has ultimately allowed women more cultural

freedom. The existence and popularity of underground women musicians testifies to the failure of the Iranian government to impose the oppositional binaries of music (legal/authentic versus illegal/inauthentic) and space (public/male versus private/female).

Literature Review

While contemporary Iranian music has increasingly interested journalists and filmmakers in recent years, the subject is still in its infancy in scholarly research. Studies on women musicians in particular are even more sparse. Several works by the musicologist Laudan Nooshin are related to the topic and have thus been immensely helpful; her studies on mainstream and underground contemporary Iranian music have helped to provide a solid framework for my study. These include various articles and book chapters, as well as her book, *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia*. The bulk of my research, however, has been interdisciplinary, combining scholarship on gender, nationalism, musicology, and social theory. The most central to this study is the scholarship on sound and space, both broad theoretical terms that are integral to understanding how women musicians function within the larger socio-political context. Also relevant, yet not a focal point, is the Islamic debate on the social space and morality of music. Finally, I have incorporated studies on gender and nationalism to elucidate the larger dynamics at play in constructing women's performative space in Iran.

Sound, Voice, and Women's Performative Space

In any musicological study, the concepts of *sound* and *voice* are key. Sound is the most basic aural object, from which music evolves. Moreover, sound, even in its rawest form, helps to define physical spaces. Sounds such as the chirping of birds and the bustle of city streets are identifying components of space; they can denote the indoors, outdoors, public and private. *Voice* can be defined as the sound produced from the bodily larynx, and is thus distinctively personified in character. While voice in its most literal interpretation denotes vocal sound, it can also refer to figurative voices in literature and performance art. As such, my study is also informed by the "voice" of non-musical women performers, such as the poets Qurrat al-'Ayn and Forough Farrokhzad, and current *naqālī* storytellers. The various forms of voice all share an inherent individuality; this individuality coupled with the importance of the body give voice the power of subversion, and consequentially subject it to frequent censorship. Voice is synonymous with opinion, expression, and communication; when a particular voice runs contrary to social and spatial mores, it disturbs constructions of order and space. The errant voice is confrontational and incendiary; its acts of subversion are important because they challenge dominant structures of power, poke holes in the binds of spatial propriety, and when successful, create new spaces for vocal expression.

The concept of voice has long been a matter of theoretical contention. This is due chiefly to its multifaceted nature; the voice originates in the physical body, while in essence it exists as an intangible aural form. Voice can be seen as physical or abstract, as an object or a tool, as autonomous or dependent on other physical forces. As such, voice has been theorized as corporeal, immaterial, and a combination of both. The Lacanian scholar Mladen Dolar opts for the latter view, positing voice as "a bodily missile which has detached itself from the source, emancipated itself, yet remains corporeal."³ Moreover, Dolar argues that voice is not merely the carrier of a verbal message; it exists as an independent force that interrupts, rather than supports, a message. Voice's ability to "interrupt" discourse is important because it denotes an inherent power and difference between voice and other forms of communication and art. Its multidimensional character creates this power: difficult to classify, yet related to both physical and abstract forms, voice has the ability to both subvert and support pre-ordained structures of space and power. Similarly, the body serves as a source of both empowerment and disempowerment for the voice: it is the body that makes the voice subversive. Gendered analyses of musicology often uphold this bodily nature of voice, sound, and music, thus going against the dominant grain of music theory, which tends to essentialize music as independent from the body.⁴ According to musicologist Philip V. Bohlman, reinforcement of the body is key to understanding music's larger societal and public

³ Qtd. in Schlichter, Annette. "Do Voices Matter? Vocality, Materiality, and Gender Performativity," *Body & Society* 17 (2011): 33.

⁴ Bohlman, Philip V. "Musicology as a Political Act," *The Journal of Musicology* 11.4 (1993): 431.

role: "As a bodily and performative practice, music enters a very public and contested sphere, in which the political nature of its discourse can be hidden from no one."⁵ Music's intrinsic attachment to the body is the locus of the subversive power of women musicians in Iran.

Not only is vocal sound attached to the body, but also to its physical environment.

According to Jonathan Sterne, "that elusive inside world of sound—the sonorous, the auditory, the heard, the very density of sonic experience—becomes perceptible only through its exteriors...Sound is an artifact of the messy and political human sphere."⁶ Sterne's theory roots sound in a physical space beyond the body—a social space that crystallizes its recognition and understanding. Because of the importance of social space in the articulation of sound, it can also serve as a signifier of social relations. Roshanak Kheshti argues that sound should not be theorized as an object, but instead as "an analytic or a hermeneutical tool for understanding inequality, racism, gender formation, desire, pleasure."⁷ Sound is thus inextricably tied to both physical space and socialization. When sound takes the specific form of music, its ability to address and respond to social structures becomes even clearer. Music is a tangible product of sound, one that is pervasive and integral throughout human societies. According to ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes, "music informs our sense of place": it aids in the construction

⁵ Bohlman, "Music as a Political Act," 432.

⁶ Schlichter, "Do Voices Matter," 34.

⁷ Brooks, Daphne and Roshanak Kheshti. "The Social Space of Sound," *Theatre Survey* 52.2 (2011): 330.

of a collective memory and experience, incorporates notions of social boundary and organizes moral and political hierarchies.⁸ It is thus unsurprising that music—especially in the form of national anthems—has been used as a nation-building tool throughout the world. In twentieth century Turkey, for example, music was redefined and regulated to reflect the ideals of the Kemalist state.⁹ Similarly, the Soviet Union censored western popular music because of the perception that it undermined national culture.¹⁰ But does place inform our sense of music? The regulating bodies of the Islamic Republic seem to follow this line of theory, using preexisting concepts of nation to create musical space. It is unequivocal that music is bound to politics, history, and power relations, and yet occupies its own distinct social space. The space of music comes with the norms and mores of other social spaces, defining physical boundaries as well as delineating who is and is not allowed.

Performance constitutes the physical articulation of music's space and carries similar social weight as sound. According to Stephen Blum, "A performer works within the constraints imposed by a particular set of social relations. He learns, elaborates, exercises, and refines the techniques which make it possible for him to act as a performer within one or more (changing or stable) contexts."¹¹ As a physical act rooted in physical space,

⁸ Stokes, Martin, ed. *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place* (Providence, RI: Berg, 1994), 3.

⁹ Erol, Ayhan. "Music, Power and Symbolic Violence: The Turkish State's Music Policies During the Early Republican Period," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 15.1 (2012): 45.

¹⁰ Whiteley, Sheila, Andy Bennett and Stan Hawkins, eds. *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004): 5.

¹¹ Qtd, in Danielson, Virginia. *The Voice of Egypt: Um Kulthūm, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 1997), 12.

performance brings the voice's bodily character to the forefront. Moreover, performance serves as the most concrete form of music as social space. Henri Lefebvre's theories on social space are instrumental in my analysis of women's musical performance in Iran. According to Lefebvre, social space is a social product. As such, it serves as a "tool of thought and action," as a means of production, and as a means of control.¹² When the state deliberately creates musical space, as in Iran, music echoes the aforementioned possibilities. It can serve as a tool of thought by propagating ideologies such as nationalism, and it can reflect and reinforce dominant power structures such as gender, religion and government. There is an important caveat, however: "The social and political [state] forces which engendered this space now seek, but fail, to master it completely; the very agency that has forced spatial reality towards a sort of uncontrollable autonomy now strives to run it into the ground, then shackle and enslave it."¹³ Although Lefebvre's theory does not explicitly mention the space of women and music, its general framework can be extended accordingly: the state's construction of an acceptable music space for women has ultimately failed.

What is the significance of women's performative space? Some may balk at the notion of considering women's artistic production (and hence, performance) as separate from men's. The Iranian writers Mahshid Amirshahi, Simin Behbehani, and Tahereh Saffarzadeh have all voiced dissatisfaction with classifying a

¹² Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 26.

¹³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 26.

women's canon.¹⁴ Farzaneh Milani explains, "Isolating women from the mainstream of Persian literature, understood to belong to men, is feared to be damaging, at best condescending, to women."¹⁵ However, Milani goes further to argue that such classification is necessary in order to understand their social and cultural context. In keeping with this perspective, Neshat argues that the oppression of women has made them more creative and subversive artists:

It's far *harder* for a woman to find a voice in Iran; as writers, artists, or filmmakers, they have to endure far more, in every aspect of life, and therefore their point of view is often more poignant...And because women are under so much pressure, they end up being more innovative about dealing with crises and devising ways out. They become more subversive, in my mind.¹⁶

Stokes argues that music in particular is a site of negotiating gender: it "provides an arena for pushing back boundaries, exploring the border zones that separate male from female."¹⁷ As such, performance possesses a tremendous social power; to regulate this power, musicians are "culturally desexed."¹⁸ Stokes' examples of desexed musicians make mention of only male performers, who are cast as effeminate. What about women's performance? Is women's performative space also desexed? In Iran, restrictions on women's performance seem to oppose Stokes' theory; when they follow the law, women performers do not subvert dominant constructions of femininity. However, if the voice is

¹⁴Milani, Farzaneh. *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 10-11.

¹⁵Milani, *Veils and Words*, 11.

¹⁶Zanganeh, Lila Azam. "Women Without Men: A Conversation with Shirin Neshat," in *My Sister, Guard Your Veil; My Brother, Guard Your Eyes* (Boston: Beacon, 2006), 47.

¹⁷Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, 22.

¹⁸Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, 23.

inherently sexed due to its corporeality, silencing the female voice can be seen as a method of desexing. The goal is social control; whether this control has succeeded is arguable.

Hierarchies of Sound

In the regulation of women's performance space, it is necessary to look to historical precedents of hierarchizing sound and performance. Scholars such as van Nieuwkerk (1997), Doubleday (1999) and Chehabi (2000) have pointed to Islamic conceptions of music and voice as a framework for evaluating women's performance space in Islamicate countries. However, there are several factors that restrict the applicability of Islam-centered arguments: it is difficult to pinpoint a solid and singular Islamic view on music, music continues to occupy a significant cultural space in Islamicate societies, and women have historically been very much a part of various musical traditions. Contemporary Iran is unique in time and place, and theories from pre-modern scholars arose from a very different context. Moreover, is Islamic theory on sound unique? Milani argues, "If biblical scripture ordered women to 'keep silence in the churches. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate, even as the law says' (1 Corinthians 14:33-34)...no such edicts can be found in the Qur'an."¹⁹ Nevertheless, analyses of the social space of sound by pre-modern Islamic scholars help to lay a framework for considering the concept of voice. Sound is often placed on a

¹⁹ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 48.

hierarchy, in which the voice typically resides on the lowest (and most subversive) rung.

Islamic scholars as various as Abu Hamed al-Ghazali (1058-1111), Kâtip Çelebi (1609-1657), and Yusuf al-Qaradawi (b. 1926) consider sound as a hierarchized spectrum ranging from prayer to singing. At the top of the hierarchy is religion-oriented sound (recitation of the Qur'an, the call to prayer, and religious chanting), followed by instrumental song, and finally singing. It is important to note, however, that Muslims usually do not consider the call to prayer and religious lamentations as musical. Nevertheless, their inclusion in the hierarchy of sound is necessary because of the contrast with other categories. A genre that falls somewhat between categories (yet remains permissible) is music associated with ceremonies such as marriage and military.²⁰ Space is thus a factor in the hierarchy of sound, as is time. The more time a musician devotes to his or her art, the less acceptable, argues al-Ghazali, because music detracts from one's devotion to God.²¹ Full-time professional musicians are therefore less acceptable than avocational enthusiasts, reflecting the class-based perception that professional musicians come from popular classes. Other scholars, such as Çelebi of the seventeenth century, apply slightly different, albeit similar hierarchies of sound. According to Çelebi, the three categories of music include birdsongs, singing, and instrumental. Unlike the dominant view that places singing at the bottom rung, Çelebi stated instrumental music was the least permissible because of

²⁰ van Nieuwkerk, Karin. *'A Trade Like Any Other': Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1997), 11.

²¹ van Nieuwkerk, *'A Trade Like Any Other,'* 11.

some instruments' associations with illicit behavior. A drum called the *kūba*, for example, is unacceptable because of its supposed link with "drinking wine, licentious songs, and dissolute people."²² According to al-Qaradawi, Islam prohibits activities that have the ability to cause excitement of the emotions and instincts. However music—while attached to some restrictions—is permissible in itself. So long as a given song does not contradict Islamic morals or incite excessive excitement, it is lawful.²³

In the general breakdown of music—in which instrumental music is better than the human voice, the more bodily a type of sound is, the less permissible. Music's relationship to the body is highly gendered and plays a central role in the male/female music hierarchy. Solo instruments, as previously mentioned, can resemble the voice (specifically, the female voice), and the female voice "can be considered part of her intimate sphere (*'awra*)."²⁴ It is thus solo instrumentalists' implication of the feminine that makes such music less acceptable than multi-piece ensembles. When the actual human voice enters the equation, this gendered hierarchy is made even clearer. According to van Nieuwkerk, "Instrumental music is relatively gender-neutral, but in singing it makes a crucial difference whether the singer is male or female."²⁵ The gendering of singing is thus unavoidable, unlike metaphorical insinuations of gender in instrumental song.

²² van Nieuwkerk, 'A Trade Like Any Other,' 10.

²³ van Nieuwkerk, 'A Trade Like Any Other,' 13.

²⁴ Chehabi, H.E. "Voices Unveiled: Women Singers in Iran," in *Iran and Beyond: Essays in Middle Eastern History in Honor of Nikki R. Keddie*, ed. Rudi Matthee and Beth Baron (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2000), 151.

²⁵ van Nieuwkerk, 'A Trade Like Any Other,' 132.

Further, differences in societal perceptions of male and female singers are echoed in the judgment of their abilities. "Men are evaluated on their voices and skills, but female singers are primarily assessed for their physical attributes and only secondarily for their talents as singers."²⁶ Women's singing is perceived to have the innate ability to violate al-Ghazali's rule of deterring excitement. Women's music, according to al-Ghazali, has the power of both visual and aural seduction. Still, it is better to merely listen to a woman singing than to see *and* listen to her, because "the excitement aroused by looking is considered more powerful than the excitement aroused by listening."²⁷ The realm of women entertainers can also be broken down according to the use of bodily texts. Women instrumentalists who are part of ensembles are at the top of the hierarchy, followed by women solo instrumentalists, followed by women singers, and finally—the most purely physical and least acceptable—is women dancers. van Nieuwkerk explains:

Female musicians are mainly listened to; female singers are both listened to and, at least at present, observed; while female dancers are solely eye-catchers...Yet if female dancing is performed in front of a female audience and no temptation is feared and the performance is in keeping with the limits of proper time, place, and company, it is probably permissible.²⁸

Music's relation to the body is thus the site of a large part of its controversy to pre-modern scholars. This controversy, however, is not restricted to Islamicate societies: as previously

²⁶ van Nieuwkerk, 'A Trade Like Any Other,' 132.

²⁷ van Nieuwkerk, 'A Trade Like Any Other,' 12.

²⁸ van Nieuwkerk, 'A Trade Like Any Other,' 12.

mentioned, the bodily nature of the voice gives it an inherent potential for subversion regardless of cultural context. Moreover, history suggests that despite its negative connotations, music (and more specifically, women's music) has persisted in numerous Islamicate cultures.

Women, Music, and Nation-Building

Where does the Iranian woman's voice fit in the larger national context? Scholarship has already established that music and the voice have been conceived as independently powerful and subversive. When the voice is female, its subversive power is even greater because of the added dynamic of women's sexuality. If men can be corrupted by music and women's sexuality, so can the very fabric of the nation. As such, women and cultural production like music are both entwined in concepts of nationalism and nation-building. Not only can both women and music cause corruption, but they can also be the sites and symbols of corruptive influence. In a nationalist state, music is often prized for cultural authenticity. Similarly, the sovereignty of nations is often symbolized by women's bodies: according to Christiane Timmerman, "the purity of the nation's women is identified with the purity of the nation itself."²⁹ Further, Joane Nagel notes, "unruly female sexuality threatens to discredit the nation."³⁰ These dynamics are evident in the post-revolutionary rhetoric of "cultural purification" and

²⁹ Timmerman, Christiane. "Muslim Women and Nationalism: The Power of the Image." *Current Sociology* 48.4 (2000): 18.

³⁰ Nagel, Joane. "Masculinity and Nationalism: Gender and Sexuality in the Making of Nations." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21.2 (1998): 256.

“cultural revolution,” which affected both women and music in Iran.

According to Nagel, “nationalism is both a goal—to achieve statehood, and a belief—in collective commonality.”³¹ As such, nationalism entails a belief in common descent as well as the proffering of a national narrative. In Iran’s case, this common descent has traditionally (and now even moreso) been identified with Shia Islam, and to a certain extent, ancient and pre-Islamic Persian culture. The patriarchal implications of nationalism are rooted in the concept of nation, which often uses the family as a symbol and model. Accordingly, Gellner (1994) argues that nationalist narratives usually reference older and traditional frames of social organization, such as the family. In this national family, women’s role is that of the mother. “As exalted ‘mothers in the fatherland,’” writes Nagel, “their purity must be impeccable, and so nationalists often have a special interest in the sexuality and sexual behavior of their women.”³² In this approach to gender and nationalism, the woman’s shame is the family’s shame, and hence, the nation’s shame. Women thus have an integral yet passive role in conceptualizing the nation, one in which the weight of national identity and honor rest upon the female body.

In addition to establishing women’s vocal space, music also has an important symbolic role in the construction of nationalisms and ethnic identity. While women’s symbolic role in nation-building is passive, as vessels of purity and/or

³¹ Nagel, “Masculinity and Nationalism,” 247.

³² Nagel, “Masculinity and Nationalism,” 254.

corruption, music has a more active role as the articulator of culture and history. According to Jacques Attali, "All music, any organization of sounds is then a tool for the creation or consolidation of a community, of a totality."³³ Music is thus fluid and independently powerful. George Revill argues that "sound is valued for the directness with which it expresses the 'soul' of the nation, the moral obligation of the composer as a servant of the people and [his] elevated sentiments as an artistic leader."³⁴ Moreover, Attali posits that music plays an important social role in articulating the collective identity of a nation through constructing binary opposites in society. These binary opposites are "recognized as fundamental to the social construction of modern consciousness, between, for example, order and chaos, human and nonhuman, civilization and barbarism."³⁵ Binary forms are, at base level, the difference between sound and music; and further, the artistic opposites of indigenous and foreign. Just as nationalism often defines itself against an imagined "Other," music is a tool for expressing this difference.

The meeting point between women, nation, and music has occurred in other contexts before. In Algeria, the musical genre of raï sprang out of a social setting in which nationalism was brewing. Raï appeared in the coastal towns and villages of 1930s Algeria, which had at the time been under French colonial rule for a century. The genre blended traditional African and Arabic

³³ Qtd. in Revill, George. "Music and the Politics of Sound: Nationalism, Citizenship, and Auditory Space." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18.5 (1999): 599.

³⁴ Revill, "Music and the Politics of Sound," 605.

³⁵ Revill, "Music and the Politics of Sound," 599.

music with Spanish and French influences, and quickly took on a social consciousness. The singers—called *shaykhs* and *shaykhas*—used their music and lyrics to inform Algerian youth about values, tradition, and culture. When opposition to French rule came to a boiling point in the mid-twentieth century, raï singers increased their already overt nationalism by singing in Arabic and aligning themselves with liberation movements. One singer said, “through such songs we pass heritage and culture from generation to generation; and, we are taught courage and noble spirit.”³⁶ Though raï was traditionally performed by men, women singers soon became more prevalent and eventually became characteristic of the genre. After Algeria achieved independence from the French in 1962, its new regime embarked on a plan for “cultural purification,” similar to Ayatollah Khomeini’s policies in the immediate years after the Iranian Revolution. The new policies entailed the strict regulation of culture and artistic production, in which only patriotic national songs, traditional *andaluṣī* music, and popular Egyptian hits were allowed to be broadcast on national radio. According to Al-Deen, “raï music was not accepted both because it was considered a remnant of colonial times and due to its association with the lifestyle of *shaykhas*.”³⁷ Music, then, played a central role in articulating Algerian nationalism in opposition to French rule. It simultaneously established and subverted binaries by using lyrics to emphasize heritage and tradition, while incorporating colonial music in its reformulation of indigenous sound. And once

³⁶ Al-Deen, Hana Noor. “The Evolution of Rai Music.” *Journal of Black Studies* 35 (2005): 599.

³⁷ Al-Deen, “The Evolution of Rai Music,” 603.

again, the involvement of women as *shaykhas* created a new dynamic in which women's behavior and dress (*shaykhas* were controversial for their provocative clothing and their willingness to perform for men) symbolized the ultimate affront to national identity. It is quite likely that the popularization of women *raï* singers is what reversed the nationalist associations of the genre. Though the message of the music stayed the same, the context changed its nature and acceptability.

The mid-twentieth century Iranian singer Mahvash provides another example of women entwining nationalism and music. Mahvash (born Akram) lost her mother at an early age and became a prostitute, growing up in the brothels of Tehran. The brothels were her earliest stage; from there, she went on to perform in Tehran's cabarets and cafes and drew large support from the working classes from which she hailed. Mahvash's musical style—dubbed “unwesternized popular urban music”—was rejected by both the westernized elite and the champions of highbrow Iranian music.³⁸ Nevertheless, she attained a populist following due to her appeal to the working class urban masses. According to Chehabi, “She gained the masses' adulation by articulating in her songs the problems, difficulties, needs, and frustrations of common people, which she knew very well: in fact, her nickname was Akram *Ābg ūshū*, after the lamb stew that she loved and that used to be the daily staple of poorer Iranians.”³⁹ In a way, Mahvash's ability to speak to the disenfranchised majority absolved her of her forays into prostitution and other publicly

³⁸ Chehabi, “Voices Unveiled,” 161.

³⁹ Chehabi, “Voices Unveiled,” 161.

indecent behavior. After her death in a car crash in 1961, religious authorities tried to stop her from being buried in a Muslim cemetery, but backed down after her tremendous following protested. Mahvash was ultimately buried as planned, and her funeral attracted an unprecedented amount of mourners—the most ever seen at an Iranian funeral until Ayatollah Mahmud Taleqani's burial in 1979.⁴⁰ Chehabi writes, "When the police opened the gates to let the second procession in, people stopped reciting prayers, stormed in, and, in a clear break with traditional practice, sang her songs as her coffin was lowered into the grave."⁴¹ The popularity of Mahvash attests to the national power of music, which is able to both defy cultural regulation and absolve unsavory associations.

The above examples go further to demonstrate the problems that arise from the national regulation of culture. Imposed binaries (such as modern versus traditional and indigenous versus imperialist) have failed and are more a part of official rhetoric than cultural reality. "The definition and construction of national styles is seldom unproblematic," argues Stokes.⁴² In Iran, the success of Mahvash demonstrated the failure of culture that is out of touch with the masses; her style of music was reviled by the cultural elite yet she attained an unprecedented level of fame due to her music's populist appeal. Moreover, Ziad Fahmy's study of Egyptian mass media in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries indicates a similar dynamic. In this

⁴⁰ Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 162.

⁴¹ Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 162.

⁴² Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, 11.

case, the Egyptian media inadvertently forged a communal identity among the populace due to its revolutionary ability to speak to the masses. While print media had long been a site of fomenting concepts of nation, it was inaccessible to the illiterate majority of Egypt at the turn of the twentieth century. "The demand from below," argues Fahmy, "was for media products that were entertaining, accessible, socially relevant, and culturally and linguistically comprehensible."⁴³ In Iran, the problem of reaching illiterate people could be solved with the radio; however in Egypt the discrepancy between colloquial 'amiya Arabic and formal *fuṣḥā* complicated the matter. 'Ammiya was the language of the masses, while *fuṣḥā*, the formal language of culture, was understood by only a tiny minority of Egyptians. According to Fahmy, this necessitated the creation of a new form of mass media culture using the colloquial dialect, caused by capitalism: to maximize profits, media executives needed to make their music and plays intelligible to the majority of people. Further, the change to colloquial media "articulated a cultural and psychological gap between the thin stratum of Egyptians forming the leadership of the inceptive bourgeois nationalist movement and the masses whose support was needed to challenge European encroachment."⁴⁴ While the cultural shift drew disdain from the cultural elite, who viewed the new mass media as vulgar, sales demonstrated that colloquial media was exponentially more popular. Moreover, women were once again at the center of the new nationalist dialogue

⁴³ Fahmy, Ziad. "Media-Capitalism: Colloquial Mass Culture and Nationalism in Egypt, 1908-1918." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (2010): 86.

⁴⁴ Booth, qtd. in Fahmy, "Media Capitalism," 98.

articulated through song: the new mass media included the immensely popular *ṭaqāṭiq* genre of folk songs, predominated by women singers. *Ṭaqāṭiq* songs were generally flirtatious and light in theme, but became increasingly political, speaking to the concerns of everyday Egyptians. Moreover, the lyrics used simple language, making them easier for listeners to memorize and disseminate. The overall effect was the creation of a solidified nationalism, demonstrating at once music's power in nation-building, women's central role in national narratives, and the inevitable failure of regulating culture.

The various spheres of scholarship that have provided the backbone of my research coalesce in this discussion of women, music and performance in contemporary Iran. Studies of voice and sound are instrumental in establishing the social power of women's music. Similarly, the independent roles both women and music play in establishing nationalisms exemplify this social power, which has been acknowledged at various points of nation-building throughout Iranian history.

Methodology

In addition to integrating interdisciplinary studies, my research has included various other tools, from music to lyrics to video. The Internet has been a key source for primary information on Iranian music; websites such as *Zirzamin* and *TehranAvenue*, among others, have provided me with interviews, reviews, and samples of music from relevant artists. Although my lack of fluency in the Persian language has limited the

availability of primary sources, I have been able to procure translations of articles from Iranian state media. However, my heavy reliance on English-language sources has possibly skewed my findings towards a more Western understanding of the issue at hand. Counteracting this somewhat, my research also includes a number of personal interviews with underground women musicians both inside Iran and in the diaspora. Several documentary films have been helpful in providing background on my subject; these include *The House is Black* (1963), *Googoosh: Iran's Daughter* (2000), and *Not an Illusion* (2009). In addition, the fictional film *No One Knows About Persian Cats* (2009) provided some insight into the dynamics of women's underground voices in Iran. My research has thus incorporated varied sources, from visual to written to musical.

I have been fortunate enough to be able to incorporate personal interviews in English with several artists: Farzane Zamen, Ghogha, Abjeez, and Mozghan Balouch. Another artist, Salome MC, has been written on and interviewed at comparative length in international media, and I have made use of these primary sources. The voices of other artists are also briefly included, but evidence from these four acts has been most central to my research. While the content of this thesis does not rely heavily on personal interviews, they have provided first-hand insight into the experience of women musicians in Iran. These chosen artists come from different musical genres, including rap, rock, and classical, giving a broader perspective on women's performative space and the commonalities that occur regardless of

superficial categorization. Moreover, two acts, such as Abjeez and Balouch, are located in the diaspora rather than inside Iran. The inclusion of diaspora musicians is important because of the increasing links between communities of Iranians around the world, aided in part by the Internet. This variation in types of sources has helped me to explore the multidimensional aspects of Iranian women's music.

CHAPTER II

MUSIC AND WOMEN'S PERFORMATIVE VOICE IN IRANIAN HISTORY

In the nineteenth century, questions about the place of both women and music gained public prominence amid larger political developments. In the following section, I will discuss the negotiation of music and women's performative voice in the history preceding the 1979 revolution. In discussing the emergence of the public female voice, I include nonmusical voices such as those of the poets and orators Qurrat al-'Ayn and Forough Farrokhzad. While neither is a singer or musician, their literary and performative voices laid the foundations for expanding women's performative space. Further, while analyzing the converging questions of voice, performance and music, it is important to consider the contextual social currents that allowed them to materialize.

What exactly are these related contextual points? Historian Afsaneh Najmabadi argues that there are two time periods during which the 'woman question' took prominence in Iran: in the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries (marked by the 1906 Constitutional Revolution) and from the 1960s to the present (marked by the 1979 Islamic revolution).⁴⁵ During both of these periods, Iran underwent major socio-political changes that deeply altered its national consciousness. The former period, writes Najmabadi, "ushered in the era of 'modernity' and 'progress,' an era during which, despite an underlying animosity towards European intrusion, Europe's social and political achievements provided the model for modernity and progress."⁴⁶ As such,

⁴⁵ Najmabadi, Afsaneh, "Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran," in *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (London: Macmillan, 1991), 663.

⁴⁶ Najmabadi, "Hazards of Modernity," 663.

reformers sought to redefine the nation with some resemblance to the European example—a concept that proved to be controversial, especially regarding discussions of unveiling and women's public involvement. The latter time period, which lasts until the present, entailed the creation of "an Islamic political alternative" via a rejection of the former model of modernization. Nevertheless, the binary faced by women still persisted, albeit in reformulated terms. In both periods, women's bodies served as symbols of the nation—as the vessels of culture, tradition, family, and sexuality.

The upheavals from 1905-1911 and 1978-79 undoubtedly catalyzed the introduction of "women's issues" in political discourses. However, Najmabadi's classification overlooks time periods in which the actions of individual women also brought the woman question to the forefront. Figures such as Qurrat al-'Ayn, Forough Farrokhzad, and the various female performers of the pre-modern period and the Pahlavi era were of equal importance to the question of women's place and voice in public society. These women, who broke the boundaries of women's public performance, served as visual and vocal reminders of social changes such as modernism. The seminal revolutions mentioned by Najmabadi can be seen in part as reactions to the arrival of various pioneering women; it is therefore necessary to study the effects these women had on articulating women's roles in performance and public. Moreover, the music question similarly emerged outside of the context of revolution; however these uprisings played an important role in reorganizing musical space.

In pre-modern Iran, when women's literacy was scarce, musical performance was perhaps the most available outlet for exercising the female voice. Paintings and written accounts show that women musicians, dancers and singers were a common part of royal court life in pre-modern Iran as well as its regional neighbors. Court performers ranged from slaves to aristocrats indulging in musical hobbies, and included members from a wide range of regions and ethnicities. Persian miniature paintings from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries show women playing various instruments in royal courts as part of all-female or mixed-gender ensembles. The latter was much less common, although sometimes a woman would dress as a man or vice versa in order to join a single-sex troupe. Usually, troupes would perform for audiences of the same gender, although exceptions—especially for high-ranking royals—could be made. Prevalent instruments included the harp (*chang*), dulcimer (*santūr*), various forms of lutes, and the frame drum. The latter, claims Doubleday, "is sometimes shown held against the face, used as a resonator for the voice."⁴⁷ In contrast to the drum-centric musical processions in weddings, female court musicians employed the use of a variety of instruments.

In court life, the trades of music, dance, and prostitution were intertwined, and many women entertainers engaged in all three. These entertainers and courtesans are often shown in paintings of Safavid court life, and were associated with royal luxury despite the disreputable status of their professions.

⁴⁷ Doubleday, Veronica. "The Frame Drum in the Middle East: Women, Musical Instruments and Power." *Ethnomusicology* 43.1 (1999): 114.

Matthee explains, "As in Renaissance Italy or in nineteenth century Lucknow in India, the courtesan, a woman of some education, familiar with music and of discerning taste, was an integral part of court life in Safavid Iran."⁴⁸ Although their official wages were typically very low, women entertainers were usually showered with lavish gifts from royal officials. "Some of these courtesans," explains Matthee, "became very rich indeed and lived in sumptuous apartments."⁴⁹ Some were even reportedly able to exercise some form of power based on their close relationships with the royal family. The female musician Felfel, for example, was a favorite performer of Shah 'Abbas, and thus held a relatively high level of social clout despite her old age and reported lack of beauty. Female musical troupes remained prevalent in the harems of Qajar dynasty shahs, especially that of Fath-'Ali Shah Qajar (r. 1797-1834). A European traveler, the Baroness d'Hermalle, remarked upon her visit to Qajar-era Persia:

Persians simply love their music, and no feast, holiday, or entertainment is complete without it. Important personages hire the regimental bands when they give a garden-party or a dinner, and very rich Persians usually keep their own musicians, who are classed among the servants; but for those unable to afford this luxury there are troupes which can be hired for the evening.⁵⁰

It must be noted that the majority of written accounts of court entertainment are from European travelers. Because of the scarcity of first-hand accounts from women, the accuracy of some tales is not certain. Harems grew more central in the Orientalist imagination as European expansionism developed. According to van

⁴⁸ Matthee, "Prostitutes, Courtesans, and Dancing Girls: Women Entertainers in Safavid Iran," in *Iran and Beyond: Essays in Middle Eastern History in Honor of Nikki R. Keddie*, ed. Rudi Matthee and Beth Baron (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2000), 143.

⁴⁹ Matthee, "Prostitutes, Courtesans, and Dancing Girls," 144.

⁵⁰ Qtd. in Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 155.

Nieuwkerk, "Travelers were thus fascinated by the 'licentious' female dancers, who provided them with a means to express the differentness and sensuality of 'the East.'" ⁵¹

Yet despite the prominent role of music in court life, the musical profession was still looked down upon. Women entertainers, in particular, were "thought of as little more than courtesans, and in 'Abbasid times they occupied the lowest rank in the hierarchy of court musicians, beneath male instrumentalists and male singers.'" ⁵² Women performers were often objectified on the basis of their physical appearance, and thus were judged differently from men. Even in all-female settings, women performers were still seen as morally ambiguous because they transgressed norms of feminine behavior. The fact that they performed for profit was frowned upon, and they were often assumed to be of lower social status because their employment implied that they lacked financial or familial security in the form of a husband or father.

The low social regard for women musicians influenced a wave of attempted reforms throughout the pre-modern period. Rulers made various attempts to regulate and prohibit certain kinds of entertainment throughout the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, usually focused on prostitution. Not surprisingly, these bans often went hand in hand with regulations on musical entertainment. Shah Tahmasb (r. 1524-76) banned brothels, dance and music halls after his "famous repentance." ⁵³ The act of

⁵¹ van Nieuwkerk, *A Trade Like Any Other*, 22.

⁵² Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 154.

⁵³ Matthee, "Prostitutes, Dancing Girls, and Courtesans," 145.

singing, specifically, came under pressure when the grand vizier Khalifah Soltan (1645-54) enacted several treatises that declared it unlawful. Such measures specifically targeted Sufis and their customs of singing, dancing, and swooning. Nevertheless, "their criticism of singing pure and simple may have been interpreted by contemporary readers as an oblique reference to the merriment common in court circles."⁵⁴ The royal court of Shah Solayman (r. 1666-94) was conspicuously free of female musicians and dancers, as well as wine.⁵⁵ By the end of the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722), it was apparent that court entertainment had diminished in favor of increasing religious consciousness.

The low social standing of musicians was perhaps supplemented by the prevalence of ethnic and religious minorities in the music trade. Jews and Armenians, for example, were highly represented in musician circles. According to Chehabi, wedding musicians (*mūṭrib*) were often Jewish, and Muslim musicians typically congregated in Tehran's Jewish neighborhoods because of the legal prohibition of trading in musical instruments for Muslims.⁵⁶ "Given the social marginality of both Muslim musicians and non-Muslims in general," writes Chehabi, "there was much interaction between Muslim, Jewish, and Armenian musicians, another way in which musicians transcended the dominant social norms."⁵⁷ Gypsies were also commonly associated with the music

⁵⁴ Matthee, "Prostitutes, Dancing Girls, and Courtesans," 146.

⁵⁵ Matthee, "Prostitutes, Dancing Girls, and Courtesans," 146.

⁵⁶ Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 156.

⁵⁷ Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 156.

trade.⁵⁸ In Persian literature and folklore, gypsies (and more specifically, gypsy women) are frequently depicted as musical performers. In fact, they were so closely associated with music and dance that some even traced their presence in Iran to the trade. In a story told by Ferdowsi (among others), the Indian King Shangal sent 4,000 gypsies to Iran in response to the Sasanian King Bahram Gur's request for musicians and dancers in the fifth century.⁵⁹ The Susmani tribe of Kurdistan was reportedly of Indian gypsy origin, and had a reputation for music, dance, and prostitution. Various European travelers, such as W.I. Knapp, T.M. Lycklama a Nijeholt, and Jakob Polak, wrote of the disrepute of the Susmani tribe in the nineteenth century. An earlier traveler, French jewel merchant Jean Chardin, wrote in his *Voyages* (1711) of the "connection between gypsies and loose morals in the Safavid period."⁶⁰ Chardin traced this connection to the derogatory term often used to describe gypsies, *kawī*. *Kawī*—which, according to Matthee, is thought to be a corruption of the word *Kabuli*, or "of Kabul"—was the term designating a particular group of Isfahan's urban poor, who may or may not have actually been from Kabul. The group, wrote Chardin, "were derelicts who went about in rags and lived in a state of total squalor, sloth and sexual promiscuity."⁶¹ Whether this is the root of the conflation of gypsies, immorality, and music, is uncertain; however such stories elucidate classist perceptions of

⁵⁸ While the definition of the term "gypsy" as it is used here is unclear, it is likely that the term referred to tribes such as the Susmani, who were associated with music and entertainment. The term denotes an ethnic Otherness, counternormative to social mores.

⁵⁹ Matthee, "Prostitutes, Dancing Girls, and Courtesans," 124.

⁶⁰ Matthee, "Prostitutes, Dancing Girls, and Courtesans," 125.

⁶¹ Chardin, paraphrased in Matthee, "Prostitutes, Dancing Girls, and Courtesans," 125.

groups involved in musical entertainment. While the social and political state of Iran has changed greatly since the age of female court performers, this history is instrumental in providing the foundations for unfavorable perceptions of women musicians throughout the twentieth century and beyond. Even amid the myriad changes (the dissolution of the Safavid and Qajar dynasties, the advent of modernism and the woman question, and the introduction of music into the public sphere), the old history of performance has clung stubbornly to the convictions of some segments of society.

What does this pre-modern history mean for women's performative space? It is clear that women musicians were relegated to the supposed private spheres of the home, of weddings, and of royal court life. These spheres constituted the physical performative space for women, in which they sang, danced, and entertained. While the idea of nationalism was not in existence in the pre-modern era, the fact that this performance space was largely associated with the state is telling. Could this be a proto-national space for women's performance? At the same time, other factors associated with musical performance (such as prostitution and the prevalence of ethnic and religious minorities) served as possible reasons for musicians' marginality. Moreover, women's performance space was also marginal and liminal, existing simultaneously within the physical confines of private space yet including unrelated audiences reminiscent of public space. Major developments in women's performative space would come much later, beginning in the

nineteenth century, when questions of nation, women and music grew in importance in a rapidly changing country.

Qurrat al-'Ayn

While female court musicians flourished in the Qajar dynasty, another type of performer pushed boundaries of women's voice and public performance in that same era: The poet and preacher Qurrat al-'Ayn, also known as Tahirih or as her birth name Fatimih Baraghani. Half a century before the Constitutional Revolution, she emerged as a pioneering female voice on the public stage. Born circa 1815 to a religious Muslim family, she later became one of the earliest adherents to the Babi⁶² movement. She has been described as the most documented Iranian woman of her era, yet also as an enigma, about whom it is difficult to separate fact from fantastical fiction. What was it that made Qurrat al-'Ayn such a potent source of controversy? Was it her gender, her voice, or her religious convictions? What insight can a study of her life and death provide to understanding the dynamics of the woman's voice in Iran?

Although Qurrat al-'Ayn's life and career covered ground in a variety of areas, her story is often epitomized by a single event: her public unveiling during a speech in 1848.⁶³ This act, according to Milani, gave "body to her voice and voice to her body."⁶⁴ Her unveiling was thus the physical culmination of her

⁶² Babism was a messianic movement within Shia Islam in mid-nineteenth century Iran, led by Sayyed 'Alī-Mohammad Shirazi, also known as the Bāb or Babullah. It eventually broke with Islam and evolved as Bahá'ism, which today constitutes the largest religious minority among Iranians.

⁶³ Derayeh, Minoo. *Gender Equality in Iranian History: From Pre-Islamic Times to the Present*. (Edwin Mellen: 2006), 105.

⁶⁴ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 58.

public vocal transgressions, both literary and oratory, in which she denounced the customs of her time such as polygamy and veiling. Her oral recitations of her own poetry also "gave body" to her literary voice, where she broke codes of silence for women in what was also a male-dominated art. Qurrat al-'Ayn was aware of the subversive power she held as a woman, and alluded to it in her poetry:

Should I unveil my scented hair
I'll captivate every gazelle
Should I line my narcissus eyes
I'll destroy the whole world with desire⁶⁵

The above excerpt demonstrates the physicality of her literary voice, which when combined with her physical presence, made her all the more exemplary. Further, she was described as a magnetic personality, a woman of great beauty and charisma who attracted audiences wherever she went.⁶⁶ Her persuasive power won her many converts to the new Babi faith, and her voice and presence was reported to be so captivating that it could be preferred to music. Baha'ullah recounts her performance in a wedding in his *Memorials of the Faithful*:

A splendid wedding it was, with instrumental music and vocal melodies—by day and by night the lute, the bells and songs. Then Tahirih began to speak; and so bewitched were the great ladies that they forsook the cistern and the drum and all the pleasures of the wedding feast, to crowd about Tahirih and listen to the sweet words of her mouth.⁶⁷

Qurrat al-'Ayn's voice, made more bodily through her public performance, allowed her to be her own interpreter, writes

⁶⁵ Qtd. in Derayeh, "Gender Equality in Iranian History," 105.

⁶⁶ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 95.

⁶⁷ qtd. in Milani *Veils and Words*, 96.

Milani. Further, "She defined the speaking subject as female and authorized for herself a public life."⁶⁸ The price for her transgressions, however, was her life. In 1852, she was executed by strangulation amid a wave of assassinations of Babis. Milani points out that Qurrat al-'Ayn's execution is notable in two ways: the method (strangulation) was unlike other executions of her day, and the Persian terminology for the method (*khafih kardan*) coincidentally also conveys silencing.⁶⁹ "Her voice was silenced because she shouldn't have spoken in the first place," writes Milani. "Her body was hidden because she shouldn't have unveiled it."⁷⁰

Qurrat al-'Ayn's life and death cannot be studied without political and religious context. The Babi movement to which she belonged was perhaps just as subversive as her voice. Babism was established in Shiraz in 1844 as a messianic movement that urged a transformation of Iranian society, which at the time was governed by Twelver Shiism and the corrupt Qajar dynasty. The teachings of its founder, Babullah, called for widespread changes in Iranian infrastructure and society. National and religious laws were to be abrogated. A new calendar was to be used, one that began on the pre-Islamic New Year rather than on the Islamic month of Muharram. Babullah advocated for postal and coinage systems, and the obligatory discharge of debts. Such changes were perceived to threaten the fabric of Iranian proto-national

⁶⁸ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 94.

⁶⁹ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 90.

⁷⁰ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 90.

identity.⁷¹ Moreover, the egalitarianism espoused by Babi teachings was made shockingly apparent by Qurrat al-'Ayn's public voice. At the time, an increasing amount of attention was being paid to European examples of modernization, including in the public role of women. While some modernists advocated unveiling and saw liberation in the European example, others "saw the threat of European influence on Iran as directly connected to the sexual debauchery of European women. Their increased influence was measured by the secularization of Iranian Shiite society."⁷²

Mottahedeh argues that Qurrat al-'Ayn's unveiling was a visual reminder of European encroachment, and the fantastical tales told of her reflect the anxieties of Iranian society struggling to grasp and define their culture. In essence, Qurrat al-'Ayn became a symbolic threat to Iranian nation-building that was doubly meaningful: as a woman and as a Babi. Her public unveiling served as the visual culmination of the various points of her subversion; her sexuality became the immediate threat to the public order. Mottahedeh notes that tales of her life coincided with a period of boundary change in Iran. As a result, chroniclers of the time period depict the Babi as an encroachment upon the fantasy of the nation: "Regions are conquered by the daring and able princes. National boundaries are agreed upon in Baghdad. The scene of Qurrat al-'Ayn Tahirah's [sic] unveiling follows with death at its heel. It is as if the nation is being

⁷¹ Mottahedeh, Negar. "The Mutilated Body of the Modern Nation: Qurrat al-'Ayn Tahirah's Unveiling and the Iranian Massacre of the Babis," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 18.2 (1998): 43.

⁷² Mottahedeh, "Mutilated Body of the Modern Nation," 39.

devoured by the excesses of Qurrat al-'Ayn's pleasure chamber.'" ⁷³ Her death thus symbolized a momentary quashing of the reform movement, which threatened the national character of Iran. It is necessary to note, however, that the existence of nationalism at the time of Qurrat al-'Ayn is debatable. Most scholars point to the 1906 Constitutional Revolution as the event that birthed Iranian nationalism, over half a century after her death. Whether she was a symbol in formulating some kind of proto-nationalism or not, the issues surrounding her life and legacy are interpreted at present to reflect issues of national identity and its relation to gender and voice. Subjects such as women's public voice and unveiling, as well as the notion of state-sponsored religion, are still very much a part of nation-building discourses in Iran. Moreover, they reflect at base level a form of collective identity and tradition, concepts that lie at the heart of nationalism.

The various forces of voice, gender and religion coalesced to emblemize Qurrat al-'Ayn and to make her an issue of controversy. Moreover, her charisma also played a role in igniting the imaginations of her contemporary critics. In fact, there is so much mythology associated with her name that it is now difficult to separate fact from fiction, writes Milani. One such story comes from Sipih, the Qajar court chronicler, who wrote of her:

She would decorate her assembly room like a bridal chamber and her body like a Peacock of Paradise...She would tell them: 'Whoever touches me, the intensity of Hell's fire would not

⁷³ Mottahedeh, "Mutilated Body of the Modern Nation," 44.

affect him.' The audience would then rise and come to her throne and kiss those lips of hers which put to shame the ruby of Ramman, and rub their faces against her breasts, which chagrined the pomegranates of the garden.⁷⁴

As implied in Sipihr's account, Qurrat al-'Ayn's voice was made inseparable from her body, not only in its intrinsic nature, but by what it was saying. Eyewitness accounts mention that "an Isfahani zealot" was so shocked by her unveiling that he slit his own throat at the sight of her.⁷⁵ These wild stories, while difficult to verify, suggest the power inherent in her voice. Her death, then, did not succeed in silencing her; her legend lives on and she continues to be a frequent topic in discussions of Iranian women's rights. Just by using her individual voice, Qurrat al-'Ayn was able to captivate and even subjugate her audiences.

Music and the Building of a Modern Nation

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw an evolution in Iranian music and in its place in society, directly impacted by the concurrent advent of modernity. The Iranian age of modernism coincided with an increase in European influence and consciousness in many aspects of society, including music. Chehabi argues that early music reformers sought to adapt Iranian music to European models with "the twin motivations of nation-building and becoming a 'civilized' nation worthy of being

⁷⁴ Mottahedeh, "Mutilated Body of the Modern Nation," 43.

⁷⁵ Mottahedeh, "Mutilated Body of the Modern Nation," 43.

accepted as an equal by the Europeans.”⁷⁶ In the early twentieth century, Iranian composer Ghulam-Husayn Minbashian echoed this sentiment of framing music as a symbol of national progress: “Every unbiased person who knows scientific music will agree that just as the camel cannot compete with railways, so the *tār*, *tunbak*, and *karānchi h* (Iranian instruments) cannot equal European music.”⁷⁷ The influx of European influence in Iranian music brought about several developments: the first formal school of music was established, Western songs and instruments were popularized, Iranian music was transcribed into Western notation, and the first books on Western music were published in Persian.⁷⁸ The primary sites for this musical evolution were in schools and the military, from which music developed into a more public art. European influence in music has been sited as a pivotal point in musical development in other contexts, as well. In Azerbaijan, for example, women musicians were virtually absent from public spheres until the last century, during which European-modeled musical education was implemented, among other social changes.⁷⁹ In Iran, too, the advent of European-style music education in the late nineteenth century revolutionized the character of music as performance art: Not only did music begin to be used in formal contexts such as the military, but musicians began to blend Iranian music and poetry with European instruments and notation. Further, one of the pioneers of music education, ‘Ali Naqi

⁷⁶ Chehabi, H.E. “From Revolutionary Tasnif to Patriotic Surud: Music and Nation-Building in Pre World War II Iran,” *British Institute of Persian Studies* 37 (1999), 150.

⁷⁷ Qtd. in Chehabi, “Music and Nation-Building,” 149.

⁷⁸ Khoshzamid, “Ali Naqi Vaziri and his Influence on Music Education in Iran” (PhD diss., University of Illinois-Champaign, 1979), 44.

⁷⁹ Naroditskaya, Inna. “Azerbaijani Female Musicians: Women’s Voices Defying and Defining the Culture,” *Ethnomusicology* 44. 2 (2000): 235.

Vaziri, opened the very first music school exclusively for girls.⁸⁰ Vaziri used European-based contexts and details of formality (from musicians' presentation to musical environment) to attempt to raise the estimation of music in the public eye. His efforts to educate women were met with controversy, but he undoubtedly paved the way for the prominent women performers of the latter half of the twentieth century.

Music entered the Iranian education system in the nineteenth century. The first schools to include music in their curriculums were the French-language institution Dar al-Fonun and various missionary schools. Owing to the European character of the schools, musical training followed the Western model. Further, the reign of Nasir-ed-Din Shah (r. 1848-1896) brought significant developments to music education. Interestingly, he was the same monarch to order the execution of Qurrat al-'Ayn, illustrating that women's voice and musical space had yet to coalesce. His plans to model the Persian military according to European standards entailed the implementation of military marching bands. According to Khoshzamid, "Nasir-ed-Din Shah was very interested in marching bands and wanted the school of music not only to be more active but also to expand the quantity and quality of musicians in military bands."⁸¹ He hired several musicians from Europe to aid in the music department of Dar al-Fonun, and soon music became a full-fledged part of the curriculum. It is important to note, however, that music was to be studied for strictly military purposes—all students were expected to become

⁸⁰ Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 157.

⁸¹ Khoshzamid, "Ali Naqi Vaziri," 37.

members of the army's band. Exceptions were made for musical entertainers of the royal court, who could attend courses at Dar al-Fonun for practice and study.

The first major break from the military music mold came in 1886, when the first Imperial Orchestra was established by the musical head of Dar al-Fonun, French-born Alfred Jean Baptiste Lemaire. "In addition to playing every evening in the royal courtyard," explains Khoshzamid, "the orchestra played at ceremonies marking special occasions such as levees held by the Shah, especially during the feasts; the departure of the Shah on an outing; court ceremonies such as the arrival of a new ambassador; passion plays (*ta'zīyih*); and wedding ceremonies."⁸² Thus gradually, music started to permeate non-military contexts. By the end of the nineteenth century, writes Chehabi, music was associated with five specific settings: the military, the royal court, Sufism, *ta'zīyih* plays and lamentation, and in *zūrkhānih* traditional gymnasiums.⁸³ While the expansion of music into the public sphere was met with clerical disapproval, musical modernists tried to emphasize music's national character in an effort to gain support. Music was thus framed as a tool of nation-building, an idea which fully came to fruition during the Constitutional Revolution of 1906.

The constitutionalist era resulted in the creation of overtly political and nationalist songs, immediately in the form of *taṣnīf* ballads and later with the patriotic hymns known as

⁸² Khoshzamid, "Ali Naqi Vaziri," 40.

⁸³ Chehabi, "Music and Nation-Building," 143.

surūd.⁸⁴ The composer Abu al-Qasim 'Arif Qazvini (c. 1882-1934) was one of the pioneers of politicizing *taṣnīf*, a category of Iranian music that uses folk poetry and classical *radf*.⁸⁵ 'Arif's songs helped to mobilize supporters of constitutionalism by building solidarity and national pride. His lyrics aided in the creation of a firm sense of *vaṭan* (homeland), often following nationalist conventions of addressing the homeland as the beloved. 'Arif explained, "When I started composing national [*milī*] songs, not even one among 10,000 Iranians knew what the word *vaṭan* meant: they thought *vaṭan* was the village or the town where they had been born."⁸⁶ His revolutionary *taṣnīf* songs created a pan-regional concept of *vaṭan*, thus helping to lay the groundwork for Iranian nationalism, which at the time was still in its infancy. In the years following the Constitutional Revolution, nationalist music took on another form: the *surūd*. Like the *taṣnīf*, the *surūd* was an old tradition that was reshaped to suit the political climate of the early twentieth century. It originally denoted both religious and profane hymns of pre-Islamic times, and later was applied to the Protestant hymns introduced by missionaries in the nineteenth century.⁸⁷ When the *surūd* took on a nationalist tone—amid modernization—the result was uniquely eclectic: "The tempo and rhythm of the *surūds* were those of a march, the melodies were in Western keys (although traces of the *radf* could at times be found), and the lyrics

⁸⁴ *Tasnif*, sometimes translated as "ballad," is a vocal style of music with melodies based on the collection of traditional melodies known as *radif*. Lyrics often consist of folk poetry. *Surud* likely began as a subtype of *tasnif*, but evolved into a distinct musical style. During the constitutional era, *surud* songs typically used European melodies with traces from the traditional *radif*.

⁸⁶ Chehabi, "Music and Nation-Building," 145.

⁸⁷ Chehabi, "Music and Nation-Building," 146.

expressed pride in one's country, province, school, vocation, and love of one's national history, flag, land, and the monarchy."⁸⁸ Thus, while the *taṣnīf* genre was generally anti-status quo, the *surūd* was employed to create a nationalism that upheld the platforms of the subsequent regime, namely secularism:

Our country is Iran
Its kings are Cyrus and Darius
O homeland, love of you is my way
Love of you is my faith and my religion.⁸⁹

Surūd songs were taught in schools and widely disseminated in an effort to glorify the present state of Iran and support the monarchy. The creation of the *taṣnīf* and *surūd* genres thus exemplifies the mutually beneficial relationship between music and nationalism: on the one hand, music helped to foment budding national consciousness in Iran; and on the other hand, the use of nationalist themes helped to raise the status of music as an acceptable public art form. Music's space was thus national space. Although women were integral in nationalist discourse, their role in music was still publicly absent.

'Ali Naqi Vaziri and the Emergence of Women Musicians

While Iran's path towards modernization encouraged the use of the arts towards nationalistic ends, musicians still occupied a precarious position of social acceptability. Iranian women, too, faced uncertainty in regard to their societal role amid the changes posed by modernism. The composer 'Ali Naqi Vaziri married music and women's rights with his founding of the first music

⁸⁸ Chehabi, "Music and Nation-Building," 147.

⁸⁹ Chehabi, "Music and Nation-Building," 148.

school for women in 1925. He did not limit his efforts to women musicians—he also was the first Iranian to encourage society's embracing of the arts and music irrespective of gender. Vaziri came from a family where military, music and feminism combined to shape his unique upbringing. His father, Mussa Khan Mirpanj, was an army officer, and his mother, Bibi Khanom Astarabadi, was a musician and one of Iran's earliest feminists. Astarabadi's own career reflected her sons': she herself played the *tunbak*, and she established the second-ever girls' school in Iran, the *Madrisih-yi Dushizigan*.⁹⁰ Vaziri's musical upbringing came into play when he became a soldier—he paid special attention to military bands and learned from their Western traits and notation. He eventually left the military to pursue a career in music and music education. Vaziri's goal was to increase the accessibility of music to the masses. In addition to his schools and musical troupes, he set up two music clubs (one for men and one for women) to foster community involvement in music. These clubs, called "Club Musical," presented a public space open to anyone able to pay the monthly fee of two *tūmāns*.

Vaziri's forays into creating a space for women musicians were ultimately telling of the social and cultural undercurrents behind the mistrust of music. The government agreed to his request for funding the school on the conditions that his students be only "educated and respectable women from good families," and that the classes were to be held in private and

⁹⁰ Khoshzamid, "Ali Naqi Vaziri," 51.

concealed from the public eye.⁹¹ Fifteen women enrolled in his first music course, all from families with personal connections to Vaziri. Efforts were made to ensure that no male music students were to be present at the time of the women's class. If a male student needed to use the premises for extra practice or study, he would be accommodated in a separate room, out of sight of the women.⁹²

The boundaries of private space became clearer throughout the course of Vaziri's efforts—in most cases, this entailed gender segregation. His concerts at the American School in Teheran in 1929 were attended by mixed-gender audiences, but with separate men's and women's seating sections. The concerts he organized specially for women (as part of his *Club Musical*) were attended by all-female audiences who were required to cover their bodies and faces. Any men in the musical ensembles were prohibited from looking into the audience. Moreover, there were separate entrances and exits for musicians and audience members.⁹³ His concerts, though providing an artistic outlet for women, illustrated the rigidly enforced boundaries encircling the act of musical performance. The implications denote the sexual potential of music, which when paired with women, creates an atmosphere ripe for social transgression. His all-women's concerts did not last long; they were swiftly cancelled due to public outrage.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 157.

⁹² Khoshzamid, "Ali Naqi Vaziri," 114.

⁹³ Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 157.

⁹⁴ Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 157.

Despite the cancellation of his all-women's concerts, Vaziri was able to break certain boundaries in regard to women's specific musical roles. For example, Vaziri's women's concerts included solo instrumentals from women. Such concerts used a mixed-gender orchestra, which included two women: violinist Shamsi Sotudeh and Badri Vaziri on the *tār*. Both women performed solos on their instruments. "During the concert," writes Khoshzamid, "Badri Vaziri played a solo in the *dastagh*⁹⁵ of Chahargah, and Shamsi Sotudeh performed a violin solo in Dashti."⁹⁶ Vaziri also made progress for women singers through his efforts to find a female singer to accompany his orchestra. One of his students connected him to the singer Ruhangiz, whom Vaziri eventually took on and trained as part of his ensemble. After training for a few months, Ruhangiz was able to perform with Vaziri's troupe.⁹⁷ She eventually went on to become one of the most famous singers in Iranian history.

Vaziri held a tolerant and celebratory view of musical expression; he saw singing as a natural method of emotional expression that evolved out of the imitation of birds. He posited that music had a mutually beneficial relationship with society: music helps to develop and enrich society, while societal conditions affect music's evolution. Music, according to him, was an art that permeated all kinds of traditions in human society from primitive times. The art was thus an important part of human culture, and its repression went against history and even human

⁹⁵ *Dastagh*: One of twelve categories of Iranian classical music. Each *dastagh* has a distinct scale, motif, and character. Related to *maqām* of Arabic music and *raga* in Indian music.

⁹⁶ Khoshzamid, "Ali Naqi Vaziri," 116.

⁹⁷ Khoshzamid, "Ali Naqi Vaziri," 117.

nature. However, Vaziri's views on music did echo the prevalent perception that music has deep and powerful power over the spirit of humans. This power could be positive or negative: Vaziri believed that music has the potential to be moral and artistic as well as the potential to be sensual and satanic.⁹⁸ Khoshzamid traces the dualism of this view to Zoroastrianism, which preaches the dualism of the world. Music can thus fall into either opposing categories. He believed in the teaching and proliferation of artistically sound music, yet warned against the powers of spiritually harmful music, which "can lead the society into immorality and destruction."⁹⁹ As such, Vaziri used moralist poems from poets like Sa'adi in his personal method of music education. "Vaziri's choice of poems demonstrates that he, like the poets, considers the knowledge of good things a source of pleasure and delight to the soul and to the body: good music brings happiness to the people."¹⁰⁰

The concept of musical space also provided a pioneering front for Vaziri. Until his time, music was largely relegated to private spaces: in homes for private parties, and in the courts of nobility. He believed that music must become public, and that audiences should listen to music in musicians' own spaces. For this reason, he did not encourage his students to perform in private parties. Instead, he set up performances as part of his "Club Musical" initiative. "If people were really music lovers," thought Vaziri, "they should go where the musicians

⁹⁸ Khoshzamid, "Ali Naqi Vaziri," 82.

⁹⁹ Khoshzamid, "Ali Naqi Vaziri," 84.

¹⁰⁰ Khoshzamid, "Ali Naqi Vaziri," 82.

were in order to hear their music." The motive was thus to popularize music and make it more accessible to all classes and groups of people. Further, Vaziri believed that music should not merely provide background noise for events or gatherings; music should have its own forum and should be fully appreciated as an art. Moreover, Vaziri taught his students to make their musical presentation more formal. He advised students to always use a chair or stand when practicing music, rather than sit on the floor. He also arranged his orchestras to emulate those of symphonies, with music stands and proper positioning. All of his musicians were turned out in formal suits and neckties, clean-shaven and neat.¹⁰¹ These actions and views confronted the longstanding conventions of musical space and character. Vaziri's aim was thus to elevate the status of music in society in two ways: by creating a special physical space for music, and by changing societal attitudes on the art itself.

Vaziri's role in revolutionizing music influenced one of the greatest female Iranian singers of the twentieth century, Qamar al-Moluk Vazirizadih, who took his name as part of her own out of reverence. Vazirizadih was born circa 1905, orphaned at an early age and raised by her grandmother, who introduced her to singing and public performance by way of Qur'anic recitation. From her beginnings in "religious sound art," as described by Chehabi, Vazirizadih went on to develop her voice under the training of the composer Morteza Naydavud. As her mentor, Naydavud "took her under his wing," training her in Iranian music and vocal

¹⁰¹ Khoshzamid, "Ali Naqi Vaziri," 121.

techniques.¹⁰² Vazirizadih became one of the pioneers in women's public musical performance in 1924, when she gave her first public concert at the Grand Hôtel in Tehran. Her performance broke with Iranian tradition, which had set no precedent for women's public musical performance. Moreover, Vazirizadih's performance also made waves because she went unveiled, and effectively had "torn apart both the visual and the acoustic veil."¹⁰³ After this initial performance, she went on to perform in concerts and cafes around the country. However, while her concerts were successful, she nevertheless was subjected to death threats and controversy. Her music also found opposition from the State, at times; her recordings of the Constitutional Revolution-era "March of the Republic" were confiscated under the rule of Riza Khan "after the republican fever was over."¹⁰⁴ This action was an early example of music censorship for nation-building purposes, and Vazirizadih's gender made her an even more visible agent of transgression.

Despite Vazirizadih's confrontations with the shah and other objecting members of society, she nevertheless became a famous and revered singer. Chehabi argues that she was a paradigm of early Iranian women's emancipation: "she performed without the veil a decade before Riza Shah banned the veil; she associated with politically progressive literati and called many men her friends; and she traveled around the country in the company of a Jewish musician [Naydavud] at a time when many Iranian Muslims

¹⁰² Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 159.

¹⁰³ Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 159.

¹⁰⁴ Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 160.

considered non-Muslims to be *najis* (ritually impure).''¹⁰⁵ Moreover, Vazirizadih was deeply involved with charity, donating much of her fortune to charitable causes. She died in 1959 in ``genteel poverty''¹⁰⁶ after giving away most of her earnings. Chehabi argues that Vazirizadih's charitable work is what raised her estimation in society, in keeping with the cases of historical court performers and her contemporary female singers such as Mahvash. Vazirizadih and her contemporaries thus lived up to the expectations of the ideal *lūfī*,¹⁰⁷ who in addition to performing music, ``is generous, ever helpful to his friends, down-to-earth, unimpressed by status distinctions, and supports widows and orphans when he can.'' Thus this pioneering woman singer was able to achieve her status by adhering to dominant social expectations while transgressing spatial norms through her career.

Forough Farrokhzad

While the first popular female music stars emerged in the mid-twentieth century, another woman's voice broke new ground in literature. That woman was Forough Farrokhzad (1935-1967), the most famous Iranian woman poet of all time and one of the foremost Iranian poets (of either gender) in the last century. Decades before Farrokhzad, Iranian women poets had become more and more eminent, each helping to create new spaces for their

¹⁰⁵ Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 160.

¹⁰⁶ Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 160.

¹⁰⁷ *Lūfī* is a Persian term, usually derogatory, used in its most general sense to denote a person of lower class and loose morals. Historically, the term primarily referred to dervishes and musical entertainers, who were often perceived to be involved in drug and alcohol use, pederasty, and dishonesty in monetary matters. In the nineteenth century, *lūfī* began to refer to bandits and thugs who challenged corrupt local rulers and espoused populism. The label as it has been bestowed upon performers such as Mahvash and Vazirizadih likely draws upon this later connotation.

voices. Farrokhzad, however, is a special case because of her immense popularity, the physicality of her poetic voice, and the controversy surrounding her life. Her verse is uncensored in its descriptions of love and sexuality, her narration is intensely personal, and her oral recitations—like Qurrat al-‘Ayn—gave literal body to her voice.

The poetry of Farrokhzad is characterized by its irreverence and honesty. Her male characters are nuanced, her voice is clear and honest, and her subject matter is often of a sensual nature. In her poem, “I Sinned,” she exclaims,

Beside a body, tremulous and dazed
I sinned, I voluptuously sinned.
O God! How could I know what I did
in that dark retreat of silence?¹⁰⁸

The poem violates norms of privacy and sexuality for women in a social context in which the public discussion of sexuality was taboo. Further, according to Milani, Farrokhzad’s persistent use of the first person singular “further dramatizes her own desire.”¹⁰⁹ This voice, then, is not only subversive, but it is unequivocally hers. It is loud, shocking, and impossible to ignore. Farrokhzad’s poetry, in this way, is the literary equivalent of screaming at the top of one’s lungs. The emotionality of her poetry can be described, in her own words, as “iron-strong, hot, and avenging.”¹¹⁰ On Farrokhzad’s unbridled forays into the personal and emotional sphere, Milani writes, “She laughs and cries in public and shares her many pains and

¹⁰⁸ Qtd. in Milani, *Veils and Words*, 143.

¹⁰⁹ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 145.

¹¹⁰ Qtd. in Milani, *Veils and Words*, 143.

pleasures with total strangers—her readers.”¹¹¹ This public effusiveness made Farrokhzad a literary rebel; not only did she break codes of silence by writing, but the sheer emotionality of her work raised the volume of her voice by making it even more subversive.

Farrokhzad’s poetic voice has been called autobiographical and confessional. But why was the autobiographical tone of her poetry notable? After all, lyrical poetry is often autobiographical.¹¹² It can be surmised that for Farrokhzad, the perception of an autobiographical factor only made her transgressions all the more controversial: not only did she openly discuss matters of love and sexuality, but the idea that they reflected the realities of her life was more than society could handle. As such, “Farrokhzad the poet has more often been called Farrokhzad the individualist, Farrokhzad the kept woman, Farrokhzad the whore.”¹¹³ Her reputation was accordingly clouded. In magazines, she was depicted as a naked, scandalous woman: the accompanying artwork for two early reviews of her poetry featured a nude female torso and an image of Brigitte Bardot, respectively.¹¹⁴ Of course, Farrokhzad’s “nudity” was not physical; it was vocal. Moreover, the details of her personal life helped to foment controversy. As a young woman, she left her marriage after three years, ultimately losing custody and visiting rights to her only child. Shortly after, she suffered a

¹¹¹ Milani, *Veils and Words*, 137.

¹¹² Weintraub, qtd. in Hillmann, Michael Craig. “An Autobiographical Voice: Forough Farrokhzad,” in *Women’s Autobiographies in Contemporary Iran*, ed. Afsaneh Najmabadi (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 44.

¹¹³ Hillmann, “Autobiographical Voice,” 51.

¹¹⁴ Hillmann, “Autobiographical Voice,” 51-52.

nervous breakdown and was admitted to a psychiatric hospital. These incidents in her short life made her an unconventional woman from the start; her poetry vocalized her transgressions.

In the early 1960s, she extended her artistic interest to film, and in 1962 released her internationally acclaimed documentary, *The House is Black*. The film depicts a leper's colony in Iran, and is interspersed with Farrokhzad's own vocal narration, dipping in and out of poetic verse. *The House is Black* thus features Farrokhzad's oral performative voice, as did her other poetic recitations. Her poetry is thus inseparable from vocal performance; not only is Farrokhzad's literary voice subversive, but it is made physical, aloud, and therefore bodily through performance. The performative aspect of her voice increased its volume, thus making its transgressions impossible to ignore. It is not coincidental that criticisms of Farrokhzad referred to physical nudity—if the voice is inextricably bound to the body, her performative and poetic use of the voice made it exponentially so.

Farrokhzad died in a car accident 1967 at the age of 32, cutting her prolific life short. Her legacy, however, lives on, as did that of Qurrat al-'Ayn. Both women were poets who dabbled in oral performance; both women were criticized for their unconventional life choices; and both women met untimely deaths. While today's Iran bears little resemblance to the Iran of Farrokhzad's time, her exercises in performing the female voice are still applicable to contemporary Iranian voices.

Westernization and Revolution

The religious clergy's marginalized public role during the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-1979) gave women musicians more opportunities and freedom, argues Chehabi.¹¹⁵ Yet despite the expanding roles for musicians, the longstanding stigma remained. There still was much speculation about the nature of respectable women engaging in public musical performance, even while Iran's first major female songstresses emerged. During the rapid modernization of the Pahlavi dynasty, European culture was emulated in many aspects of social and cultural life, including music. The first-ever major Iranian women popular singers appeared, singing Persian songs that were influenced by Western trends in popular music. In fact, Western-style pop music (sung by Iranian stars such as Googoosh, Dariush, and Ebi) made up the majority of the music played by national radio and television programs.¹¹⁶ This new pop music drew from Iranian folk and classical music while incorporating Western instruments like the keyboard and the electric guitar. Further, the voice became central, as all pop stars were singers.

Googoosh emerged as the foremost female voice of the twentieth century, a superstar of unprecedented proportions. She was born Fa'iqih Atashin in 1951 and was brought up by her father after her parents' divorce. Her father was an entertainer himself and encouraged her to enter show business at an early age; she was publicly discovered at a café at the age of three, and

¹¹⁵ Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 158.

¹¹⁶ Youssefzadeh, Ameneh. "The Situation of Music in Iran since the Revolution: The Role of Official Organizations," *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 9.2 (2000): 36.

embarked on her singing and acting career shortly thereafter. Googoosh's early entrance into the music business endeared audiences to her as she grew up in the public eye. Her motherless upbringing (drawing parallels to her predecessors Qamar and Mahvash) drew pity from the public, who came to view her as a daughter figure. In fact, her position as a national daughter was brought to the forefront in Farhad Zamani's 2000 documentary, *Googoosh: Iran's Daughter*. According to Chehabi, "Few artists embodied the cosmopolitan spirit of [1970s] revolutionary Iran as much as Gugush [*sic*]." ¹¹⁷ Yet alongside her emblematic role in Iranian culture, her music denoted an international sophistication. She blended Eastern and Western musical influences, and sang in her native Persian and Azeri in addition to French, English, Italian and Arabic. Her vocal style reflected the customarily Iranian trilling and expressiveness along with the smoother tones of Western singers, denoting an "imaginative, smooth blending [that] paralleled the fusion to which many young Iranian aspired in their personal lives and styles." ¹¹⁸ Breyley writes, "her association with what was seen as western sophistication enabled her, to an extent, to escape the somewhat disreputable image that had attached itself to many of the female singers who went before her." ¹¹⁹ Further, she was able to bridge the gap between Pahlavi loyalists and the increasing crowds of revolutionaries; while she was embraced by the powers-that-be, critics of the regime widely interpreted the lyrics of her later

¹¹⁷ Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 163.

¹¹⁸ Breyley, Gay. "Hope, Fear and Dance Dance Dance: Popular Music in 1960s Iran," *Musicology Australia* 32.2 (2010): 210.

¹¹⁹ Breyley, "Hope, Fear," 218.

songs as anti-shah. After 1979, Googoosh decided not to emigrate and put an end to her performing career in Iran.

In short, “revolutionaries did not like pop music,” writes Chehabi.¹²⁰ While this reading is simplistic, it is certain that the more conservative strains of revolutionary ideology—the same strains that ultimately prevailed—were wary of music’s public role in Iranian society. For some Iranians, pop music and women’s dress were symbols of the excesses and failures of westernization. The anti-westernization discourse eventually permeated secular groups of revolutionaries, such as intellectuals like ‘Ali Shariati, who decried what they believed was a blind imitation of the West, and much of their focus was on women. Women who wore makeup and lived materialistic lifestyles were labeled *gharbzādiḥ*,¹²¹ the products of Pahlavi’s “colonized culture.” When the new Islamic Republic was instituted in 1979, the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini led the nation in a cultural revolution that preached Shi’i Islam as key components of the new state. Iran’s new direction featured the creation of an oppositional identity—one in which the new character of the Iranian state and its people would be defined against Western imperialism. According to the state, imperialist hegemony included popular music. As such, pop music (shorthand for Western-style music) was banned, as was all Western-imported music. The resulting atmosphere was one of strict cultural

¹²⁰ Chehabi, “Voices Unveiled,” 163.

¹²¹ *Gharbzādiḥ* (literally “born of the west,” also translated as “west-struck,” “westoxified,” or “occidentosis”) is a term popularized by Iranian academic Jalal Al-i Ahmad in his book of the same name, published in 1962. The term is often used as a pejorative, and was coined out of criticism of westernization and imperialism. It is often directed towards women who were perceived to embody the social ills of the Pahlavi regime, and was adopted by both secular and religious revolutionaries in the years leading up to 1979.

regulation that continues today. Various government bodies control legal cultural output based largely on notions of cultural purity, and women remain the focal point of this discourse.

In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, when the new Khomeini-led state underwent a deliberate cultural reconstruction, musical performance was more restricted than it is today. Khomeini was unequivocal in his mistrust for music, and believed it could lead to the corruption of the nation. In 1979, he decreed:

Music is like a drug, whoever acquires the habit can no longer devote himself to important activities. It changes people to the point of yielding to vice or preoccupations pertaining to the world of music alone. We must eliminate music because it means betraying our country and our youth. We must completely eliminate it.¹²²

As such, all types of music were promptly banned with the exception of military march music and patriotic songs and hymns. Both genres had clear nation-building implications, and thus both of these spared genres were broadcast in abundance by state radio and television. During the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-88, the prevalence of patriotic and military songs was compounded. Amid the mass violence, other types of music and entertainment were criticized for being disrespectful and inappropriate. Music was thus heavily entwined with state politics, and had the very clear and specific goal of solidifying the nation under the new regime.

Over time, restrictions on music have loosened. In 1989, Khomeini issued a fatwa declaring the authorization of the sale

¹²² Qtd. in Youssefzadeh, "Situation of Music," 38.

and purchase of musical instruments.¹²³ "Little by little," writes Youssefzadeh, "some concerts were authorized, albeit under certain restrictions: thus there was a ban against sensually arousing rhythms, as well as women's voices in the presence of a male audience."¹²⁴ The first genres to achieve permissibility were traditional and folk songs, which fell in line with the cultural purity polemic as well as the perceived acceptability of instrumental songs over vocals. After Mohammad Khatami was elected President in 1997, the government took a turn towards social reform that included a "cultural thaw" for many of the restrictions and regulations on artistic production, as well as women's public roles. Pop music was officially legalized in the first year of his presidency, and the government launched the first-ever women's music festival. While these changes shifted the boundaries of acceptability to a certain extent, the dominant state-led discourse on women musicians still largely operated on the foundations led by Khomeini. Perusing many Iran-based music websites still yields little to no information on women musicians. On the website *Iran Music News Database*, one of the only mentions of women musicians is an article titled "Women Themselves are to Blame." In the article, Pari Maleki, the female leader of a traditional music band, Khonya, criticizes women who refuse to abide by government regulations that ban women from singing solo "out of continuous selfishness and egotism."¹²⁵ Another article on the *Ravayat* news website

¹²³ Youssefzadeh, "Situation of Music," 39.

¹²⁴ Youssefzadeh, "Situation of Music," 39.

¹²⁵ "Women Themselves Are to Blame," *Khonya Official Website*, Accessed April 1 2012, http://www.khonya.com/interview_int_en.asp?

criticizes two women singers who publicly complained about their inability to appear officially on film or in photographs: "The bold mention of these words is indeed the result of years of negligence by the country's cultural authorities against the enemy's cultural invasions."¹²⁶ The article further lambastes the government's permission of "some problematic women's concerts" in which dancing was present.

These arguments must not be taken as representative of perceptions of women musicians among the general public; however they reflect the contentious position women musicians still occupy in official circles. In response to this contention, the state has delineated certain spaces of propriety for women musicians. These spaces reflect common themes of nationalism, religion and cultural tradition. They exemplify the reorganization of art and public space to accommodate both state rhetoric and the realities of social life, which has proven to be ungovernable in some respects. In order to understand the current nature of state-imposed acceptable spaces, it is necessary to analyze the conventional spatial politics of women's music and voice; these include domestic space, weddings and religious lamentations, all of which are related to women's national roles. Present-day reconstructions of acceptable space are largely drawn from these spheres of feminine musical propriety.

eid=234.

¹²⁶ "When women singers claim 'Why aren't our photos and voices released?' (translation)" *Ravayat*, 2 August 2011, <http://ravayat.ir/print.php?d=sn&id=13675>.

CHAPTER III

NEGOTIATING WOMEN'S PERFORMATIVE SPACE TODAY

The current state of music in Iran reflects its nature as a dual society, in which there exists a stark chasm between the state narrative and the actualities of social life. Women are banned from public performance yet are still performing. Genres like rap and heavy metal are illegal yet thrive in the underground music scene. When Western music was officially banned in the early years of the Islamic Republic, it thrived in the black market. The Islamic Republic's heavy-handed regulation on artistic production (in which it carefully delineates the permissible from the unacceptable) has little bearing on the actual pulse of urban life. The post-revolutionary ban on women's public performance does not diminish women's presence in music; rather, it has strengthened and defined the notion of "women's music" as a category of marginalized performance with inherent subversive power. As such, women musicians have for the most part moved to the underground, along with the immensely popular rappers and rock bands that are unable to obtain government permission to perform.

At surface level, there are two kinds of women musicians in Iran: those with government permission and those without. This apparent dichotomy carries over to music in general, for which

there is a government-imposed dividing line between mainstream and underground. In regulating musical output, the Iranian government has essentially binarized music: legal music is framed as authentically Iranian and in line with the ideological narrative of the state; underground genres such as rap and rock, and music featuring women soloists, are ultimately cast as counterrevolutionary for subverting the state's constructed cultural ideals. The actuality of contemporary Iranian music is not as simple, however. The recent blossoming of underground music culture has subverted the state by deconstructing binary classifications of music, deterritorializing space, and forging new forms of musical nationalism. Women musicians, as subversive performers, embody this breakdown of national space to a greater effect than their male counterparts. The assertion of "national space" evokes Lefebvre's theory on the production of social space, which posits that state-constructed social space necessarily fails. Using this conceptual framework, the following chapter elucidates the ways in which legal performative space for women has been subverted by the organic birth of underground performative space. As a result, mainstream music loses its cultural power while underground women musicians construct new spaces of creativity, voice, and authenticity.

While the state's attempts at regulating culture have proven ineffectual, it is necessary to understand how official authorities administer music. The governing body responsible for granting permits to perform is Irshad. The three basic functions of Irshad include the following: protection and support

(*ḥimāyat*), guidance and orientation (*hidāyat*), and supervision and control (*nizārat*). The last category encompasses the granting of permits, the organization of concerts, and the regulation of musical production.¹²⁷ In order for a musician to obtain permission, his or her music must be categorized as either *jadīd* (new), *mellal* (world music), *kilāsīk-i gharb* (classical Western music) or pop. This set of allowed genres does not include rap music, indie rock, and heavy metal—all of which are characteristic of Iranian underground music. Irshad then ranks the music's overall quality on a scale of 1-4. "We would have preferred not to make such judgments," says Irshad's former director, Mr. Moradkhani, "but they are unfortunately necessary."¹²⁸ In judging music, authenticity is key, and preference is given to folk (*maḥallī*) and art music (*mūsīqī -i sunnaʿī*)—both of which have been promoted as part of "a post-1979 renaissance of indigenous music."¹²⁹ Once a musician or band has received a permit to produce music, they must navigate additional screening processes in order to perform live (also through Irshad) or to have their music broadcast (through the state broadcasting organization, *Sida u Sima*).¹³⁰ Nooshin notes that "musicians are therefore caught in a vicious circle: on the one hand, they can't access audiences before securing mujaviz; on the other, bands tend to delay applying for mujaviz until they

¹²⁷ Youssefzadeh, "Situation of Music," 43.

¹²⁸ Youssefzadeh, "Situation of Music," 45.

¹²⁹ DeBano, Wendy. "Singing Against Silence: Celebrating Women and Music at the Fourth Jasmine Festival," in *Music and the Play of Power*, ed. Laudan Nooshin (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 232.

¹³⁰ Nooshin, Laudan. "Underground, Overground: Rock Music and Youth Discourses in Iran," *Iranian Studies* 38.3 (2005): 468.

have material of sufficient quality to submit to the ministry." ¹³¹

The convoluted and intensive process of passing music through Irshad is undoubtedly discouraging to those who seek permission. Lyrics, music, and final recordings are all carefully inspected by the *Shura-yi Shi'r* (Lyrics Committee), *Shura-yi Musiqi* (Music Committee) and the *Shura-yi Farhangi* (Cultural Committee), respectively.¹³² According to Nooshin, "Approvals are often subject to stipulations, for example, that only instrumental pieces should be performed (without a singer) or that a band should replace one of its members with another musician." ¹³³ Applying for permission to perform in concerts presents yet another process of approval through Irshad as well as through the Office of Realty Supervision. As such, many musicians have carved out new ways to perform and produce music without the restrictions that come with governmental permission. In effect, these musicians have renegotiated performative space.

Women in music occupy a unique position in the negotiation of this performative space. As previously mentioned, both women and music are independently powerful tools for building nation and national ideology. State attempts to regulate music and the female voice are thus deeply entwined with the broader goal of nation. Outside of its socially-constructed permissible context, women's musical performance implies a threat to spatial organization as it relates to gender and voice. The boundaries of

¹³¹ Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 468.

¹³² Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 478.

¹³³ Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 479.

public and private are blurred in liminal performance spaces, cultural authenticity problematized and the female voice persists, unregulated. Such threats against nation-building can be broad or acute, based on music's longstanding place in Islamicate societies as well as on the current dynamics of Western hegemony. In modern Iran, music's association with ethnic and religious minorities served to marginalize it as an artistic "other" against which mainstream Iranian culture could be defined. Further, the longtime association of women musicians with prostitution—as seen with Qajar-era court performers—threatened the ideals of female chastity, and thus familial and national honor. Such associations served to give women's musical performance an anti-nationalist tone. As previously noted, the purity of the nation often rests on the purity of the nation's women; therefore women's social and cultural transgressions are more carefully guarded and regulated than those of men. This phenomenon makes the recent appearance of women underground musicians a particularly potent threat to the nation's cultural policies. Women musicians therefore straddle the intersection of national identity, gender and cultural administration.

Moreover, the rise of women as underground musicians testifies to the failure of Iranian cultural administration to successfully regulate culture and manage performative space. According to Nooshin, "official discourses treated music not as an aesthetic reality, but as a social factor that needed to be

controlled.”¹³⁴ Attempts to regulate culture fail to acknowledge that culture thrives in subversion; according to Theodor Adorno, the tension between culture and administration is necessary in order for culture to fulfill its inherent power. Adorno argues, “culture suffers damage when it is planned and administered; when it is left to itself, however, everything cultural threatens not only to lose its possibility of effect, but its very existence as well.”¹³⁵ In other words, while the practice of administering culture inevitably fails, it also inadvertently empowers other forms of cultural production that rely on a counterpart as a point of contrast, subversion and revolt. Without an administering (and censoring) body, culture lacks the significance and social power upon which it thrives. The current state of music regulation and censorship in Iran has thus paradoxically aided in the creation of a grassroots, underground music scene that achieves authenticity and legitimacy through its power for subversion. Despite legal restrictions, the context is ripe for women musicians to exercise and fulfill the full possibility of cultural power.

The blossoming underground music scene was enabled by the loosening of some restrictions, however. The so-called “cultural thaw” that birthed the underground music movement is largely credited to liberalizing reforms during the Khatami presidency (1997-2005). His administration officially legalized pop music, precipitating the creation of a genre of homegrown Iranian pop.

¹³⁴ Nooshin, Laudan. “Subversion and Countersubversion: Power, Control, and Meaning in the New Iranian Pop Music,” in *Music, Power and Politics*, ed. Annie J. Randall (New York: Routledge, 2004), 242.

¹³⁵ Adorno, Theodor. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 108.

Further, his leadership coincided with a gradual increase in music's public presence; music was heard more and more on radio and television programs, and posters advertising concerts and music lessons were more visible than ever before in the then-decades-old Islamic Republic. Moreover, music lessons became immensely popular after the opening of cultural centers (*farhangsarā*) throughout Tehran. One contemporary scholar reported, "Now it is really not an exaggeration to say that in every family someone plays an instrument."¹³⁶ Nevertheless, some of the regulations laid during the founding of the new regime still remained: women still could not sing solo before a male audience, public dancing was still forbidden, musical instruments still could not be shown on television, and only religious music was allowed to be played in public on holy days.¹³⁷ Musicians, however, started to find loopholes in these policies. For example, women were (and still are) allowed to sing before men only as part of a chorus, and many bands have accordingly used small choruses so that women can sing in public—sometimes, their solo voices can be heard in brief instances.¹³⁸ The resulting climate for musicians was thus multidimensional: minor musical reforms made music accessible to more people, while the perseverance of key restrictions made musicians resort to unconventional methods and modes of performance. Simply put, there were more musicians (and more women musicians) with nowhere to go. Musicians thus forged new spaces in the underground.

¹³⁶ Qtd. in Nooshin, "Subversion and Countersubversion," 246.

¹³⁷ Nooshin, "Subversion and Countersubversion," 246.

¹³⁸ Nooshin, "Subversion and Countersubversion," 246.

The reform period also resulted in loosened restrictions on the Internet, making it accessible to more people than ever before. As such, the new reform-era youth generation was exposed to music from all over the world, in styles and genres formerly unknown. While the legalization of pop music erased its subversive potential, musicians turned to other genres. Now, the Iranian underground is predominated by rap, heavy metal, and indie rock—even genres like reggae have made appearances. While women are still not as represented as men among the plethora of different underground groups, singers, and rappers, they have become more visible and engaged in recent years. Moreover, women's participation in cultural subversion has implications beyond the microphone stand. Are these female rappers, guitarists, drummers and singers a new reification of westoxication? Or, is their presence a direct reaction to failed cultural administration, and further, an emblem of the failures of nation-building? Both questions are partially true. To the state and its supporters, these underground women are the *gharbzādi* youth of today, undermining the nation and cultural purity through their musical expression. Yet these underground women can also be understood as an inevitable result of cultural administration, which according to Adorno, ultimately helps to foment and embolden cultural expression. The state's focus on defining women's performative space so closely has directed citizens to redefine spatial and cultural boundaries.

The Public/Private Dichotomy in Women's Performative Space

Historically, the private, domestic sphere has served as performative space for women. While at certain points in history it may have appeared that women vanished from the musical profession, in actuality they resided in private: in the home, within the family, and out of public view. This private, domestic, and feminine space was the immediate answer to spatial acceptability for women musicians. Lengel posits that Islamicate cultures bestow "the power of poetic license" upon all-women's spaces.¹³⁹ In these gendered and private spheres, women are able to engage in activities that could be seen as improper in public. Most notably, these activities include dancing, singing, and unveiling. "The problems occur," says Lengel, "when women venture out of the protected women's sphere into the public eye and ear, that sees and hears women performers as problematic at best, as an 'āhira (prostitute) at worst."¹⁴⁰

Owing to the relative freedom granted by privacy, literature has been the most conducive outlet for women's voices. Salman Rushdie accordingly argues that literature "is the art least subject to external control, because it is made in private."¹⁴¹ It is thus not surprising that literature served as one of the earliest forms of legitimized women's performative space. Poetry, in particular, has accommodated women's social roles because it can be produced and transmitted in private, "without venturing into the social, economic, and political public world barred to

¹³⁹ Lengel, Laura. "Performing In/Outside Islam: Music and Gendered Cultural Politics in the Middle East and North Africa." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 24.3/4 (2004): 215.

¹⁴⁰ Lengel, "Performing In/Outside Islam," 215.

¹⁴¹ Qtd. in Milani, *Veils and Words*, 58.

women.”¹⁴² The poets who have caused the most controversy include Qurrat al-‘Ayn and Farrokhzad—two writers who violated codes of privacy through their public oration and public commentary on their sexuality. How, then, does music fit into the public/private dichotomy? Unlike literature, music is inherently social in both production and performance. Nevertheless, music connected to the home carries validation for women musicians. Music in private space may still be social—as performed in parties and ceremonies—yet it is guarded by the physical boundaries of the private home. This emphasis on domestic space has been seen in other cultures; in Victorian Europe, for example, the piano was seen as a particularly ladylike instrument due to its association with the home.¹⁴³ In pre-modern Persia and in its regional neighbors, the private domestic space could also be extended to parts of the royal courts, which made frequent use of women musicians as entertainment.

Private space allows women’s musical performance to occur within the binds of modesty. In a space physically closed off from the outside, consisting of women or immediate family, performers can engage in behavior that would be seen as improper elsewhere. The examples of two kinds of Egyptian female performers, the *‘āwālim* and the *ghawāzī*, illustrate this point of privacy and modesty. The *‘āwālim* were a class of respected women who sang, danced, and composed poetry in the harems of Ottoman Egypt. Their respectability was guarded by their chosen audience:

¹⁴² Milani, *Veils and Words*, 58.

¹⁴³ Lengel, “Performing In/Outside Islam,” 218.

they traditionally only performed in the harem.¹⁴⁴ If men were present, efforts were made to conceal the singer, often with a latticework screen. Thus the *'āwālīm* could be heard but not seen by men. Their appearance was so firmly guarded that not even the master of the household could witness their performances. This spatial propriety was likely a reason why the *'āwālīm* were esteemed. The *'āwālīm* stand in contrast to the *ghawāzī*, who were lower-class singers and dancers who performed in public, often unveiled. The major distinction between the *'āwālīm* and the *ghawāzī* was their performative space; the *'āwālīm* did not violate family and privacy codes, while the *ghawāzī* performed in full view of unrelated men, thus compromising their feminine and domestic roles.

Ideas on female modesty typically focus on the visual, hence the case of the Egyptian *'āwālīm* concealing their bodies rather than their voices in the presence of men. However, in more rigid interpretations of modesty, the female voice is sometimes included as a part of the private and intimate sphere. In such discourses, woman's voice, then, could be used to elicit sexual attention from unrelated men and should thus be guarded. Chehabi elaborates on this view:

A number of legal compendia went so far as to recommend that a woman distort her voice when talking to an unrelated man by putting a small pebble under her tongue, or suggested that when someone knocked on the door of a house in which there were no adult males or children, the woman of the house clap her hands instead of asking 'who is it?' Aural adultery (*zina al-udhuni*) was considered a constant danger even where the veil impeded 'visual adultery' (*zina al-'ayni*).¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ van Nieuwkerk, *'A Trade Like Any Other,'* 26.

¹⁴⁵ Chehabi, "Voices Unveiled," 151.

This position on the female voice is hardly practicable in everyday life, and therefore Chehabi argues that it has more to do with singing than with everyday speech. Singing, in turn, was permissible in private and gender-segregated contexts much like the removal of hijab. The threat was committing "aural adultery," which could very well be extended to actual adultery. The regulation of 'awra can be read as an issue of national importance precisely because of the sanctity of the family as a microcosm of the nation.¹⁴⁶

The domestic sphere is a space heavily intertwined with women's role in the nation. Timmerman argues, "the traditional domestic and familial role of women is often equated with retaining one's 'authentic' ethnic identity."¹⁴⁷ In protecting this authentic identity, the domestic sphere is sanctified and upheld as a female domain. Domestic space's association with women gives them a certain degree of autonomy in comparison to the public world, and a major factor in determining this level of freedom is the control of female sexuality. Within the confines of the home, feminine transgressions on sexual mores are perceived as relatively non-threatening because they occur within the family, or in gender-segregated spaces. The purity of the nation is thus not compromised. There are no unrelated men or "others" to witness these transgressions and thus compromise the dignity of the women and the nation as a whole. In the case of private court entertainment of Qajar Persia, the gendering of

¹⁴⁶ Nagel, "Masculinity and Nationalism," 254.

¹⁴⁷ Timmerman, "Muslim Women and Nationalism," 22.

private space served as the dividing line for propriety of court musicians. In the presence of unrelated men, women performers were attached with the stigma of links to prostitution and violating the sexual honor of their families.

Forging Public Performance Space

In contemporary Iran, however, the realities of social life and culture have made the complete absence of women's public performance an unattainable ideal. After all, women did have public outlets for musical performance in the years prior to 1979, and the former prominence of female music icons such as Googoosh made the erasure of the public female voice a difficult task. Moreover, the emergence of women's performative voices in other arts, such as in literature and in film, has made music censorship faulty in its execution. In recent years, the government has attempted to compromise by creating state-sanctioned public spaces for women musicians. These legal performance spaces seek legitimacy through officialdom, in the form of national concerts and festivals. Such official platforms espouse themes of nationalism and women's national roles, giving musical performance an acceptable and political public space. How does women's performance function in these legal public spaces? How are these spaces legitimized?

One such mode of women's public performance is in the dramatic storytelling art known as *naqālī*, which has interestingly been overlooked by censoring bodies. In these performances, which often occur in public coffeehouses, the *naqāl*

(performer) recites stories from national epics such as Ferdowsi's *Shahnama*. While storytellers were traditionally men, women have become more prominent in recent years. Women's emergence in the role of *ālaq* began in the late 1970s, when 15-year old Farahnaz Karim-Khani sought ways to incorporate conventionally feminine emotive traits with the old performance art. "I even thought of methods in which *ālaq* could be told in a female form of narration," said Karim-Khani. "I believe women have smoother and softer feelings and can give new forms of expression to *naqāl*. Since women can narrate ordinary tales with great depth of feeling and emotions, they surely can do an excellent job of narrating our epic stories."¹⁴⁸ Today, the most prominent female *naqāl* is Fatemeh Habibzad, who goes by the stage name Gordafarid. In her performances, Gordafarid stands on a public stage, surrounded by a mixed-gender audience of all ages. Using oratory and theatrical techniques, her voice warbles through various dramatic inflections as her arms flail for emphasis throughout the epic verse. For Gordafarid and other female *naqāl* performers, voice and body serve as the artistic core of the performance, as the zones of individual creative expression. Although *naqāl* performance occurs in the absence of music, its stylistic use of voice and body make it a similar space of performance. Moreover, *naqāl* is legitimized through the idea that it is a uniquely Iranian custom, one that brings old national epics to a modern public stage. It is this emphasis on

¹⁴⁸ "Iran's first female *naqqal* appeared 30 years ago in Sanandaj," *Mehr News*, 1 January 2010, <http://www.mehrnews.com/en/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=1009440>.

tradition and national narrative that makes the naqālī an acceptable performative space for the female voice.

As for music, the government has crafted public performance spaces for women in the shape of grand-scale music festivals and concerts. These Irshad-organized national music events, which are attended by only mainstream (legal) musicians, help to disclose the nuances of music's acceptability and space in Iran. They are carefully planned and organized to create a socially acceptable space for music, which even at its most thoroughly vetted still produces controversy within the regime's ideological framework. The legitimizing tool here is overt nationalism in space, content and context. This theme is immediately apparent in the festivals' names, which tend to use patriotic or religious terms: Festival of Hymns and Revolutionary Music (*Jashnvarih-yi Sorud va Ahangha-yi Inqilabi*), Festival of the Week of the Union (*Jashnvarih-yi Haftih-yi Vahdat*), and Fajr International Music Festival (*Jashnvarih-yi biyn al-Mellali-yi Musiqi-yi Fajr*), among others. Nationalism is also exhibited in festival artwork, themes, and location; faces of political leaders and the national flag are typically on prominent display, and the locations are usually associated with some kind of nationalist event or imagery. Further, most festivals are planned to coincide with national or religious holidays, such as the anniversary of the 1979 revolution or the Prophet's revelations.¹⁴⁹ This strategic timing thus works to legitimize the music as an act of celebration, and goes further to show how the state attempts to harness the

¹⁴⁹ Youssefzadeh, "Situation of Music," 49.

controversial art to suit nation-building purposes. The genres of music involved typically reflect the ceremonial theme of each festival, and as with Irshad's music classification system, patriotic and traditional songs are given preference. In 1997, the Hymns and Revolutionary Music¹⁵⁰ festival added a section for women's traditional and regional music, "sung for and by women."¹⁵¹ This development marked a milestone for regulating music through a gendered lens. Originally, even solo instrumental pieces by male musicians were prohibited by the festival administration because of their purported resemblance to the female voice.¹⁵² In the coming years, the idea of creating an acceptable public space for women musicians would catch on, resulting in the advent of the first-ever musical festival for and by women.

In 1999, the women's-only Jasmine Festival (*Jashnvarih-yi Gul-i Yas*) was established, perhaps as a concession to increasingly prominent women musicians. In this weeklong annual event, all-female musicians from around the country take the stage at the prestigious Talar-i Vahdat concert hall for an audience entirely made up of women. The performers typically play traditional and regional music, with much representation of the indigenous music of Iran's various ethnic minorities. Even in this state-sanctioned space, dealing with musicians who generally already have government permits, the screening process for performers is still extensive. After being formally invited to

¹⁵⁰ Since 1986, the Hymns and Revolutionary Music festival has been held annually on the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. It is the most prominent national music festival in Iran.

¹⁵¹ Youssefzadeh, "Situation of Music," 50.

¹⁵² Youssefzadeh, "Situation of Music," 54.

the 2002 festival, “musicians had to provide officials at the [Vizarat-i Irshad] with their biographies, group photographs, a detailed concert programme, sample recordings, a transcription of all Persian lyrics and transcriptions and translations of non-Persian lyrics.”¹⁵³ Delays in receiving clearance from Irshad were rampant—a fact that led some to believe that the festival’s existence had become fragile and threatened.¹⁵⁴ Nevertheless, the Jasmine Festival has continued, operating within its own carefully designated space.

The government has gone through great lengths to ensure the propriety of the space used for the Jasmine Festival. While musical performances are usually associated with nightclubs, parties and other morally questionable spaces, the Jasmine Festival occupies the high-prestige locale of Talar-i Vahdat. As a venue associated with high art—and relatively high ticket prices to match—the space denotes an element of class, which DeBano calls a “delimiting” factor for women musicians.¹⁵⁵ Moreover, performers are typically highly educated and specially trained—echoing Irshad’s preference for classically trained musicians.¹⁵⁶ Gender segregation also helps to create the performance space. The homosociality of the event is duly guarded by the prohibition of all recording equipment, including personal cameras and mobile phones. Not even male sound engineers are permitted.¹⁵⁷ “The only man in the vicinity of Talar-i Vahdat

¹⁵³ DeBano, “Singing Against Silence,” 236.

¹⁵⁴ DeBano, “Singing Against Silence,” 239.

¹⁵⁵ DeBano, Wendy S. “Enveloping Music in Gender, Nation, and Islam: Women’s Music Festivals in Post-Revolutionary Iran,” *Iranian Studies* 38.3 (2005): 451.

¹⁵⁶ DeBano, “Enveloping Music,” 460.

¹⁵⁷ DeBano, “Singing Against Silence,” 238.

during the performances in 2002 was the guard stationed at the iron gates in front of the hall, whose role was to prevent unauthorized members of the public from entering, thus making the Fourth Jasmine Festival inaudible and invisible to all but its female participants."¹⁵⁸ Further, the festival artwork's visible absence of images of musical instruments and the musicians themselves—even the apparent reluctance to print their stage names¹⁵⁹—serves to separate the body from the art of music. Because music and the body most often coincide in the act of dance—a practice largely frowned upon—erasure of the body from the Jasmine Festival ensures the propriety of the space.

The Jasmine Festival is shrouded in symbolism that coincides with the dominant state narratives on gender. Each year, for example, the festival falls on the birth date of Fatimah, daughter of the Prophet Mohammad. Fatimah's birthday is also the national holiday of Mother's day.¹⁶⁰ Such timing is not coincidental, for Fatimah has long taken on a symbolic role in the Islamic Republic, in which she is posited as the ideal Iranian woman. The roots of the Fatimah model date back to the mid-twentieth century, when Nusrat Allah Nuriyani wrote that Fatimah "was offered to this world by her father, the Prophet Muhammad, as the complete example of womanhood."¹⁶¹ The paradigm gained popularity in the 1970s, when the intellectual 'Ali Shariati posited Fatimah as the antithesis to the westoxified Pahlavi woman. Shariati called upon Iranian women to reject the

¹⁵⁸ DeBano, "Singing Against Silence," 238.

¹⁵⁹ DeBano, "Enveloping Music," 450.

¹⁶⁰ DeBano, "Enveloping Music," 452.

¹⁶¹ Kashani-Sabet, Firoozeh. "Who is Fatima?: Gender, Culture, and Representation in Islam," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 1.2 (2005): 1.

emulation of Western women espoused by the Shah's modernizing regime and instead look to the Prophet's daughter as a model of Shi'i female activism and domesticity. Kashani-Sabet argues that the use of Fatimah as a model for womanhood only recently grew to achieve cult status in Iran; she was all but absent in nineteenth and early twentieth century debates on women's roles. This absence, according to Kashani-Sabet, mirrors the secularism of intellectual discourse in the Qajar and Pahlavi eras—a secularism that was reversed in the building of the post-1979 Islamic state.

The ideological cult of Fatimah is rooted in her perceived divination: it is believed that "when Fatimah was born, a light emanated from her, illuminating the homes in Mecca. By the grace of God, ten *houris* appeared from paradise, each carrying a jug of water from Kawsar (a river in paradise) to wash Fatimah in holy water."¹⁶² The mythology surrounding her contests to the belief that she stood apart from ordinary women by nature; her supreme morality and chastity are cast in an almost unearthly sheen. Shariati carried her exemplar status further by emphasizing her revolutionary role in spreading Islam and contributing to the Prophet's line of succession. In doing so, Fatimah became an active figure who simultaneously occupied the gender normative domestic role while engaging with the public in an Islamic context. By birthing the Prophet's successors and winning converts, Fatimah could literally be seen as the mother of an Islamic nation. It is thus apparent why Iran's Mother's Day falls

¹⁶² Kashani-Sabet, "Who is Fāṭimah," 6.

each year on Fatimah's birthday, and why Irshad chose this day to frame the Jasmine Festival in a revolutionary context.

The Jasmine Festival intertwines the Fatimah paradigm with nationalism quite inconspicuously. In addition to the deliberate timing of the festival, state and gender are further enmeshed in its official artwork, in which the jasmine flower is stylized in the colors and design of the Iranian national flag.¹⁶³ Further, symbols of the state are present in the form of posters of President Khatami (during his presidency) and Ayatollah Khamenei emblazoned on the front walls of Talar-i Vahdat. In the back of the concert hall, writes DeBano, was the same calligraphic "God is Great" insignia that marks government documents. DeBano argues, "By promoting specific state concepts of the 'ideal woman,' 'appropriate' female behavior, and by making the protection of women's modesty a state imperative, women in particular come to be regarded as both ideological and physical extensions of the nation."¹⁶⁴ This women's space is therefore physically marked with the state's stamp of approval—a stamp that aims to legitimize women musicians and renegotiate public space to accommodate their voice and performance.

While the Jasmine Festival clearly provides a safe space for women musicians who might otherwise struggle to be heard, the concept of the festival has been met with ambivalence by many musicians. Some see it as a wholly positive development for women and arts in Iran; the carefully calculated space it has created means that more women musicians have a chance to perform. This

¹⁶³ DeBano, "Singing Against Silence," 235.

¹⁶⁴ DeBano, "Enveloping Music," 447.

viewpoint echoes the argument that the post-revolution era's strict regulation and gendering of public space made employment and engaging in public life more accessible to women from more traditional backgrounds. Others, however, disagree with the entire concept of the Jasmine Festival's "separate but equal" character, as well as the lack of artistic freedom that comes with taking part. Further, "Some artists are concerned that their participation may signal complicity with state-imposed gendering of musical spheres and thereby compromise their artistic or professional standing."¹⁶⁵ Others cynically point to political motivations for events like the Jasmine Festival. One unnamed musician told the *Christian Science Monitor* in 2003, "It's all about publicity. In the US and Europe they say that Iranian women are under pressure, so they hold these festivals so they can say that Iranian women don't have any problems."¹⁶⁶ Nooshin elaborates, "Not surprisingly, young musicians that I spoke to were wary of centrally-organized events, both because of uncertainty about government motivations and concerns over loss of control, as well as a general reluctance to be associated with officialdom."¹⁶⁷ Festivals have also been criticized by musicologists such as Stokes, for whom they consist of "staged folklore" out of touch with what they aim to represent: "music and dances become alienated from their real settings, their currency worthless out of context."¹⁶⁸ Considering these criticisms, are national music festivals successful in creating

¹⁶⁵ DeBano, "Singing Against Silence," 241.

¹⁶⁶ May, Rachel. "In Iran, no men allowed at women's music fest," *Christian Science Monitor* 22 August 2003.

¹⁶⁷ Nooshin, Laudan, ed. *Music and the Play of Politics in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009): 249.

¹⁶⁸ Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, 15.

musical space? Has the Jasmine Festival succeeded in negotiating women's performative space? The answers to these questions are debatable; to obtain a clearer picture, one must consider the effectiveness of non-centrally organized festivals of underground music.

Because of restrictions on underground performance, underground musical events on the scale of the Jasmine Festival are virtually inconceivable. In recent years, however, events that are typically part of physical spaces—such as music festivals and concerts—also find a new virtual space in the Internet. The website Tehran Avenue, for example, hosted the first-ever Underground Music Competition in 2002. Word of the competition spread through informal networks and word-of-mouth, and the end result included 21 bands that each submitted one song. The public could listen to the songs and vote for their favorites online. The competition saw more than 200,000 downloads, of which sixty percent were from outside Iran.¹⁶⁹ The following year, Tehran Avenue launched the Tehran Avenue Music Open, a similar online competition for underground music. *Zirzamin.com* also embarked on the competition trend, and started their own "Zirzamin Music Award"—a compilation album made up of selected songs that is available for download on the website. Similar to the aforementioned competitions, Zirzamin asked artists to submit a song to be judged on its production, composition, creativity, and musicianship. Scores are tallied and the top twenty are featured in the compilation album. A young

¹⁶⁹ Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 473.

woman singer and guitarist, Farzane Zamen¹⁷⁰, placed eighth with a combined score of 58.9¹⁷¹—a “surprise” showing due to what Zirzamin described as a scarcity of female rock musicians. For Zamen and other musicians, recognition from online music competitions provides the validation and recognition that is difficult to achieve. According to Sohrab, one of the organizers of TAMO, competitions also help form the identities of bands who, without them, may see their music as a mere hobby. He explains, “Many who didn't think of themselves as band suddenly became aware of their “self-for-others,” they looked at themselves from an outside point of view.”¹⁷² The virtual stage of online music competitions thus gives bands an elevated platform to reach a wider audience. While underground concerts have a limited scope, the online audience is infinite and unregulated. Moreover, the music regulation and rigid spatial constructions that come with the Jasmine Festival are lifted in virtual space. Women, too, find themselves on virtual stages alongside men, and in the case of Zamen, can achieve recognition and praise.

Liminal Performance Space

Underground artists have thus formulated an answer to state-regulated festival space for music, using the Internet. How, though, does the Internet figure in notions of spatial privacy in Iran? Is the Internet a public or private space? The Internet,

¹⁷⁰ Farane Zamen is a 28-year-old Tehran native with a background in visual arts. She is an underground solo act; she sings, plays guitar and piano, and writes her own lyrics in English and Persian. Her music draws from a variety of mostly Western influences, including rock and punk.

¹⁷¹ “ZIRZAMIN Music Award – Make Yourself Heard- WINNERS!” *Zirzamin*, 7 November 2010, <http://zirzamin.com/?q=node/989>.

¹⁷² “An Interview with one of the Organizers of ‘Tehran Avenue Music Open’,” *Zirzamin*, 17 April 2003, <http://zirzamin.se/?q=node/126>.

like other spatial platforms for women musicians, is a liminal space, neither private nor public. While the dichotomy between public and private performance is useful in framing the social implications of acceptable spaces for women's performance, the complexities of life in modern Iran render the binary as problematic. There exist contexts of performance space that are not easy to define as either public or private, such as weddings, funeral lamentations, and underground space. Some of these liminal spaces, such as weddings and funeral lamentations, are infused with the theme of "the nation," and are thus socially acceptable to the state. The ceremonial nature of these contexts also supports their use for women's performance; and the greater goal of building the nation thus trumps the problematic nature of the space involved. Moreover, performance within ceremonial spaces "at once defines and reinforces the disposition of power within those spaces and the authority represented by that space."¹⁷³ The following section elucidates the ways in which these liminal spaces operate on the margins of public and private, and uphold central power and nationalist ideology.

Weddings, for example, typically occur within physically private spaces; however the occupiers of this space are not restricted to the family. Nevertheless, the wedding has historically served as a safe space for women's performance throughout Islamicate cultures including Iran. Women performers have been integral to the wedding procession, either as hired professionals or as friends and family of the bridal party. Why

¹⁷³ Leysohn, Andrew et al. "The Place of Music: [Introduction]." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, 20.4 (1995): 426.

are weddings accorded this leeway? To begin with, marriage is perceived as the only legitimate context for female sexuality; any undertones of immodesty in performance are thus legitimized by the context. In addition, marriage itself is inextricably bound to nation-building. Marriage is the cornerstone of the family, which serves as a microcosm of the nation. It is the base and root of the family, from which new generations of national citizens are born. These future citizens provide the necessary foundation for the nation, and thus marriage is a necessary tool for building the nation. This contextual propriety serves to support women's performative space in weddings—a context which is not clearly defined as either public or private.

Funeral lamentations and mourning rituals also occupy a nebulous position in the public/private dichotomy. While these types of performance often take place in public spaces, they occur in the immediate company of women only. Although lamentations are not considered musical performance, the practice demonstrates a permissible context for women to use their voices in a stylized and performative manner, much like *naqālī*. Moreover, like the *ʿāwālīm* of Egypt, **lamenters are held in** relatively high esteem because the practice necessitates the knowledge of poetry, metaphors, and the nuances of musical performance. Women usually perform seated on carpets, wailing and clapping their hands. In the context of funerals, women's voices are thus made permissible by the context of mourning and religion. Mourning rituals also accompany national and religious holidays such as *'Āshūrā'*, which commemorates the death of Husayn

during the holy month of *Muharram*. One such ceremony, held in Tehran, was recounted in *The New York Times*:

A dirge singer -- paid about \$125 for the night -- keened into a microphone. . . She moaned the story of Zeinab, Ali's daughter, watching him die: 'The daughter is looking at her father who is dying, whose eyes are becoming dim, he is dying, this is Zeinab, who is watching her father die, who is cleaning father's bloody head, she is saying baba baba, father father, talk to me, open your eyes and talk to me'. . . One woman, then two, then dozens, began to weep, as if it were their own father's death being described.¹⁷⁴

As described in the above story, such rituals are characterized by vocal wailing, singing, and emotional intensity.

Women's public mourning also has an important role in nation building. Ritualized mourning is fundamental to the Shiism, tracing its root to the deaths of 'Ali and Husayn in the fifth century. While the formulation of the Shi'i cult of mourning largely centers on these deaths, tragedy and martyrdom have deep roots in Persian culture. In Ferdowsi's *Shahnama*, tragic deaths are rampant. The characters of Jamshid, Iraj, Sohrab and Rostam all succumb to unjust murders.¹⁷⁵ As part of this national discourse of martyrdom, public mourning became a socially sanctified way to pay respect to history and nation. The culture of martyrdom and mourning was further solidified in the immediate aftermath of the Iranian Revolution, when the nation was sprung into a devastating war with Iraq that lasted for most of the 1980s. For the new Iranian nation, which was rapidly undergoing a cultural transformation, the Iran-Iraq war helped to lay its ideological foundations. In the war narrative, martyrdom

¹⁷⁴ Waldman, Amy. "Iranian Shiites Mourn a Martyr," *The New York Times*, December 15, 2001, <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/12/15/world/iran-shiites-celebrate-and-mourn-a-martyr.html>.

¹⁷⁵ Dorraj, Manochehr. "Symbolic and Utilitarian Political Value of a Tradition: Martyrdom in the Iranian Political Culture," *The Review of Politics* 59.3 (1997): 492.

was exalted as the utmost sacrifice for the nation, and promises of rewards in the afterlife made the act palatable to large swaths of the revolutionary generation. Women's role in war and nation-building was not one of martyrdom, however. According to Huston, "the exclusion of women from the making of war and war narrative has meant that they have played predominately passive or reactive rather than active roles in both."¹⁷⁶ In the event of war, women thus serve as the physical remainders of the aftermath, and their responsibility is to commemorate, memorialize and give the victims posterity through ritual mourning. When religion enters the funereal discourse, as it often does, mourning takes on an even more potent role in forging solidarity among survivors. Malinowski argues, "The ceremonial of death, which ties survivors to the body and rivets them to the place of death...religion counteracts the centrifugal forces of fear, dismay, demoralization and provides the most powerful means of integration of the group's shaken solidarity and of the re-establishment of its miracle."¹⁷⁷ Women's highly visible role in public mourning in Iran thus makes them tools for building national solidarity. The utilitarian nature of this female-oriented tradition makes the otherwise controversial public use of the female voice acceptable within its regimented space.

The ceremonial spaces of weddings and mourning rituals thus provide state-accepted performative space for women and their voices. Although both contexts occupy a liminal space, between public and private realms, themes of nation, religion, and family

¹⁷⁶ Huston, Nancy. "Tales of War and Tears of Women," *Women's Studies International Forum* 5.3-4 (1982): 271.

¹⁷⁷ Qtd. in Dorraj, "Symbolic," 503.

serve to legitimize them and ultimately consolidate nationalism and state power. But what about other liminal spaces? Does liminality cease to provide space for women's performance when stripped of ceremonial undertones?

The physical space used by underground musicians is also liminal, yet does not enjoy the same permissibility within government ideology. How did this underground space obtain this liminality and, ultimately, its subversive power? Post-1979, increased restrictions on public behavior resulted in the renegotiation of private space. The private space of modern Iran goes beyond bestowing "the power of poetic license" upon women; it also has been the site of social and legal transgressions such as drug and alcohol use, mingling with the opposite sex, and as a space for performing illegal music. Underground artists rely on physically private spaces to perform, while legalized artists are given public outlets such as official concerts and festivals. Underground performance has thus become commingled with private, feminine space; the context of these performances, however, goes against ideals of private space.

Underground physical space often consists of private basements, where musicians can rehearse and perform for parties, concerts and weddings. According to Nooshin, the basement "represents a liminal space in which the boundaries between private and public domains become blurred."¹⁷⁸ The basement's liminality is due to the context of its use: many underground performances are not personal, intimate occasions and thus the

¹⁷⁸ Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 463.

norms of the private sphere do not apply. On the other hand, the physical geography of basements sets them well inside the physically private sphere, behind gates and nestled deep within the home. As previously mentioned, domestic space has historically allowed women more creative freedom; it was one of the few contexts in which women could perform music in a socially acceptable manner. If women were to perform in the home, it was usually implied that they performed for other women or for men in their immediate families, thus avoiding the transgression of modesty norms. Now, when women perform in basements it is often for underground concerts open to listeners beyond the family unit. Therefore, while the underground basement physically resides in the private, domestic sphere, its current usage as a zone for subverting laws on public social life meld the two spatial qualities together. In effect, the creation of underground space has deterritorialized both public and private space in a "citizen rebellion against invented culture."¹⁷⁹ Most importantly, the private space of the home has been deterritorialized in that its position as a safe space for women's expression has been simultaneously upturned and upheld.

While the Iranian government has constructed an acceptable public space for women musicians in grand-scale national events such as the Jasmine Festival, underground concerts still take place under the radar, in liminal spaces such as basements. The catch to these underground concerts—besides the threat of arrest—is that they lack the perks of official concerts like

¹⁷⁹ Dorn, Charles. "The Deterritorialization of Art," *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society* 34.2 (2004): 147.

posters and tickets. On the other hand, underground concerts' lack of officialdom allows for a relaxation of social mores. In a rap concert held just outside of Tehran in 2007, for example, alcoholic beverages and unveiled women were a common sight.¹⁸⁰ Yet even in the absence of egregious legal transgressions, the threat of discovery persists. The private sphere is thus no longer sacred; it has been deterritorialized and remade into a subversive and liminal performance space. One of the rapper Salome's¹⁸¹ underground venues includes an annual assembly of women's activists, which is in itself a risky space.

At an event like the women's activist assembly meeting, which is already dangerous, if the government finds us they will arrest everyone there. But if I'm there it's going to be double-trouble. Maybe they'll say that I'm a devil worshiper! There's always danger. Even if you're partying with your friends at home there is danger because the police can enter and say you were doing whatever.¹⁸²

Because of the known social transgressions that sometimes take place in private, underground performance is often cast as indissociable from other illegal behavior. Physically private space thus becomes a dangerous space, where the state struggles to maintain control.

Because of the state's concerns over this subversive space, it has now become associated with fantastical rumors. Salome's aforementioned devil-worshipping quip references the perception that some underground artists—most notably rock and heavy-metal musicians—are satanic. She explains a situation in which the

¹⁸⁰ Johnston, Sholeh. "Persian Rap: The Voice of Modern Iran's Youth," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 1 (2008): 102.

¹⁸¹ Salome (also known as Salome MC) is perhaps the most famous underground female musician from Iran. The 26-year-old Tehran native is a rapper, performing what she calls "conscious rap"—concerning social and political issues in Iran. Known for her outspokenness and bravado, Salome has become a poster-girl for Iranian underground culture. In addition to her online presence, which includes YouTube videos and various profiles on music sharing websites, she has garnered attention from publications such as the BBC.

¹⁸² Stransky, Olivia. "Iranian Rapper Salome: Scream to Let Your Voice Be Heard," *Sampsonia Way Magazine*, 12 September 2011, <http://www.sampsoniaway.org/blog/2011/09/12/iranian-rapper-salome-scream-to-let-your-voice-be-heard/>.

police halted an underground rock concert and arrested musicians and audience members.

In the newspapers they said that they caught young people doing satanic rituals. For a while they were saying that rock and metal music are satanic and that the people who like them drink blood. After rap became prominent among young people... they started to call rap satanic. They would interview these young people who had these crazy hairstyles, who didn't have anything to do with rap, and ask them, 'Why do you make your hair like this?' 'Oh I saw it on MTV,' and then they talk about how MTV is making people worship the devil.¹⁸³

In casting underground musicians as satanic, radical, and brainwashed by Western media, the state articulates its own anxieties about private space becoming liminal. This private/public space has thus been acknowledged as a space of social subversion, where individuals can flout the laws and ideology constructed by official authorities. Liminal space, therefore, poses a threat to the nation. If state-organized spaces for women musicians entail gender segregation, nationalist overtones, heavy regulation and highbrow venues, underground spaces deconstruct these spatial qualities. Most importantly, underground space signifies a breakdown of the feminine private sphere by bringing public life within its grounds. Still, not all female musicians are satisfied with performing in underground space. 'I always imagine myself playing in the best concert halls and stadiums!' exclaims Farzane Zamen. 'I laugh because it's really hard to achieve that. We live in a prison named Iran!'¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Stransky, "Iranian Rapper Salome."

¹⁸⁴ Farzane Zamen in discussion with the author, December 2011.

The Internet as Liminal, Global, and Underground Space

Just as the Internet helped to create a forum for underground music festivals, it also serves as a forum for deterritorialized physical and cultural space. In essence, the Internet is also a liminal space, with both public and private qualities: while it allows musicians to reach unlimited, public audiences, it is generally reached through private physical spaces such as the home, and the ability to protect one's anonymity bestows a level of privacy upon the virtual sphere.

The Internet is perhaps the most important public space for Iranian underground musicians, where tech-savvy youth use proxies and aliases to dodge government censors. Through their personal websites and underground music e-zines, artists can attain a certain amount of publicity that would normally be unavailable to them. Some websites—such as *bia2.com* and *rap98.com*—serve as music banks that post songs for free download. Others serve as e-zines, publishing interviews, reviews, and editorial articles on Iranian music both inside the country and in diaspora. The latter category includes websites such as *TehranAvenue.com*, *Zirzamin.com*, *7sang.com*, and *Bar-Ax*. Most offer content in both English and Persian, and many are not based in Iran, but in the various diasporic communities in Europe and in North America. In this way, underground music websites serve as cultural links between diasporic and internal communities.

The "cultural thaw" of the late 1990s coincided with a surge in the number of wired-in middle class Internet users, creating a natural avenue for the then-burgeoning grassroots

music scene. A study conducted by the World Bank in 2010 estimated that 13% of Iran's population used the Internet, increasing sharply since 1998.¹⁸⁵ As part of this growth, huge numbers of urban youth were introduced to the genres that now thrive in the underground scene, such as rap and heavy metal. The globalization of music via the Internet reshaped the cultural identities of plugged-in urban youth. For this generation, now personally in touch with global culture, "the problem of reconciling national and Western cultures can be particularly acute."¹⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the Internet has proven to be the ultimate forum for expressing and reconciling these cultural identities through music. Many social theorists have pointed to the Internet as catalyzing a breakdown in nationalisms through its deterritorialized nature; however Eriksen argues that the Internet has strengthened national identities, particularly by linking diasporic populations to their homelands.¹⁸⁷ As many of the virtual platforms for Iranian musicians are based in the diaspora, it is possible that this interaction between Iranians around the world has forged a new national identity that blends global music with what is seen as authentically Iranian.

As a virtual space, the Internet has served as the major (and in some cases, the only) social outlet for underground musicians. According to Nooshin, "In comparison with existing means of circumventing central control—the black market or private concerts, for example, the Internet offered a relatively

¹⁸⁵ World Bank, "Internet Users as Percentage of Population," 30 March 2012.

¹⁸⁶ Manuel, qtd. in Nooshin, "Subversion and Countersubversion," 239.

¹⁸⁷ Eriksen, Thomas Hylland. "Nationalism and the Internet," *Nations and Nationalism* 13.1 (2007): 1.

cheap, risk-free, and infinitely more flexible medium to access audiences, both inside and outside Iran."¹⁸⁸ For many underground artists, such as Farzane Zamen, a near entirety of their music careers lies in the World Wide Web. Zamen's online presence includes a Facebook page, a MySpace account (which has been deactivated), YouTube videos, and various profiles on underground music websites. It is possible to access nearly all of her finished musical material online, as well as her visual material including album covers and photographs. In the online world, an artist like Zamen is like any other: her music is available for download, she dons blue jeans and rocker-eyeliner in publicity photographs, and gives interviews to music blogs. Her Internet presence clashes with the reality of her career, in which she has little or no forum for performing and publicizing her music. Offline, says Zamen, "I can do nothing...there's no way to get heard."¹⁸⁹ Similarly, the lead singer of the band 127 says, "The only club we have for playing is our website."¹⁹⁰ Even Salome, who is one of the more known voices from Iranian music, acknowledges the fundamental importance of the Internet in her career: "It's all there is for me. All I do is record and mix my work and then put it on the net. I don't do any extra things for distribution."¹⁹¹ The rapper Ghogha¹⁹² agrees, calling the Internet "one of the tools of freedom of expression

¹⁸⁸ Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 472.

¹⁸⁹ Farzane Zamen in discussion with the author, December 2011.

¹⁹⁰ Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 472.

¹⁹¹ "Exclusive Interview: Iranian Rapper Salome," *View from Damavand*, 8 August 2010, <http://viewfromdamavand.com/2010/08/08/rapper-salome/>.

¹⁹² Ghogha is one of the best-known underground rappers. She is twenty-something from Tehran, she raps in Persian and shows a strong social consciousness in her lyrics. Ghogha has been able to expand her own performative space by taking her act outside of Iran; she has spent much time in Sweden, where she has participated in music festivals and has attracted local headlines.

nowadays.”¹⁹³ The Internet provides a safer and more reliable venue for musical performance than the underground concerts and private parties that provide physical space; the virtual space of the web offers more flexibility because it can more easily evade governmental control.

The Internet’s power of subversion is not limited to musicians; it also serves as a forum for civil disobedience for women’s rights activists, protestors and reformist clerics. This phenomenon “demonstrates how the new technology can enable the formation of new civil spheres, or ‘virtual domains,’ to defy authoritarian control over the ideas of civil society and symbols of justice.”¹⁹⁴ For example, when Ayatollah Husayn Kazemini Boroujerdi was arrested in 2006 for criticizing Ayatollah Khomeini, Boroujerdi’s supporters flocked to the Internet to voice their outrage. They posted footage of the resulting public demonstrations on blocked websites such as YouTube, using computer-savvy tricks to evade censors. Video clips, for example, would be emailed to contacts outside of Iran, who would then post the footage on YouTube. Iranian users could then use anti-filter programs to access the website. During the post-election uprising of June 2009 (dubbed the Green Movement), the Internet once again allowed activists to become citizen journalists as they uploaded videos, photographs and SMS text messages onto blogs and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Thus in non-democratic contexts, in which the Internet is censored and filtered by the government, “an underground and subversive

¹⁹³ Ghogha in discussion with the author, April 2012.

¹⁹⁴ Rahimi, Babak and Elham Gheytaichi. “Iran’s Reformists and Activists: Internet Exploiters,” *Middle East Policy* 15.1 (2008): 47.

counter-culture germinates.”¹⁹⁵ Amir-Ebrahimi argues that “the absence of the body in virtual space generally allows more freedom of expression and at the same time more security through the possibility of concealing gender, age, and personal positions on political, social, and cultural issues.”¹⁹⁶ Activists, therefore, have forged new ways to dodge government censors based on anonymity. Women are more likely to use anonymity to their advantage; women bloggers tend to use pseudonyms more often than men.¹⁹⁷ Women musicians also often use stage names, as evidenced by the rappers Salome and Ghogha.

Iranian women have been major players in this underground Internet culture as musicians, bloggers, and women’s rights activists. A study conducted in 2003 found that women comprised 49% of the total number of Internet users in Iran—the highest rate of women’s Internet usage in the Middle East.¹⁹⁸ However, the government’s filtering activities have at times curtailed women’s presence in the virtual sphere. Between 2004 and 2006, the government attempted to filter out pornography websites by using the keywords “woman/women” in Persian and English.¹⁹⁹ In turn, many women’s rights websites were blocked out of this measure. Yet with each attempt at censorship, users become more savvy and develop new ways to subvert the state—for instance, by using alternative keywords. Because of this, women’s online presence has continued to exist. In June 2006, activists used the Internet

¹⁹⁵ Shirazi, Farid. “Information and Communication Technology and Women Empowerment in Iran,” *Telematics and Informatics* 29 (2012): 46.

¹⁹⁶ Amir-Ebrahimi, Masserat. “Transgression in Narration: The Lives of Iranian Women in Cyberspace,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 4.3 (2008): 102.

¹⁹⁷ Amir-Ebrahimi, “Transgression,” 105.

¹⁹⁸ Shirazi, “Information,” 51.

¹⁹⁹ Amir-Ebrahimi, “Transgression,” 103.

to organize a street protest for women's rights. While the protest ended with mass arrests, it also resulted in a virtual flooding of the Internet with thousands of photographs and video clips of the movement, thereby demonstrating the subversive capabilities of virtual space. Moreover, the post-election protests of June 2009 largely centered on one woman's presence on the Internet: Neda Agha Soltan. Neda was a student killed during the uprising, and her public murder was captured on video and was posted all over the blogosphere, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. One Iranian blogger wrote, "These days a woman [Neda] is a symbol of protest in Iran. Women in Iran are the pillars of this movement."²⁰⁰ Women are thus the focal point of subverting the state in the virtual world as well as on the ground.

The Space of Authenticity

The age of the Internet and its partner, globalization, has affected not only the space of women's music, but also its content. How has global connectedness affected Iranian women's music, and Iranian music as a whole? In sum, it has problematized one of the legitimizing frameworks of women's music: authenticity. What is the meaning of musical authenticity? And how is authenticity practiced by women musicians?

Physical spaces such as the Jasmine Festival can be infused with a sense of cultural authenticity through the use of timing, symbolism and context. The form and content of music, however, has also been used to demonstrate authenticity. During the 1960s

²⁰⁰ Shirazi, "Information," 52.

and 1970s, "it was [pop] music more than any other cultural form that came to represent the modern face of Iran."²⁰¹ In reaction to the perceived growth in Western cultural hegemony, many traditional musicians became increasingly preoccupied with preserving authentic Persian musical traditions. This search for musical authenticity carried on into the post-Revolutionary years, where the notion permeated the Islamic Republic's official stance on acceptable versus unacceptable forms of music. Today, folkloric and traditional genres enjoy the top of the music hierarchy within the sphere of state-sanctioned music. Key instruments include the *tār*, *sitār*, *santūr*, and *niy*, with some variations according to a particular piece's region of origin. The renewed emphasis on traditional Iranian music and instruments reflects Khomeini's quest for cultural purity in the foundational years of the Islamic Republic, during which the new state forged a new, indigenous identity in opposition to the high-speed Westernization of the previous regime. According to Daring, "The idea of tradition, or rather of 'authenticity', appears to be closely linked with that of national or even ethnic identity, and thus indissociable from politics."²⁰² The heightened concern for authenticity is particularly apparent in the criteria used to judge state-sponsored music competitions. In the 15th annual Fajr festival for traditional and regional music, the judging criteria included the following: authenticity of interpretation; refrainment from "the introduction of alien elements"; exclusive use of native and regionally appropriate instruments;

²⁰¹ Nooshin, "Subversion and Countersubversion," 235.

²⁰² Qtd. in Youssefzadeh, "Situation of Music," 42.

the use of poetry native to the region; and accordance with performance traditions.²⁰³ Owing to its perceived cultural authenticity, traditional and folk music was one of the first genres to appear in public concerts after 1979. "Music derived from folk elements encapsulates in sound the essential expressivity of the nation," writes Revill.²⁰⁴ Folk is thus seen as more authentic and more conducive to nationalism; its traditionally oral transmission makes it more democratic and, "most importantly, folk songs and dances were believed to be founded on the rhythmic and melodic traits of native language."²⁰⁵

The desire to reach and promote a pure and authentic musical tradition first made headway during the latter half of the twentieth century—perhaps not coincidentally coinciding with the formulation of revolutionary discourse. The period was marked with increasing foreign interference in Iranian affairs from the British, Russians and Americans, coming to a boiling point with the 1953 CIA-backed coup to overthrow Prime Minister Musaddiq. Foreign influence was also seen to be seeping into Iranian cultural output such as music, which was growing to be increasingly influenced by Western, Arabic and Turkish models. Consequentially, in 1956 Davud Pirnia launched the *Gulhā* (Flowers of Persian Song and Music) radio program to foster appreciation for "true" Persian music. Pirnia believed that the state of Persian music had declined due to inauthentic influence, which

²⁰³ Youssefzadeh, "Situation of Music," 53.

²⁰⁴ Revill, "Music and the Politics of Sound," 602.

²⁰⁵ Revill, "Music and the Politics of Sound," 602.

tended to come from Western, Arabic and Turkish "street cultures" rather than the high artistic traditions of the respective regions. In effect, "singers and musicians on the radio were largely imitating international music, performing songs and tunes that not only had nothing to do with authentic Persian music, but did not follow the norms of international music either."²⁰⁶ Pirnia's program was popular among the intelligentsia, for whom the topic of the degeneration of Persian music had come to a focal point. Moreover, the programs were able to achieve mass popularity with the introduction of the transistor radio, thus "[penetrating] into every village and hamlet throughout Iran."²⁰⁷ The *Gulhā* program lasted until 1979, totaling 886 hours broadcast and 1400 different radio shows. The influence this new return-to-the-roots rhetoric had was profound in the cultural sphere.

Nevertheless, the binds of adhering to absolute cultural authenticity have proven to falter when translated beyond theoretical discourse. Western classical instruments, for example, are now incorporated in many of the so-called "traditional" ensembles of the Fajr festival and its ilk. Pop and western classical music, as genres, have grown to be accepted by the state as a permissible category of music—Irshad lists them as official genres. Moreover, the boundaries of musical genres have grown increasingly blurred. The pop group Orkideh exemplifies this blurring of boundaries: though classified as a

²⁰⁶ Lewisohn, Jane. "Flowers of Persian Song and Music: David Pirnia and the Genesis of the *Golha* Programs," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 1 (2008): 81.

²⁰⁷ Lewisohn, "Flowers of Persian Song," 93.

pop group, their use of traditional instruments and melodies bears little resemblance to the *Los Angelesi*²⁰⁸ style by which Iranian pop music is usually characterized.

Orkideh is one of the foremost women's music bands with government permission. They are a 13-piece ensemble comprised entirely of women, and headed by the *sar sant* player and singer, Orkideh Hajivandi. While the band includes *sar sant* and *siār*, it also includes an array of non-traditional instruments, including the guitar, keyboard, flute, violin and French horn. Their official website opens with a picture of the women dressed in multi-colored headscarves, posing with their respective instruments. An instrumental piece by bandleader Hajivandi serves as a musical introduction, consisting of *casadiār* **nehes** played in increasingly rapid and intricate succession. The band is clearly heavily influenced by traditional music, despite its categorization as a pop ensemble. In an interview with the *International Iranian Music Magazine*, Hajivandi addresses the question of Orkideh's precise genre: "It is necessary to first define pop music. Pop music is no other than our classical and folk music, made more comprehensible...so that the majority can appreciate it." She further advocates the usage of traditional instruments in non-traditional genres. "Using *sar sant* is not a problem here, because the reason for using any instrument in pop music is beauty, and in pop music whatever is more beautiful and

²⁰⁸ *Los Angelesi* refers to the style of pop music originating from the Iranian exilic community in Los Angeles, California. The music blends Persian 6/8 rhythm with international influences such as rap, reggae and Latin.

any element that is more appreciated by the audience can render that music more successful and effective.”²⁰⁹

Orkideh’s use of traditional instruments not only exemplifies the state’s failure to impose categorical boundaries on cultural production, but also serves as a tool of legitimization. Hajivandi is a duly important figure because she is considered to be the first female pop singer after the revolution, one of the first and only women musicians to achieve legitimacy in the public sphere.²¹⁰ According to Kaemmer, “Legitimacy is basically the result of processes involving the gradual acceptance of particular types of music by various groups in a society. When the leaders in a society adopt a music complex or musical style to enhance their prestige or strengthen their position, legitimacy usually follows in their influence.”²¹¹ The state has legitimized both traditional music and music education within its carefully regulated confines. Hajivandi holds a Masters degree in music, specializing in ~~Iranian~~ **Iranian** Thus Hajivandi’s education and expertise with a traditional instrument no doubt factor in her ability to find commercial and public success within the confines of Irshad. Her education thus legitimizes and heightens the prestige of her profession, as does her band’s use of overtly Iranian rhythms and composition. In a climate where pop music is male-dominated and occupies a liminal position of propriety, Orkideh’s traditional flavorings give her more leeway in a heavily structured and regulated state-sponsored space.

²⁰⁹ “An interview with Orkideh Hajivandi, head of Orkideh Group and the first woman singer after the revolution,” *International Iranian Music Magazine*, Accessed 1 April 2012.

²¹⁰ *International Iranian Music Magazine*, “Orkideh Hajivandi.”

²¹¹ Qtd. in Erol, 45.

The melding of Persian traditional music and classical Western instruments is interesting because it provides an example of the state subverting its own rhetoric. Western classical music (as is pop) may now be legalized, but both occupy a nebulous position in the hierarchy of sound. In the case of Western classical music, the fact that instrumental song is placed above singing undoubtedly serves as a tool of legitimization. Further, comparative examples from Turkey and Algeria show the how the imposing threat of an imperial "other" can result in the appropriation of "other" music. In Algeria, raï artists incorporated local traditions with French musical influences in formulating a new indigenous sound while concurrently struggling for independence. In Turkey, the creation of a new Kemalist state in the twentieth century entailed the deliberate creation of a state music that blended Turkish folk music with Western classical influence. The Turkish nationalist sociologist Ziya Gökalp wrote,

There are today three musical genres in our country: Eastern music, Western music and folk music. Which one of them is national for us? We have seen that Eastern music is morbid and non-national. Since folk music represents culture and Western music is the music of our new civilization, neither should be foreign to us. Therefore our national music will be born out of the welding of folk and Western music.²¹²

In Gökalp's view, Turkish folk music symbolized culture while Western music symbolized civilization. The new nationalist narrative thus sought to blend the two while strengthening Turkey's position in the global order, and this position was largely defined against an Imperial "other." In Iran, the

²¹² Qtd. in Erol, "Music, Power and Symbolic Violence," 41.

recent embracing of Western classical music may carry the same implications; even though the "other" is defined antithetically, the state has forged loopholes in its own rhetoric to incorporate "other" elements in culture with the goal of national progress.

Not only has the state contradicted its own message of cultural authenticity, but it has neglected to take into account its intrinsically problematic nature. According to Stokes,

Authenticity is definitely not a property of music, musicians, and their relations to an audience. . . Instead, we should see 'authenticity' is a discursive trope of great persuasive power. It focuses a way of talking about music, a way of saying to outsiders and insiders alike 'this is what is really significant about this music,' 'this is the music that makes us different from other people.'²¹³

Besides the difficulty in delineating just what is and is not truly authentic, the binary is increasingly difficult to apply to globalized modern culture. In the late 1990s, when the Iranian government loosened its grip on cultural isolation, a new generation of youth was introduced to globalization in full force, primarily through the Internet. "Transnational communication networks affect consuming masses, who then learn to be the audiences of a deterritorialized message," writes Dorn. "The homogenized information and styles received through global media, independent of political, religious, or national contexts, guide the cultural practices of these younger generations."²¹⁴ The popular genres of Iranian underground music reflect the realities of a globalized world, where particular styles of music

²¹³ Stokes, *Ethnicity, Identity and Music*, 6-7.

²¹⁴ Dorn, "The Deterritorialization of Art," 143.

and sound are no longer bound to specific places. The resulting creation of deterritorialized culture flouts the deliberate creation of national culture, as seen in the policies of Iran's Irshad. Such policies, as previously mentioned, hierarchize art on a basis of cultural authenticity, thus favoring styles that play into the national identity espoused by the state. Dorn writes, "Some citizens have rebelled against what they call 'invented folklore' (or socially reconstructed art), seeing in it the symbolic projection of state control over popular culture."²¹⁵ The styles of underground music revert this invented folklore, at times either rejecting it altogether or appropriating it within its own reconstructed framework. Moreover, deterritorialization is, at core, harmful to both nationalism and patriarchy, both of which rely on the politics of space in their definitions. By divorcing the importance of location from culture, conventional modes of national identity are shaken, as is the patriarchal public/private divide in men's and women's spheres.

Authenticity in Poetry and Language

One of the ways in which Irshad delineates authenticity is through the use of classical Persian poetry as lyrics. Within the permissible contexts for female musical performance, the use of classical Persian poetry as lyrical content serves as a legitimizing tool, as a way to draw in unique history and culture. As previously mentioned, Shi'i mourning rituals often

²¹⁵ Dorn, "The Deterritorialization of Art," 147.

employ the use of poetry, as do the traditional and folk genres of music. In the state-sponsored Fajr Music Festival, the use of poetry in song is one of the criteria used to judge musical authenticity. Further, the radio channel *Radio Payam*, launched in 1995, intersperses poetry among its various music programs.²¹⁶ These examples demonstrate the ways in which music and poetry are bound in contexts of permissibility. While the musical use of poetry is not limited to women, their marginal role as entertainers makes poetry a more powerful tool for legitimacy; it can serve as the bonus needed to obtain permission to perform. Poetry, then, has the power to push women's musical performance over the fine line separating the acceptable from the obscene.

Poetry has long been inextricably bound to Iranian nationalism, serving as the site of asserting Iranian linguistic and ethnic identity. During World War I, for example, when the Young Turks revived territorial claims over Iranian Azerbaijan, the musician Abu al-Qasim 'Arif composed a *taṣnīf* song urging Azerbaijanis to align themselves with Iran through embracing Persian language and poetry. 'Arif's lyrics made direct mention of the canonical 13th century Persian poet Sa'adi as an example of what the Azerbaijanis should adopt as a show of national solidarity with Iran.²¹⁷ Poetry, here, is a symbol of nation and language.

Poetry has been used as lyrical content by both authorized and unauthorized bands, albeit for different purposes. Bands and

²¹⁶ Nooshin, Laudan. "“Tomorrow is Ours”: Re-imagining Nation, Performing Youth in the New Iranian Pop Music," in *Music and the Play of Power*, ed. Laudan Nooshin (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 254.

²¹⁷ Chehabi, "Music and Nation-Building," 145.

singers with government permission often use poetry as a tool for achieving official legitimization, or use its metaphorical language and religious symbolism as ways to avert censorship.²¹⁸ Censorship and legitimization do not carry the same weight for underground musicians, and therefore it can be assumed that the use of classical poetry has thus risen organically out of an unadulterated cultural context. Is the use of poetry—an art deeply entrenched in national identity—thus more purely nationalist for underground musicians? It can be argued that this is so, because underground musicians and particularly women do not operate under the same socially constructed concepts of culture than do musicians with permission.

In some cases, underground musicians find their music intrinsically linked with poetry. "[Persian] is a very poetic language," says Salome. And poetry is very important in Iran - every house has a book of Hafez poems. "Maybe that's why hip-hop is so popular."²¹⁹ Another rapper, Nazila, explains that the majority of rappers in Tehran use classical poetry as lyrics, "because it's so near to our lives."²²⁰ Other underground artists, such as O-Hum and Mohsen Namjoo, also make extensive use of classical poetry in their songs. The artist Rana Farhan uses classical poetry with her jazz and blues-infused music, and garnered international attention with the 2009 release of her single "Drunk With Love," which uses Rumi's poetry as lyrics. "Rumi and Hafez were the blues of their time," says Farhan.

²¹⁸ Nooshin, "Tomorrow is Ours," 251.

²¹⁹ Khaleeli, Homa. "Salome: Straight Outta Tehran," *The Guardian*, January 5, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2011/may/10/salome-iran-hip-hop-interview>.

²²⁰ "An Interview with Nazila, female rapper from Iran," *Couscous Global*, 19 February 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PjXqJl5HVbQ&feature=player_embedded#!.

“When you put their verses with the blues, it’s like they’ve always belonged there.”²²¹ Underground artists are thus breaking the state-imposed conventional pairing of poetry with traditional music. Moreover, traditional music is also making way in the underground scene. One of the most famous contemporary female artists, Mahsa Vahdat, plays traditional music and Persian folk songs, yet remains underground because of her solo singing. Further, traditional sounds permeate the music of other genres. According to Salome, “There are people that use traditional instruments to make beats so they can make the sound more Iranian... We have rhythms that don’t exist in Western music, like 6/8. There are people that use it in pop music.”²²² This merging of cultural influence exemplifies a reconciliation of national identity with the pulse of globalized culture.

The underground rapper Ghogha also uses Persian poetry as lyrical influence, but her choice in poetry is unique, yet fitting. The twenty-something Tehran native cites Forough Farrokhzad as a personal and lyrical influence; one of her songs, “Arūsak Kūkī (Wind -up Doll)” takes its name from one of the late poet’s works. In a personal interview, Ghogha says, “[Farrokhzad’s poems] have a special property, being feminine, erotic and being written from a woman’s perspective, which is so forbidden and has a long history. She was so free. . . I think we Iranian women have the same issues with society that Forough had,

²²¹Smith, Emily Esfahani. “Persian Poetry Gets the Blues,” *Wall Street Journal*, 30 August 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111903639404576516552257206550.html>.

²²²Stransky, “Iranian Rapper Salome.”

and we can find our selves in her poems."²²³ Ghogha's use of a modern female voice as lyrical inspiration is powerful: not only is Farrokhzad's literary "voice" a precursor to contemporary underground female vocalists, but her status as a cultural icon infuses Ghogha's raps with a distinct Iranianness, a sense of cultural propriety and authenticity. While her musical style has its roots in the west, Ghogha's poetry-laced lyrics infuse it with national character.

Moreover, the lyrical spirit of underground women musicians reflects a form of cultural reconciliation by use of language. While Persian is the dominant language of underground music, English is growing increasingly common, with musicians often alternating between languages from song to song. Lyricists have found ways to justify using either language, often in accordance with consciousness of their national identity in the context of the globalized world. When the Persian language is used, it is often because the singer or rapper recognizes in it an intrinsic value in relation to the music at hand. Salome has stated that Persian is naturally suited to rap music due to its melodic capabilities. The same, in reverse, is often said for English lyrics; rock musicians, for example, tend to claim that English sounds better with their musical style than does Persian. Singer Maral of the Plastic Wave echoes this sentiment, as does the band 127, which exclusively sings in English. Both 127 and Farzane Zamen go further to add that their aim in using English lyrics is to reach an international audience. Moreover, language is not

²²³ Ghogha in discussion with the author. April 2012.

always viewed as a tool for achieving authenticity, according to 127. On their lyrical language of choice, 127 says,

We have to become universal. In our opinion, even if we want to demonstrate our native and regional spirit in any kind of music the way to convey it would be through the music itself and not the language of the lyrics. . . Using Persian lyrics on western music doesn't necessarily bring about the Iranianization of that music; many have tried that and although the language has changed to Persian the feeling remains western.²²⁴

The globalization of music therefore has led to the deterritorialization of language as artists forge new ways to blend musical and linguistic styles. Using Persian or English lyrics thus denotes practicality and aesthetic functionality rather than nationalism. Moreover, the desire to reach international masses is a driving factor, made possible by the deterritorialized space of the Internet. For example, while Salome raps in Persian, she provides English translations of all of her lyrics posted on YouTube. Language is thus reduced to a means to reach the masses rather than an ends denoting cultural authenticity.

The lyrical content of underground female musicians is varied, with songs about love and despair, politics and everyday life. Farzane Zamen typically sings of life and relationships, and any possibly political messages are hidden. Her song "You've Gone Cold Tonight," tells of an emotional gulf between lovers: "your eyes never lie / I know what goes on in your heart." Another song, "Shadows," describes feelings of personal failure in contrast to an unnamed "they": "I'm not a soldier, but I think I am in a war / I try to save my power, but it seems I am

²²⁴ Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 483.

not as strong as they are." The song is peppered with bleak verbiage like "shadows," "falling down," "endless road," and "loser." In the context of discussing the politics of Iranian women musicians, it is tempting to draw political meanings from Zamen's lyrics. However Zamen herself says that her main lyrical subject is everyday life, not politics. Similarly, the singer Maral is not an admitted political artist. Most of her songs, like Zamen's, concern personal feelings and relationships, with no overt political meanings. However, her song "Autonomy" is clear in its gender consciousness. To a steadily rising electro-beat, she sings with increasing urgency of inner turmoil and despair:

I couldn't run, couldn't hide, couldn't help myself
I had to not talk about the way I felt
I tried to write, tried to talk, tried to be someone
But all my thoughts and my plans, they didn't work.

The feeling of disappointment with oneself is similar to Zamen's "Shadows," but Maral directly brings gender into the picture by singing, "I wanted to be a man who is strong." The song ends on a dark and ambiguous note, with the repetition of the line, "Now I'm cutting my feet, I won't live a lie, I won't kill my dreams." The subject of Maral's "Autonomy," is simultaneously defeated and optimistic; she is at once mired in "the mud of emptiness" and struggling to free her dreams with a knife. While the songs of Zamen and Maral can be interpreted as political, their lyrics are framed in a personal context, unlike overtly political songs that typically are unequivocal in targeting a large lyrical audience. Moreover, it is important to note that neither Maral nor Zamen label themselves as political artists,

unlike others who have carved out a niche of revolutionary dissent through their already subversive sounds.

'Conscious' Music and Nationalism

Despite underground music's inherently subversive nature, it is not always overtly political in lyrical content. Rap artists, however, tend to be more political, and the lyrics of the prominent female rappers Salome and Ghogha, demonstrate this trend. In an interview with a Swedish newspaper, Ghogha said, "When I walk, it is politics. When I talk, it is politics. I just can't keep quiet anymore."²²⁵ Ghogha's lyrics also portray a high level of consciousness of gender issues; her song "Arūsak KŪkī" is a lyrical diatribe of the state of women's rights in Iran. It opens with a lullabye-esque melody, evolving into a charging hip hop beat. The song posits the socially constructed ideal of womanhood as the cookie doll, a powerless pawn "between the hands of men." She continues, "I've heard the voices of thousands of women suffering." The suffering to which she alludes concerns socially (or politically) imposed restrictions on women's freedom, visualized with physically constraining imagery:

Women are beautiful and beauty is not a sin
Do you have a problem with the creation? Then it's not
God's?
You've taken her beauty from her and imprisoned it
You've put a wall around it, stood up and closed it with a
chain.

²²⁵ Sandén, Kinga. "She Can't Keep Quiet Any Longer (translation)," *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* 14 April 2010, http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=382325262333.

Ghogha's culprit is the male sex, which she calls weak-minded in one verse, and the weaker sex in another. Her mention of beauty and sin is telling, given the implications of the ban on woman singers such as herself. Throughout the song, she repeats her status as a lone woman, set amidst dark imagery: "I come from a land of dolls / I smell of the night / I come from the dream." Her view in the song is one of pessimism; she stands alone "on the brink of the cold season... nothing will remain except a few drops of blood." Her initial blaming of men gives way to a dark universalism: "Lives are a fantasy and the species is sleeping." She addresses her "sisters and brothers," calling upon national action. The song's unofficial music video is a montage of images from the Green Movement, first focusing on women protesters and then zooming out to larger crowd photographs, echoing the lyrical structure. The final lines mention Forough Farrokhzad by name, calling upon her to rest in peace.

"Arūsak Kūkī" is only one of many political songs, dubbed "conscious" music by some members of the underground scene. Salome defines her own music as "conscious rap," calling it a genre "where you are socially and politically aware, you're aware of your environment, you know what you want from your environment, what people are doing around you, you are aware of what politicians are trying to do, and you try to make other people aware of it."²²⁶ One needs only a brief introduction to Salome's music to notice the overtly political nature of her

²²⁶ Stransky, "Iranian Rapper Salome."

lyrics, which are not masked by opaque metaphor. Much of the time, Salome calls upon her audience for action: "Don't keep quiet, because if you do, it will be your turn soon." After the post-election uprising in 2009, Salome recorded the song "Grown Green on this Land" in response. "We got to be united/ We must have a common goal then act / We never stay silent to keep our heads up," she raps, repeatedly calling for unity and solidarity. The lyrical antagonist does not seem to be the Iranian government, but rather external forces who are perceived to be meddling in the protests out of their own interests. "If someone interferes, that is where the problems begin," she advises, turning the tide towards foreign interveners and propaganda. She adds: "We are not the people of Saddam, / or the victims of Taliban / Go ahead with the sanctions as long as you want." The song was posted on YouTube along with an English translation of the lyrics, performed in Persian. It plays against a video of Salome singing into a microphone, edited in the vein of pop-art, with her face and gestures swathed in shades of purple and electric blue. Across the screen, the translated lyrics flash by in time with the music, peppered with repeated keywords such as family, mother, brother, sister, home, country, and soil. Salome uses the family as a symbol of the nation, calling upon her "brothers and sisters" to stand united against "the stranger." "We will get united under the colors of our flag," she raps, evoking blatantly patriotic themes and imagery. This patriotism permeates the verses of Salome's other songs,

most notably the song "Constant Pain of Mine," in which she raps:

If the nation wants, the sea will split
If the nation wants, alchemy would be found
If the nation wants, the (so called) winner would lose
If the nation wants, this homeland will be built.

Salome's overt use of nationalism illustrates the ways in which underground artists have forged new nationalisms. This runs contrary to the state's binary classification of music, in which unauthorized music is posited as culturally inappropriate and unpatriotic. In other "conscious" underground music, artists often use lyrics that do not necessarily contradict dominant political discourses. Many artists, for example, use their songs to express support for the Iranian nuclear program, which is seen as an issue of national pride. Moreover, after the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003, songs across the underground spectrum began to espouse increasingly patriotic rhetoric.²²⁷ These current trends go further to elucidate the failure of the government to impose a nationalist interpretation of cultural regulation. The boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable, and between cultural purity and westoxication have been blurred to the point that they have become effectively meaningless.

Subverting the State

We have seen the ways in which the state forges legitimacy in women's performative spaces, but what about cultural legitimacy among the populace? Have underground women artists

²²⁷ Zahir, Sanam. "The Music of the Children of the Revolution: The State of Music and Emergence of the Underground Music in the Islamic Republic of Iran with an Analysis of its Lyrical Content," (Masters diss., University of Arizona, 2008), 79.

achieved legitimacy through subversion and the grassroots building of performance space? Although many artists struggle to receive permits from Irshad and create a living—or even just a practicable hobby—from their music, the concept of subversion has somewhat complicated the process. Subversion has gradually become an overt theme in Iranian artistic output, and artists choose to subvert the state in various ways—in political lyrics, their choice of genre, or method of performance. The very message of subversion becomes muddled when government permits come into play; this point can be illustrated by the case of pop music in Iran since the lifting of its ban in 1997. In the years prior, when pop music was prohibited in lieu of the state narrative of cultural purity and anti-West posturing, pop music (like women musicians) was inherently subversive in the Iranian context. Apolitical love songs and global radio hits came to carry political weight amid the state's cries against globalization and cultural imperialism. While the message may not have necessarily been pro-globalization, it is clear that by producing and purchasing banned products on the black market, consumers sent a message to the government on consumer autonomy and the futility of cultural regulation. In turn, however, the legalization of pop removed its ability to subvert and challenge the status quo. "In the same way," writes Nooshin, "full legalization may bring advantages to rock musicians, but there may also be unforeseen consequences: for a music that largely defines itself as alternative, the official stamp of approval that would necessarily accompany legalization may not be wholly

desirable."²²⁸ Musicians, then, must weigh artistic freedom and financial gains. In a personal interview Farzane Zamen explains, "in financial stuff mainstream music is successful, because of advertising and promotions in national TV and radio and newspapers, and performing in big concerts." However, "underground music can be more creative because no one checks it."²²⁹ Zamen herself does not have a permit, and did not express a desire to apply. For Zamen and other likeminded musicians, creative freedom is worth more than the benefits of government approval. "Coming overground," writes Nooshin, "represents a trade-off, an exchange of independence and control for the benefits of operating in the public domain."²³⁰ Salome echoes Zamen's sentiment:

Some of these underground artists want to be mainstream, want to be talking to the masses, but they can't because the government is not letting them... I always want to make it clear that I would be underground no matter what. Even if the Iranian government wasn't like this, I wouldn't try to get any kind of permission from any government anyway. That's just going to limit my creativity. Governments shouldn't be meddling in this kind of stuff regardless.²³¹

A member of the rock band Amertad offers a similar point: "When we first started this work, we weren't thinking about permits at all. We thought the best thing was to do what we liked... if we wanted to shout, to shout; if we wanted to have a female singer, to have a female singer."²³² The institution of Irshad and other similar regulating bodies are thus almost irrelevant to musicians. While such regulations are important in setting the

²²⁸ Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 475.

²²⁹ Farzane Zamen in discussion with the author, December 2011.

²³⁰ Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 480.

²³¹ Stransky, "Iranian Rapper Salome."

²³² Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 477.

tone of the musical environment of Iran, they tend to have little direct impact on the many performers who flout the concept of mujaviz altogether.

As Salome and Farzane Zamen note, obtaining mujaviz does not necessarily give a musician more freedom to perform. Women, in particular, still face censorship with government permission—this censorship, however, means that their pictures are not published and their music is hardly promoted. One woman with permission to perform said, “When we get a permit, it means that we are accepted. Then why aren’t our CDs of mixed programs released?”²³³ Another remarked, “women’s music is just a name, because no trace of it will remain. No photos, no sound, nothing. I think it is in vain. We’d also like our work to be reflected.”²³⁴ In an interview with Orkideh Hajivandi, she also notes the lack of opportunities for women musicians who have government permission—namely their inability to “be seen and be famous.” This invisibility has affected women’s musical output; with less publicity and fewer chances to perform and produce, there is not much incentive to create new music, says Hajivandi. Women’s music, at least in the state-approved sector, has thus become “repetitive.” While Hajivandi herself has enjoyed more success and fame than most other women in her trade, she voices the need for more opportunities for women musicians. “As we can see,” she says, “this support of women is obviously made in cinema and sports.”²³⁵ It is therefore evident that working

²³³ “Women singers,” *Ravayat*.

²³⁴ “Women singers,” *Ravayat*.

²³⁵ “Orkideh Hajivandi,” *International Iranian Music Magazine*.

within the confines of Irshad has little value beyond limited publicity. Not only do such artists relinquish their creative freedom, but because they operate within the state's sphere they must abide by regulations to a greater degree than those who only perform underground.

Deconstructing the Cultural and Spatial Binary

Iran's music regulation authorities have created a binary opposition in culture, dividing those with governmental permission and those without, and operating upon all of the according connotations of both sides of the spectrum. In the framework and rhetoric of organizations such as Irshad, permissible music is clearly and deliberately defined as culturally authentic and within the bounds of Islamic law. This has additionally meant that permissible music resides within the nationalist discourse, using subtexts of traditional and folk sound and classical Persian poetry to drive home its indigenous nature. On the other side of the spectrum, underground music is connoted to exist counter to the ideals of cultural authenticity and nation-building. However, authorized musicians such as Orkideh have already shown that imposing strict boundaries on cultural production is difficult to effectively execute. Moreover, permissible genres of music are not all indigenous to Iran (for example, pop and Western classical music), yet have been appropriated into the sphere of acceptability. This is problematized because official rhetoric on culture largely relies on binary oppositions in both national identity and cultural

output. Further, underground music artists have incorporated some modes of nationalist expression (as delineated by the state) in their own various sounds. Most notably, the use of traditional instruments and of classical Persian poetry have become increasingly popular with underground artists. The ultimate effect is a breakdown of binary imposed by cultural administration, and the creation of a new alternative nationalism that subverts rules on culture and, in the case of women musicians, gender roles. The failure of the Iranian state to govern culture on account of national identity could be due to "a deep consciousness of a much older national identity that predates Islam by at least a thousand years and to which music and poetry are central."²³⁶ While states can influence national identity through the use of patriotic imagery and narratives, the nationalism that ultimately prevails is not prescribed by the state but reflects the realities faced by citizens at the grass roots.

Additionally, space has also been binarized between the public and private poles. Recent cultural developments, such as underground space, have deconstructed the notions of public and private space: the private, such as the underground basement, has now become public, and other liminal spaces such as the Internet further complicate the spatial divide. Today, women's performance typically occupies a liminal space, neither public nor private, due to the nature of cultural and spatial regulation by the Islamic Republic.

²³⁶ Nooshin, "Subversion and Countersubversion," 236.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Despite the difficulties women musicians face in being heard, many underground artists do not view their gender as any more of an obstacle than their music simply being underground. The musicians Salome, Farzane Zamen, Nazila, and Maral of The Plastic Wave all describe supportive family backgrounds, in which their parents often encouraged them to learn music. In response to governmental disapproval, women have created new ways of negotiation. In an interview with the Freemuse organization, Mahsa Vahdat bemoans restrictions on women's performance, yet states, "I can cope with it, in a way. I can sing inside my country for my friends, in private concerts, for myself, for my heart."²³⁷ In Vahdat's case, coping also means performing concerts outside of Iran; and her resorting to international spaces has earned Vahdat fame beyond Iranian borders. Others, for whom obtaining permission to perform is not as readily an option, are even more insistent that their gender is simply not an issue. Farinaz cites her lack of political lyrics as a reason for why she has not faced major problems, yet the highly political Salome also describes a relative freedom: "I'm not facing any more

²³⁷ "Mahsa Vahdat," *Interview with Freemuse Organization, YouTube*, 2 September 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koQoqXrqjHg&feature=player_embedded.

obstacles than a man because they cannot perform in Iran either. If you're already working underground your gender doesn't matter, so I don't care if they're trying to ban me or not."²³⁸ Salome, however, points to a possible class-rooted reason for this; her family is "educated" and "culturally rich" and therefore afforded her more artistic freedom than one might find with a working-class background. Any possible risk of arrest or imprisonment is seen as a gender neutral because male underground musicians are also at risk. Being female, therefore, doesn't carry the same weight as in state-controlled spaces, which must abide by the regulations of cultural administration. In essence, the alleged importance of space, gender roles, and national authenticity, are deconstructed and redefined in underground women's music.

Women musicians in Iran occupy an inherently subversive performative space, which is why such space is heavily regulated and administered by state bodies such as Irshad. As musicians, they possess the power to stir emotions, as well as the power to subvert rules of propriety and ideology through music's interpretive nature. As women, their voices are significant because they have been silenced. The power of the human voice is based on its individuality, its corporeality, and its propensity for expression, for opinion, and for disturbing preordained spaces of sound. When this power is located within the female voice, its potential for subversion is doublefold. This subversion is significant because it weakens the ideological and

²³⁸ Stransky, "Iranian Rapper Salome."

structural power of decision-making bodies such as the Islamic Republic and Irshad. Subversion picks out flaws in regulation, and ultimately expands individual space for personal expression. Such can be seen in the case of underground women musicians in contemporary Iran, who have forged new performative spaces that have often inadvertently undermined cultural regulation. This renegotiation of women's performative space is of national significance, not only because it subverts the state, but because the legal spaces for women's performance have been deconstructed, along with the inherent binaries of nationalism.

The history of women's voice and performance exemplifies how this performative space has emerged and evolved in Iranian history. The first major pioneering public female voice was that of Qurrat al-'Ayn, a poet, preacher, and orator. She shocked the public by transgressing normative behavior for women; she unveiled herself in public and spoke her opinions on issues of gender and religion. Her literary voice, as a poet, was thus given "body," and was accordingly made even more revolutionary. While Qurrat al-'Ayn's voice succumbed to strangulation as part of her state execution, her experience proved to be an early sign of coming change for women's voice and performance. It also concerned the trespassing of the female voice in public space—an act unheard of at her time. The fact that her transgressions occurred in public is important, because the spatial politics of women's performance have historically been based on a flawed public/private dichotomy. This dichotomy would prove to become increasingly meaningless as women's performance continued to

redefine public and private space. Another poet, Forough Farrokhzad, similarly pushed boundaries of female vocal expression in the mid-twentieth century. Not only did Farrokhzad partake in oral recitations of her poetry, also "giving body to her voice," but her voice discussed private matters of sexuality and thus transgressed boundaries of privacy.

During the time of Forough Farrokhzad, music occupied a very different social space than it does today. Female musicians such as Mahvash and Qamar were emerging as public musical voices, the first female superstars of Iran. Their emergence was the culmination of a decades-long reorganization of the social spaces of music and gender. Music, in the end of the nineteenth century, had gradually increased its public prominence due largely to nation-building motives from the reigning Qajar dynasty. In an effort to build Iran's army in accordance with European models, Nasir ad-Din Shah opted for the creation of military bands and musical education. Music's emerging public space was thus indelibly entwined with nationalism and building a modern Iranian nation. Moreover, with the help of 'Ali Naqi Vaziri, women were eventually incorporated into formal music education. Thus, while women musicians had long been present in Iran, the reorganization of musical space—which formalized it for public listening—made way for women's performance. As such, this formalization gave music much-needed legitimacy in Iranian society, a legitimacy which was extended to the emergence of women's performative space. While early singers—most notably, Mahvash—were subject to criticism for their lifestyles, large swaths of the Iranian

populace identified with their songs. Mahvash, as a singer with ties to prostitution, was an unlikely icon among the traditional urban working classes; however her music's ability to speak to the masses made her a figure of significant social power. Years later, the singer Googoosh made waves as the biggest female superstar in Iranian history. While her popularity was undeniable, the social currents in a then pre-revolutionary Iran made her an unwitting political symbol. Modernization, which was perceived to entail Westernization, took musical shape in Googoosh. Critiques of modernization, such as Jalal Al-i Ahmad's theory of *gharbzādigī* (westoxication), often posited the Iranian woman as the emblem of social ills. As such, women's performative space was up for redefinition.

The themes underlying *gharbzādigī* included notions of cultural purity and authenticity. The post-revolutionary Islamic Republic was founded upon such ideals, which found their way to laws on music and gender. Music's inherent subversive power led Khomeini to embark on strict censorship in the immediate aftermath of the revolution; only very specific patriotic genres were allowed. Women's voices, too, were swiftly censored. No longer could women perform solo for mixed audiences; they could only sing in public as part of ensembles. The latter concept aims to strip the individuality of the voice, and thus its social power. However, as music regulation eased in the following decades, women's performative space has expanded and has been redefined. The set of allowed music genres grew to include genres such as pop and Western classical music, music lessons became

more available, and music gradually became more evident in public life. The government body in charge of music regulation, Irshad, created new public space for women's performance in the shape of the Jasmine Festival, a grand event imbued with symbols of nation and state upon every nuance. The question of whether such state-regulated spaces are beneficial to women musicians is debatable, however. Most view them with skepticism, and some even imply that occupiers of this space lack legitimacy.

If state spaces are deemed illegitimate, what are legitimate spaces? At roughly the same time the Iranian government loosened musical restrictions in the late 1990s, an underground music scene was formulating in private urban spaces. Underground musicians could play genres that were illegal, such as rap and heavy metal, and laws silencing women's voices were essentially obsolete. The conventional organization of public and private space was thus redefined. Women could perform in these private underground spaces, yet just how private were they? Is a basement rock concert really private? In essence, underground space has become liminal, between bounds of public and private. There is precedent for this liminality, however: traditionally accepted spaces such as weddings and funerals are also liminal, and have also provided space for women's performance. Yet underground space goes even further to deconstruct this spatial dichotomy, particularly through the use of the Internet.

As a global and liminal space, the Internet has allowed the current generation of Iranian youth to reach the purportedly unreachable: in the case of music, it is free musical expression.

Women use the Internet as performative space, where they can post music and engage with the underground community in ways that would have been impossible in non-virtual space. Not only has the Internet provided a platform for underground performance, but it has also deterritorialized the concept of cultural authenticity. Irshad has created a binary classification of legal and illegal music, in which legal music with permission is framed as indigenous, traditional, and authentic. Loopholes in this binary occur when considering the recent legalization of pop music, as well as the nature of modern globalized culture. The notion of cultural authenticity is, in actuality, nothing more than an ideological goal with no bearing on the reality of artistic production. In real life, boundaries between genres and nations are blurred. This has all been aided by the recent growth in wired-in Internet users. Moreover, the Internet has allowed for the interaction between Iranians in the diaspora and inside the country. This has carried over to women's music, so that musicians living in the diaspora have contact with the Iranian underground scene, and are even considered a part of it. Physical space has thus become deterritorialized; this presents a significant problem for state constructions of nationalism, which rely heavily on the politics of place.

In sum, there are three related binaries at play in the organization of women's performative space in Iran: the male/female binary, in which women's voices transgress norms; the nationalist binary of authenticity versus the foreign, which has been deconstructed by global culture; and the spatial binary

between public and private, in which women have found space for performance in paradoxically liminal spaces. The final point is that state organization of space has failed, just as the regulation of culture has failed. Music and the voice, with their emotional and interpretive power, have succeeded in forging new performative ground for women.

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