Popular music in post-revolutionary Iran: concepts, definitions, and restrictions

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Abstract

Despite the restrictions imposed on Iran's music atmosphere in the years after the 1979 Islamic revolution, different music genres survived and overcame these restrictions. Westernized popular music (*musiqi-e pāp*) and its presence in public space has been one of the controversial topics among Islamic theologians after the revolution, ranging from complete outlawing to freedom of all its forms. In the first decades following the revolution, the government marginalized Westernized popular music more than any other genre by trying to eradicate everything that had a sign of the Pahlavi Modernization-Westernization era. After the reforms of 1998 and fundamental changes in the country's policies in various fields, musiqi-e pāp overcame the restrictions and their intensity. After a long absence, women were allowed to appear at music venues as musicians, and young musicians were allowed to perform and get authorization to publish their music officially. However, these restrictions took many forms and were manifested in banning women's solo singing and dancing and the need for authorizations with complicated procedures for music production.

Based on analyzing written work around Iran's popular music and autoethnographic research, this thesis examines how the dynamics of restriction changed over the years by changing state policies and the development of technological advancements such as the internet and how both the Islamic government and the people made compromises over time. Combining the concepts discussed in scholarly works about Iranian popular music with an autoethnographic perspective will help redefine the concepts as an insider and determine their place and importance in the post-revolutionary popular music scene.

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Chapter one: The history of popular music since the 1979 Islamic revolution

Introduction

The Islamic Revolution of Iran was an influential historical event for Iranian art and culture, and in particular, music. Music in Iran has witnessed numerous changes after the Islamic revolution. Since the year of the revolution in 1979, various restrictions have been imposed on music and musicians. Musicians and audiences have been impacted by the government's severe crackdown on music – ranging from young individuals interested in popular music to traditional performers. Meanwhile, religion has played a cardinal role in the post-revolutionary music scene. People from different social classes, but mostly from Islamic backgrounds, embraced the revolution by adhering to religious aspects of it; such as, Islamizing the constitution and implementing Islamic laws. Iranian society can be considered a religious society. It is a country where Islam, with a *Shi'ite* approach, is dominant in people's daily practices, a country where the Islamic call to prayer (*azan*) is an integral part of the sonic environment of cities and villages, and a country where people gather in religious ceremonies. The Iranian revolution can be considered a popular movement,[1] because it had social acceptance and support of the majority in its time.

According to Fatemi, music in Iran can be divided into three general categories: classical music (*musiqi-e clāssic*), traditional music (*musiqi-e sonnati*) or (*musiqi-e mardomi*) and popular music (*musiqi-e āmme pasand*) or (*musiqi-e mardom pasand*). [2] This thesis uses the term musiqi-e pāp to refer to Western popular music. Musiqi-e pāp is the same as musiqi-e āmme pasand in

[1] Gurbuz Vedat, "The Iranian Revolution," *Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Dergisi* 58 (2003): 108.
[2] Sasan Fatemi, *Peydayesh Musiqi-e Mardom pāsand dār Iran* (Tehran: Mahour 1392/2013),11.

Fatemi's definition, with the difference that in this thesis, when the term musiqi-e pāp is used, it clearly and only refers to Western popular music as an umbrella term that also includes jazz, rock, rap, and hip-hop. This type of music is performed with Western instruments or synthesizers. Electric guitar, drums, and strings are part of it, and this music is in line with a piece of music that has commercial aspects and is played with memorable lyrics and catchy melodies. There is no specific term to separate Western popular music style from other forms of popular music in Iran, like *tasnif*, which was popular in the past, but now is categorizable into Iranian traditional music. However, usually, when people in Iran today use the term popular music (*musiqi-e pāp*), it means popular music with Western elements. After the Modernization process explained in subsequent pages, *musiqi-e motrebi* and *tasnif* (the ancestors of what is known as popular music today)[3] continued to exist, but, in other forms and with a less popular approach and Western popular music replaced *musiqi-e motrebi* and *tasnif* among many people's musical taste.

The restrictions imposed on music are more palpable in the realm of musiqi-e pāp. By examining the limitations surrounding musiqi-e pāp, it is possible to grasp a more profound understanding of Iranian society and the political view of the new government toward music and public space after the 1979 revolution. Public space is represented by the co-presence of the government and the people, with the former exerting an interfering and restricting role. Examples of such spaces include public venues, parks, and streets. By reviewing the written works on the events and history of popular music after the revolution, this thesis aims to provide a time frame and an accurate depiction of what is known as Iran's Westernized popular music (*musiqi-e pāp*) after the Islamic revolution. Musiqi-e pāp cannot have a precise definition without considering the restrictions imposed on it. These restrictions changed various aspects of musiqi-e pāp, affecting

[3] Sasan Fatemi, *Peydayesh Musiqi-e Mardom pāsand dār Iran* (Tehran: Mahour 1392/2013),79.

the timelines and patterns of its development. If we separated the two, we would have a different kind of music entirely.

Arjomand mentions two factors that lead to the collapse of the social structure of domination in revolutions: “The structure’s internal weaknesses and vulnerabilities, and the concerted action of the social groups and individuals opposing it.”[4] The Islamic Revolution had the support of different layers of society from ordinary people up to politicians. The *Shah's* Modernization failed because the Iranian people's dominant ideology and culture mixed with Islamic beliefs were not seen in it, and during the Pahlavi monarchy's Modernizing initiatives, authoritarianism, and the repression of the nation's religious identity coexisted.[5] Modernization began with the reform of education in the first Pahlavi era, (1930) and in the era of Shah Mohammadreza, it developed into a planned structure and principal policy of the state.[6] The Modernization process, and its tendency to Western culture, turned into a form of threat to Iran's religious society.[7] During the Iranian Islamic Revolution, the entire *Shi'ite* hierocracy turned against the governing party.[8] Many organizations and people who wanted the King (*shah)* gone, but who did not desire a theocracy, embraced Khomeini's rule as a revolution leader in the year 1978.[9] With the victory of the Islamic Revolution on February 11, 1979, Khomeini came to Iran as a religious leader, and the era of the Islamic Republic officially began.

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[4] Said A. Arjomand, “Iran’s Islamic Revolution in Comparative Perspective,” *World Politics* 38, no. 3 (1986): 383, https://doi.org/10.2307/2010199.
[5] Mahmood Shahabi, “The Iranian moral panic over video: A brief history and a policy analysis,” In *Media, Culture and Society in Iran*, (Routledge, 2007),125.
[6] Gholam Khiabany, “The Iranian press, state, and civil society,” In *Media, Culture and Society in Iran*, (Routledge, 2007), 28.
[7] Vedat, “The Iranian Revolution,”108.
[8] Arjomand, “Iran’s Islamic Revolution,”389.
[9] Ibid., 390.

According to Nooshin, the reacceptance of musiqi-e pāp into the "public sphere" as one of the most visible markers of modernity has sparked a complex and intensely emotional discussion about Iran's future in a more globally interconnected world; "a debate that draws on a range of discourses, including the role of tradition in modernity and local resistance to global hegemony."[10]

In this chapter, I aim to discuss the limitations imposed on musiqi-e pāp following the Islamic revolution. These restrictions can be examined from different perspectives, and the historical events that influenced them. By examining the works of Nooshin and Siamduost, this chapter redefines underground music in Iran and how it is used in discourses. This thesis paints a broad image of a winding route through which musiqi-e pāp has rediscovered itself. By looking at the works of Iranian music scholars, in this thesis, an attempt has been made to review their results and definitions of musiqi-e pāp after the revolution, how this music has been limited and how these limitations have been reduced, or which of them remains in use until the date of this thesis. Musiqi-e pāp has appeared in fields like cinema since the revolution, and these appearances frequently express restrictions by using critical language, such as the movie *Santouri* which is discussed in chapter two. The third chapter discusses musiqi-e pāp and the presence of women within it. Writing about Iranian Western popular music after the revolution and its limitations is impossible without considering the role of women in the musiqi-e pāp scene because women have been subjected to these limitations more severely. The experience of living in Iran and being in the field, attending popular music concerts in Tehran, and also experiencing events such as the release of the first album of the *Arian* band, which is discussed in the third chapter, experiencing and hearing rumors

[10] Laudan Nooshin, "Subversion and Countersubversion: Power, Control, and Meaning in the New Iranian Pop Music," In *Music, Power, and Politics* (Routledge, 2004),231.

and speculations about the movie *Santouri* which is discussed in the second chapter, and using the term "underground music" in a conversation with a friend, which is discussed in the first chapter, has given the author a vision to be able to have a comprehensive familiarity at the case studies and the works of the mentioned scholars and reviewing their opinions by adding personal view on concepts.

In this thesis, I have specifically examined the works of Laudan Nooshin and Nahid Siamdoust. They live in the Western countries and have lived outside Iran for many years. Their works were written by traveling to Iran and doing fieldwork over a period of time. I have tried combining my life experiences in post-revolutionary Iran with the discussed concepts and Iran's popular music definitions of Nooshin and Siamdoust through autoethnography. Living in the music environment of Iran and studying music at one of Iran's universities has allowed me to know many people who are active in this field and to be able to have a dialogue with them. As well, my personal experiences as a musician who has lived in post-revolutionary Iran has helped me to discuss the changes facing of musiqi-e pāp over the years. Also, Sasan Fatemi's works will help us better understand the topics raised. It can give us comprehensive insider insights regarding the topics with the help of Fatemi's experience living and teaching at universities in Iran and his education experience in Western countries. The book, *Peydayesh Musiqi-e Mardom pāsand dār Iran* (2013) by Sasan Fatemi is written in Farsi. Also, in the second chapter, I used the interviews published on the websites and the popular reviews written on the websites about the film *Santouri*. Also, Démy-Geroe's book, *Iranian National Cinema: The Interaction of Policy, Genre, Funding, and Reception* (2020), has a part about *Santouri* which has been discussed in second chapter. The rest of the interviews and reviews were published in Farsi and on popular news websites. The non-scholarly sources published on Farsi websites will help to provide a wide-popular view of the film's

subject and reasons for censorship. They also include interviews with the director and parts of the interviews are reviewed and criticized in the second chapter.

After the Islamic revolution in Iran, music experienced many changes, and the strict restrictions that the government imposed on music affected all musicians in Iran. The revolution affected traditional musicians as well as young people who were interested in musiqi-e pāp. Religious leaders considered music or certain types of music as *Haram* or forbidden. Many religious thinkers agree on prohibiting a specific form of music called *Ghina*. *Ghina or Ghinaei* is a piece of music that Islamic thinkers find joyful (*tarab-angiz*) and stimulates emotions; fast tempos and voice ornamentation can be involved in this music. There are different arguments about what *Ghina* is. For example, Boujnordi and Shahidi consider *Ghina* to be precisely the Islamic jurisprudential (*fiqh*) equivalent of music.[11] Defining *Ghina* is a challenging job that requires understanding Islamic law's pillars and a familiarity with theologians' viewpoints. Still, it's undeniable that *Ghina* is accompanied by vocals.[12] However, after the revolution, instrumental music has also banned for the reason of being *Ghinaei*. With its wide range of opinions, Islamic religious discourse serves as a crucial frame of reference for intellectuals, artists, and politicians in countries with a majority of the Muslim population.[13] Islam has always left room for interpretation regarding music's permissibility, with opinions ranging from an absolute prohibition to acceptance of all music and instruments. Muslim scholars and authorities have interpreted various verses in the *Qur'an* according to their personal points of view because the *Qur'an*, the final authority in Islam, does not explicitly mention music. Three passages from the *Qur'an* that

[11] Seyed Mohammad Mosavi Boujnordi and Raheleh Shahidi, "Barresi mabani feqhi Ghena va musiqi dar Islam," *Nameh Elahiat* 7, no.3(1388/2009):112.
[12] Boujnordi and Shahidi, "Ghena va musiqi dar Islam,"113.
[13] Jonas Otterbeck and Andres Ackfeldt, "Music and Islam," *Contemporary Islam* 6, no. 3 (October 1, 2012): 228.

advise against "idle conversation" in Siamdoust translation, which some Islamic thinkers interpret to mean "Music."[14] The restriction on music was periodically due to insufficient information about a subject and sometimes to extremism among religious groups. Since May 1997, the election of the reformist president Mohammad Khatami has been directly linked to changing the political structure of Iran. The presidential election ended up being considerably more significant than anticipated. Official statistics recorded nearly ninety percent of those were eligible to vote, the highest percentage ever for a presidential election after the Islamic revolution.[15]

Western popular music began to spread to Iran after the Second World War.[16] Musiqi-e pāp in the second Pahlavi era (1941-1979) was often used in cabarets and movies were accompanied by Western arrangements and instruments. With the development of Modernization and Westernization by the Shah Mohammadreza, Westernized popular music (*musiqi-e pāp*) in a large scale emerged in Iran in the 1960s.[17]" Modern and predominantly Western in its instrumentation, featuring stars attired in the latest European and American fashions, and heavily broadcast on state media, musiqi-e pāp reflected the Pahlavi government's efforts to develop and Westernize its populace while also severely limiting citizen political activity."[18] The issue of censorship and the lack of free space for the free expression of political opinions is not a new phenomenon in Iran, and it has its roots before the Islamic revolution. According to Hemmasi, to circumvent censorship, many artists used vague lyrics that hinted at their dissent instead of openly stating it. Although musiqi-e pāp during the period leading up to the Iranian Revolution might not

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[14] Nahid Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the Revolution: The Politics of Music in Iran* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017), 7.
[15] Khiabany, "The Iranian press," 34.
[16] Heather Rastovac, "Contending with Censorship: The Underground Music Scene in Urban Iran," *intersections* 10, no. 2 (2009): 62.
[17] Farzaneh Hemmasi, "Intimating Dissent: Popular Song, Poetry, and Politics in Pre-Revolutionary Iran," *Ethnomusicology* 57, no. 1 (2013): 57.
[18] Ibid.

have been an apparent platform for the increasing political opposition in Iranian society, musicians, and producers from that time, have identified a growing number of songs that opposed the political status quo.[19] Singers like Farhad Mehrad, Ebrahim Hamedi (Ebi), Dariush Eghbali, Faramarz Aslani, Ma'soumeh Dadehbala (Hayedeh), Faegheh Atashin (Googoosh), and Vigen Derderian emerged in the 1960s and 1970s and gained many fans. Still, in our generation, when I talk to my friends who were born after the Islamic revolution and ask about their musical taste and what singers they like, they will mention one or more of these singers as their favorite in most cases. Hemmasi refers to the efforts of musiqi-ye pāp artists before the revolution to show the political conditions of society: "pre-revolutionary musiqi-ye pāp was not always a diversion from politics or an audio-visual representation of state ideology. Some musiqi-ye pāp songs and certain musicians instead played a role in both aurally disseminating oppositional political perspectives and conveying increasingly widespread political dissatisfaction, all within a state-controlled public sphere"[20] Songs such as *Jomeh* (1971) and *Shabaneh* (1974) by Farhad Mehrad and *Buy-e Gandom* (1974) by Dariush Eghbali tried to represent social problems with indirect critical language and allegorical poems.[21]

The music ban after the revolution applied even more strictly to musiqi-e pāp. The development of musiqi-e pāp was one of the signs of Modernization during Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi reign (1941-1979). After the revolution, there was an unwritten rule that any signs of the *Shah's* Modernization had to be removed, and musiqi-e pāp became one of the most sensitive topics of the new government. Therefore, some aspects of "public perceptions" of Iran and the

[19] Hemmasi, "Intimating Dissent," 57.
[20] Ibid.,62.
[21] Ibid.

Islamic Republic of Iran can be evaluated through musiqi-e pāp.[22] Also, the writings on Iranian Westernized popular music after the revolution can be considered a "barometer of Iran's changing cultural and political climate."[23]

With the establishment and widespread use of technological devices like mp3 players, compact discs, and the Internet, the dogmatic idea towards music, which has been promoted by the theocratic government, has been transformed, as various genres of music became more accessible to audiences. According to Rahimi, internet users in Iran reached more than 5 million in 2005, and this number increased to 25 million users in 2009[24], becoming a nation with one of the fastest-growing bases of internet users worldwide.[25] The government in Iran first supported internet use as a way to develop science and technology during the tumultuous economic era after the Iran-Iraq war.[26] The internet has emerged as an additional significant platform for communication with the outside world, in addition to internationally recognized film industry and satellite dish use. The use of new communication tools has helped spark major changes in Iranian society.[27]

Defining a chronological framework of musiqi-e pāp in post-revolutionary Iran can help to better understand concepts and restrictions. The restrictions that covered various aspects of Westernized popular music production in Iran after the revolution, banned and suppressed it and made it a new concept. The concept is different from what is defined as popular music in the west. Westernized popular music in post-revolutionary Iran can be divided into two general periods. The

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[22] Mehdi Semati, "Sounds like Iran: On Popular Music of Iran," *Popular Communication* 15, no. 3 (2017): 156.
[23] Laudan Nooshin, "Whose liberation? Iranian popular music and the fetishization of resistance," *Popular Communication* 15, no. 3 (2017): 166.
[24] Babak Rahimi, "The politics of the Internet in Iran," In *Media, culture and society in Iran*, (Routledge, 2007),38.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Rahimi, "The politics of the Internet in Iran," 38.
[27] Ibid.,41.

first period is from the year of revolution in 1979 until 1998, and the second is from 1998, after Khatami comes into power, until now. Although the election of a reformist president took place in May 1997, it was still some time before he came to power and began to usher in reforms; therefore, 1998 can be called a more accurate time for the beginning of fundamental changes in musiqi-e pāp. This classification is clearly on a broad scale, and in each of these periods decisive events influenced the trajectory of musiqi-e pāp, such as the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), during which patriotic hymns were popular and found a place among people.

Musiqi-e pāp was forbidden in the first period and during the tensions of the revolution and then the Iran-Iraq war.[28] Even recording devices or listening to music through music players was prohibited. During that period, revolutionary songs, and patriotic hymns, all with a signature of Islamic religious songs (*nohe-khani*), were performed.

Inside Iran, no new Westernized popular music was officially produced between 1979-1998.[29] Instead, the illegal consumption of musiqi-e pāp from the productions before the revolution or the new productions of the musician in exile (pāp-*e Los Angelesi*), became a way to ignore government regulations figuratively. According to Nooshin, there were a few pop/rock bands between 1979-1998, but their activities were severely constrained due to the lack of venues and channels to distribute their music to audiences.[30] Also, the cost of such illegal activity in those years was so high that musicians preferred to remain anonymous or not to have vast activities.

People who had cassette tapes of music in their cars during the first decade after the revolution were frequently detained and penalized, while musicians who carried their instruments

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[28] Fatemi, *Musiqi-e Mardom pasand*, 75.
[29] Laudan Nooshin, "Underground, Overground: Rock Music and Youth Discourses in Iran," *Iranian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2005): 469.
[30] Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 469.

in public often had them grabbed or damaged. Consequently, a person's mere involvement with or support of music might indicate resistance to the harsh policies of the early Islamic Republic.[31] These restrictions against music and the banning of technological devices were significantly abnormal. They have also recently been portrayed in comedy movies produced in Iran. The first decade following the revolution known as (*daheye-shast*), when the Islamic Republic's practical restrictions were strict, is parodied in the film *Nahang-e Anbar* directed by Saman Moghadam, which was released in two parts in 2015 and 2017. In Figure 1, the movie's main character is walking down the street while his guitar is with him. Two officers stop him and ask him to show his authorization to carry the instrument. In Figure 2, the main character and his girlfriend are riding in a car when a police checkpoint stops them. And in that scene, the main character gets nervous and tells his girlfriend to turn down the volume of the music.

In the checkpoint scene, the fear of being arrested or fined for listening to music or carrying music on a cassette tape is well represented. These narratives can be heard by all those who experienced that period. Showing this aspect of the revolution in a comedy film produced under the Islamic Republic's laws is a sign of the undeniable fact of what happened during that period.

[31] Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the Revolution*,17.

Figure 1. Requesting an instrument carrying authorization by the officers (Photo courtesy of the author from *Nahang-e Anbar* 2)[32]

Figure 2. Police checkpoint (Photo courtesy of the author from *Nahang-e Anbar* 1)[33]

[32] *Nahang-e Anbar*, directed by Saman Moghadam (Saman Moghadam,2015)
[33] *Nahang-e Anbar 2*: *Roya's Selection,* directed by Saman Moghadam (Saman Moghadam,2017)

Following the 1979 revolution, the leaders conceded the need to permit certain music after having outlawed all music entirely. The state needed music for entertainment, including the production of film and television programs, as well as to receive revenue from the production and distribution of music. However, they continued to suppress music that does not support government political and ideological philosophies, outlawed music that they believe threatens those philosophies, and promoted a popular but "shallow musical culture."[34] At the same time, an unofficially ineffective but vibrant subculture thrives primarily outside of the official "public sphere".[35] According to Siamdoust, since 1979, the official discourse of the state has been questioned and criticized to varying degrees by both "state-approved" and "state-banned" musicians. Iranian musicians, music fans, and society have given music much value over the years as a significant alternative political, sociological, and conceptual arena.[36]

Nooshin argues that the research on musiqi-e pāp has primarily concentrated on "socio-political" aspects and, more particularly, on "music as a site of resistance or empowerment," particularly for young people. Such a narrow concentration runs the risk of "fetishizing resistance" and omitting or marginalizing other equally significant characteristics of musiqi-e pāp.[37] However, the idea of autonomous musiqi-e pāp and its existence without external stimulation, takes time to arrive at a constructive and non-emotional debate around musiqi-e pāp as a symbol of resistance. musiqi-e pāp has battled to survive for a long time; therefore, it seems to make sense that in the short twenty years since writing about it, more will be said about its resistance characteristics.

[34] Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the Revolution*,2.
[35] Ibid., 14.
[36] Ibid.,2.
[37] Laudan Nooshin, "Whose liberation? Iranian popular music and the fetishization of resistance," *Popular Communication* 15, no. 3 (2017): 169.

Since the government's restrictions on Westernized popular music were reduced following President Khatami's election in 1998, many young people have started to create bands, which has resulted in the first official appearance of Westernized popular music in Iran since 1979.[38] More than 70 percent of Iran's population was born after the 1979 revolution, and this population increase accelerated in the years after the Iran-Iraq war.[39] Iran, therefore, confronted a large youth population at the start of the twenty-first century who were curious to be aware of and understand the things that had been taken from them.

Since the 1979 Iranian revolution, Westernized popular music has been seriously debated in Iran.[40] Musiqi-e pāp was the representation of promoting Western culture in Iran, which caused discussions about this type of music. The state and some religious thinkers believed it should be removed entirely from Iran's media and music atmosphere.

According to Nooshin, while commercial Westernized popular music has become less problematic and restrictions reduced in the years after 1998 reforms, rock (*musiqi-e rock*) has stayed on the periphery due to the "power center's rejection."[41] Particularly instructive is how rock musicians position themselves concerning popular music. The two broad categories of "rock" and "pop" are frequently used to categorize contemporary Westernized popular music in Iran. Many rock musicians are particularly critical of how the government has fostered the latter since 1998.[42] The reasons why the government decided to allow Western popular music are still the subject of many discussions. Historians believe that the government chose to lift its prohibition and get involved in this profitable entertainment industry merely because it could not regulate the flow of

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38 Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 464.
39 Rahimi, "The politics of the Internet in Iran," 40.
40 Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 465.
41 Ibid.,464.
42 Ibid., 476.

Western popular music through the underground market and developing technology like satellite TV and the internet.[43]

Nooshin states that the term “rock” in Iran has changed during the years of the revolution, and in her opinion, rock refers to a wide range of alternative popular music styles. This term is used when listeners or performers try to separate a piece of music or a band from mainstream commercial music. Although after 1998 when the restrictions were reduced, bands and singers still had to follow dictated rules. Music groups must obtain a governmental permit before engaging in any live performance or professional recording; this is one of the biggest problems that music groups face. Additionally, the state broadcasting system strictly controls any music broadcast on radio or television.[44] Also, musicians faced bans and strictures when they wanted to perform in public venues. Nooshin described the steps of obtaining a governmental authorization for publishing music albums, applications for permits are submitted to the *Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance* for live performances and commercial recordings, where they are reviewed by a number of committees.[45] A number of steps are involved in the application process: first, the “Lyrics Committee” reviews the lyrics; next, the “Music Committee” examines the music; and finally, the “Cultural Committee” assures that the finished album or live performance complies with “Islamic standards.” [46] What is the exact definition of this “Islamic standard” is not written anywhere and everyone in that committee applies their interpretation to the applications. However, they all agree that music should not be *Ghina*. Many applications also, were disqualified despite not falling into the *Ghina* music category. “Earthly love” appeared to be forbidden when the first

[43] Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the Revolution*,112.
[44] Nooshin, “Underground, Overground,” 468.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.,478.

generation of popular artists debuted, and the majority of them gave songs that either dealt with completely other topics or with the more "spiritual" sides of love.[47]

One of the concepts discussed in this chapter is underground music in Iran and the narrative of young people who turned to the physical presence of the underground to avoid restrictions. Over time, this concept changed to other meanings, and from a fact, as music was produced in the basements, it became a meaning of music that was a symbol of resistance and genres that were not allowed to exist until then.

Underground Music (*musiqi-e zirzamini*)

As a result of the process of obtaining governmental authorization being complicated and time-consuming and leading to failures in many cases, music bands went underground (*zirzamin*): a place where they performed without governmental authorization and published their works through the internet, which was in the early stages and a newly emerging phenomenon in Iran at the beginning of the new century.[48]

High walls and stark and distinct entrances are frequently used in Iran's architecture to preserve the barrier between "public" and "private", ensuring that the private place is completely hidden from the public's view.[49] Old Islamic-Iranian houses had an inside space known as the *Andarouni* that divided the living area private from the public and house entrance. Traditionally, women and children resided there, free from the *hijab* and hidden from intrusion. Metaphorically we can consider house basements as musician's *Andarouni*, where people may live freely and without having to conceal their identities.

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[47] Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the Revolution*,137.
[48] Ibid.,112.
[49] Nooshin, "Whose liberation?," 173.

The basement is a place of mysterious activity. The basement: the floor that keeps you hidden from political activities before the revolution, to a place for the production and expansion of music in Iran after the revolution. During the Iran-Iraq War, basements were used as air attack shelters.[50] The basement is founded in traditional architectural designs where the space below ground offers isolation and coolness in the summer and warmth in the winter. According to Nooshin, the basement became one of the most noticeable features of modernity in the developing city of Iran.[51]

Since the middle of the 1990s, markets have significantly opened up, partly due to the development of satellite and internet technology and partly because many young people now have straightforward access to international cultural items.[52] Additionally, a significant portion of Iranians remain linked to the diaspora community through family and friends. The constant migration of people between home and the diaspora results in the regular transfer of cultural commodities. Therefore, after 1998, Iranian youth gradually became aware of what was happening in Western countries.[53]

After the election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005, with his different and controversial opinions toward art and culture in comparison to the previous president, the pace of reforms and the spread of musiqi-e pāp slowed down. However, a few years later and during the second period of his presidency, the process of issuing governmental authorization became faster, and various Westernized popular music albums were released on the market. According to Siamdoust, after the election of Ahmadinejad, the government began targeting well-known underground musicians

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[50] Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 463.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 470.
[53] Ibid.

(primarily rappers) and arrested them as a warning to others. There were several arrests of underground musicians between 2007 and 2008. [54]

Nooshin, in the "Underground, Overground" article (2005), referred to the overground, which can be interpreted as getting governmental authorization smoother and easier. However, with the election of Ahmadinejad, the situation changed, and the process of getting music authorization was delayed and stopped for a while. The first wave of mass governmental authorization by the government to underground musicians can be considered in 2008-2009; the years when popular singers like Mohsen Chavoshi and Mohsen Yeganeh, who worked underground for years, got permission to perform and release albums officially. "Popular music as a cultural form lends itself easily to a global media flow, where it is taken up by local populations as a resource for expressions of identity, among others."[55] Iranian youth have long been consumers of various Western popular music genres, including rap, jazz, techno, rock, and more.[56] Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, many people not only continued to listen to Western popular music in private, but this was their choice.[57]

Western popular music in Iran after the Islamic revolution, in Nooshin's point of view, is "metaphorically and physically underground."[58] After the 1998 reforms and at the beginning of the new century, people used to say underground music (*musiqi-e zirzamini*) in their daily conversations when referring to a style similar to Western popular music. Rock, hip-hop, and rap music were included in the category of underground music. It referred to a type of music that, regardless of genre, was produced in the basement to escape government restrictions. Nooshin

[54] Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the Revolution*,214.
[55] Semati," Sound like Iran,"161.
[56] Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 471.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.,464.

believes that the Iranian underground musician is “rock.” To be considered “rock” in Iran implies being isolated from the mainstream music scene, but this isolation was not necessarily a choice and was instead imposed on musicians. Nooshin has tried to use the English term “popular music” to consider it forbidden music and a broad concept that has gone underground. This concept can fall into generalization if we define the English term popular music as something broader than Westernized popular music (*musiqi-e pāp*). However, she has tried to narrow it down and make comparisons between rock and pop. Rock music (*musiqi-e rock*) and popular music (*musiqi-e pāp*) have distinct characteristics. Nevertheless, their common problems, underground nature, and Western orientation bind them after the revolution. Iran's underground music is restricted to being published in public space and is inevitably forced to work unofficially. This music can be in other styles, such as classical and traditional. However, due to the extent of restrictions on Westernized popular music and its sensitivity, underground music (*musiqi-e zirzamini*) is reminiscent of Westernized popular music (*musiqi-e pāp*).

Musiqi-e pāp is distinguished by a “nasal timbre”, high range, and an extremely emotional and colorful manner, especially evident in the melisma and ornamentations *(tahrir).*[59] From Nooshin’s point of view, there are differences between popular and rock singers. Their most important feature of rock singer is less use of ornamentation. Nooshin points out that many rock singers have developed a different sound partly influenced by Western vocalists that is “less ornate, passionate, and expressive and more relaxed and deeper in tone.”[60] Nooshin stated about the musical taste of musiqi-e pāp musicians that has led to subsequent creations and source of inspiration, they mostly listen to pop/rock bands such as “Pink Floyd, Dream Theater, Depeche

[59] Nooshin, “Underground, Overground,” 487.
[60] Ibid.

Mode, Massive Attack, Nirvana, Cream, Camel, Sound Garden, Collective Soul, Radiohead, Sade, Liquid Tension, Planet X, and Tool; they also listen to musicians such as John Petrucci, David Gilmour, Al Di Meola, and Ron Zarzombek as well as more mainstream artists such as Oasis, U2, Sting, John Lennon, and Christina Aguilera."[61]

The term underground music is also common in the west, but the concept completely differs from the example used in Iran. Underground music in the west is used to define "1960s psychedelic music of the US hippie counterculture, the DIY anti-corporatism of 1970s-era punk rock, the early 1990s-era of grunge rock, or 1970s and 2000s-era hip hop. Running through these styles is an emphasis on authenticity and a comparative lack of commercial appeal."[62] It is also sometimes used for the music performed by small and newly established bands that have turned underground to escape the noise of the western megacities.

After 1998, the concept of Western popular music became "underground music" over about ten years, until the restrictions on publishing became less severe. In fact, in the first decade of the 21st century in Iran, the concept of musiqi-e pāp, was not used in discourses, and "underground music" (*musiqi-e zirzamini*) was used instead. This concept also extended to "underground bands" (*goroh-haye zirzamini*) and "underground music studios" (*studio-haye zirzamini*).

The influence of the Islamic Revolution and its impact on the formation of such a term is obvious. Although underground music can be considered an obsolete term today in Iran, its existence and impact as a socio-cultural phenomenon in the history of Iranian popular music are undeniable. Nooshin stated that "it seems likely that an increasing number of bands will shift from

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[61] Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 486.
[62] Stephen Graham, "Where Is the Underground?," *The Journal of Music, August 1, 2010*, https://journalofmusic.com/focus/where-underground.

‘underground’ to ‘overground’ in the near future and that promoters and sponsors will actively seek out bands for their economic potential.”[63] It can be said that after seventeen years of Nooshin's article, this has gradually happened in Iran, and musical groups are not forced to perform and record underground. However, they still must go through legal procedures to obtain authorization for all genres.

The relationships between Iranians inside and outside of Iran and their mutual effects on one another significantly influence this field's creative pursuits. Even two decades into the Islamic Republic, the majority of Iranians within Iran were still listening to foreign creations coming in from exiled popular musicians in Los Angeles, and the music flow was mainly one-way.[64] But after around 2005, when music gradually went from the underground to overground and popular music albums were released with more freedom and with government permission, this trend went two-ways, and many pop singers who grew up in post-revolutionary Iran, performed concerts in western countries. [65]

Since music cannot be eliminated, after the developments of 1998 and the expansion of music production, it was inevitable to show and broadcast music on Iran's national television (*seda va sima*). To entertain and absorb the audience they had no choice but to dedicate a part of their programs to music. A method was used by the Islamic republic national television, in which the image of musical instruments and their presence of it were censored, and only the sound was heard. Different ways were used in this field to censor the image of instruments, from not showing the performance and mixing music on nature videos like sea or wildlife documentaries to showing only the singer and performing from behind a flower vase. Playing music from behind the vase

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[63] Nooshin, “Underground, Overground,” 479.
[64] Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the Revolution*,138.
[65] Ibid.

became one of the famous methods of national television, which has been used many times since 1998 until today.

As we can see in Figure 3, one of these performances involved a group of young musicians behind a vase performing on Iran's national television network (2018). This method shows that the government failed to entirely eliminate music. After some time, the Islamic government not only used music for purposes such as the national anthem and religious songs but also for entertainment. Showing the instrument's shape has been a topic discussed among television producers. In recent years, there have been attempts to show the instrument without censorship in television programs. However, each time these efforts have been accompanied by strictures and led to it not becoming a routine.

Figure 3. An example of playing music behind the flower (unknown photographer)

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the role of the internet and technological devices is vital in shaping the "underground music" concept. Technology helped popular musicians to find the power to personally publish their music and find their audience through the internet or by copying CDs. Also, the internet plays a significant role in enabling musicians to contact each other and with audiences in the absence of physical locations to perform or ways to share music. This then enables them to build a virtual popular music community.[66] Therefore, with the development of the internet, the need to communicate and perform through national television and its rigorous methods was no longer felt among popular musicians. Combining the underground and the internet

[66] Nooshin, "Underground, Overground," 472.

created a form of music that was listened to and circulated despite the limitations and difficulties. Music from Iranian society and popular music among young Iranians are inseparable. During the conflicts around music after the revolution, it found its way through all the restrictions and was produced and heard by accepting the risk of fines and arrest.

Siamdoust defines the Iran "public sphere" and the role of media in the last decade that led to the spread of musiqi-e pāp and the physical removal of the underground. She points out that new communication technologies, mobile phones, satellite television, and the internet, have offered a considerably less subject-to-governmental control alternative to the accepted public sphere from around 2005. Therefore, it is essential to define the Iranian "public sphere" in order to take into account both the internal, "state-controlled" public sphere and the growth that the sizable population living abroad and modern media technologies have given it.[67] In the past ten years, there has been an increase in the number of people with access to new media and satellite television, which has increased the space where criticism of religious and political authority may now be made to the extent that was previously impractical.[68] Music has been present in both public and private spaces after the revolution, these restrictions on Western popular music have prevailed more strongly on the public space, national radio and television, and public venues. These restrictions made the duality of private and public life that existed culturally in Iran more visible to research. The main distinction between a "public space" and a "public sphere" for the free exchange of ideas lies in the level of government control and repression. The government can monopolize streets and venues in a public space and restrict freedom activities. However,

[67] Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the Revolution*,16.
[68] Ibid., 17.

technology has created an "alternative public sphere" outside government control where people can freely express themselves without fear of censorship or repression.[69]

This alternative public realm resembles a sizable national private sphere where mass dialogues may occur through mobile phones, satellite TV, the internet, and other unrestricted platforms. "The state security apparatus" is aware of the importance of this alternative public space and makes efforts to cut off communication channels during intense political crises by interfering with mobile phone networks, satellite TV broadcasts, and the internet.[70] It seems that after Covid-19 era and the expansion of the use of the internet in Iran and taking many information and government platforms to cloud space, at this time, the permanent and complete shutdown of the internet is no longer available.

Conclusion

After the definition of underground music in the context of Iranian society after the Islamic revolution, it is essential to use the Farsi term *musiqi-e zirzamini* in writings instead of "underground music". *Musiqi-e zirzamini* refers to music that, regardless of genre, produced in private space to escape public restrictions. The existence of music after the Islamic revolution and its production and distribution can be divided into two periods, from 1979 to 1998 and from 1998 until now. However, many events have happened in the meantime that deserve more historical research. After the restrictions on musiqi-e pāp were slightly reduced in 1998, many musicians tried to work in this field. However, the difficulties of obtaining governmental

[69] Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the Revolution*,17
[70] Ibid.

authorization (*mojavez)* for official work and the lack of legal facilities to record and practice forced musicians to work in the basements (*zirzamin*). Therefore, the term *musiqi-e zirzamini*, was gradually used as an umbrella term to refer to Western popular music and the genres that did not have a significant presence in Iran before the reform period, such as rap and hip-hop.

The internet and technology devices such as mobile phones and satellite TV, started to expand in Iran after 1998, and their existence greatly impacted the formation of the underground music concept. The development of technology and the reduction of musical limitations had met together, and these two complemented each other for rapid progress. When technology made it possible to publish independently and away from government restrictions, musicians found a place underground to record and publish their music. With the spreading of musiqi-e pāp albums after 2008-2009, musiqi-e pāp with all its limitations and difficulties, continued and took root underground with the help of technology and became an undeniable phenomenon for the state. For example, before 2008-2009, famous singers like Mohsen Chavoshi and Mohsen Yeganeh published their albums online and for free on websites. However, as political circumstances and popular music production changed over time, these musicians could legally release official albums and perform concerts.

According to written work about Iranian popular music, discussing or mentioning underground music (*musiqi-e zirzamini*) represents a form of resistance culture. Underground musicians ignored the strict regulations of authority in this resistance movement, knowing that they may be arrested and fined. They became the forerunners of what is now recognized as Iran's popular music industry. Now, there is less necessity for secret operations and the presence of enclosure walls, offering different companies greater flexibility to produce musiqi-e pāp. Although

the restrictions take on different shapes and mandatory criteria are still enforced through governmental authorizations.

Chapter two: The presence of popular music in Iranian cinema

The first attempts to make films in Iran date back to August 1900. The shots that Mirza Ebrahim Khan-e Akkasbashi took from *Qajar* King of Iran Mozzafar Al-din Shah in Belgium were an introduction to Iranian cinema history.[71] According to Dabashi, the coffee narrative paintings (*naqqashi ghahve khane-e*) and public fairy tale narrating (*naqqali*), made up the audiovisual prelude of movies in popular culture. They were Iranian cinema's ancestors.[72] The first Iranian sound film, *Dokhtar-e Lor*, directed by Ardeshir Irani, was made in 1933. The early Iranian movies showcased the idea of a modernized society but in a way that resonated with the Iranian audience. They tailored to the local context and catered to the emerging middle class. Also, early Iranian cinema focused on providing entertainment and drew inspiration from the Persian poetry classics.[73] In the 1960s, Iran had already been introduced to some of the world's finest cinema, and regular attendance at Western international film festivals intensified the impact of foreign art films on the country. As a result, a new generation of Iranian filmmakers emerged, who began to view their society with a fresh perspective. Directors such as Ebrahim Golestan, Farrokh Ghaffari, and Dariush Mehrjui are known among the prominent filmmakers of that period.[74]

This chapter examines the presence of musiqi-e pāp in the cinema. Showing societal harms and criticizing Iran's economic situation were some of cinema's roles during the years following the revolution. The accessibility of the internet in the new century and the growth of access to free and uncensored media, as discussed in the previous chapter, and the reduction of strictness in the

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[71] Hamid, Dabashi, *Close up: Iranian Cinema, Past, Present, and Future*. (Verso, 2001), 12.
[72] Ibid.,15.
[73] Ibid.,21.
[74] Ibid.,26.

general policies of the government after the reforms of 1998, make it possible to produce more frank movies about societal issues. A subject that has not only been written about but is also portrayed in movies is 'underground music'. To look at Iranian cinema and the presence of musiqi-e pāp in Iranian cinema, we need to know what happened to the cinema during the revolution. Naficy described the Iranian cinema situation after the revolution:

> The post-revolutionary cinema in Iran is neither monolithic nor univocal. Situated in a state at war both with its neighbors and with superpowers, cinema has had to deal with many issues, among them: competition among various sectors in the industry, censorship, varied interpretations of regulations, aesthetic demands, chronic shortages of material and equipment, technical constraints, negative public and self-image, and finally economic realities of producing films which are ideologically correct and yet attractive to mass audiences.[75]

Melodramatic cinema was popular in pre-revolutionary Iran, attributable to Pahlavi's Modernization initiatives.[76] Early Iranian silent films and subsequent *Film-farsi* had the characterization techniques of Hollywood melodrama; dancing and singing as well as love stories were part of that cinema.[77] A new cinema that is distinctly different from the one that existed during the previous regime is emerging more than ten years after the Islamic government was established.[78] This new cinema often had social issues themes. It seems that the most creative filmmakers and cinematic trends emerge during times of change and societal unrest.[79] Unlike music, the religious authorities did not propose the banning or elimination of cinema after the 1979 revolution; rather, they are both in favor of using film as a tool to counter Pahlavi's Modernization

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[75] Hamid Naficy, "Islamizing film culture in Iran," in *Iran*, (Routledge, 2005), 143.
[76] Naficy, "Islamizing film culture in Iran," 125.
[77] Negar Mottahedeh, "Iranian cinema in the twentieth century: a sensory history," *Iranian Studies* 42, no. 4 (2009):535.
[78] Naficy, "Islamizing film culture in Iran," 125.
[79] Ibid.

culture and to establish an "Islamic culture."[80] The unstable and uncertain political and economic situation that followed the revolution hindered investment in new film production but favored broadcasting older films and importing new ones. Films produced abroad, therefore, saturated the market.[81] Many of the pre-revolutionary films were re-edited to meet Islamic norms. Some movies underwent multiple cuts and had their titles renamed. In the retitling procedure, the movie showed without much substantive alteration or censorship, and only the title had changed.[82] As an example "The title of the film *Bi Harekat*, *Tekun Nakhor* (Freeze, Don't Move), made by Amir Shervan was changed in 1978 to *Jahel va Mohassel* (The Thug and the Student), and after the revolution, it changed again to the *drug* (Heroin)."[83]

Naficy stated: "The morality codes which had become a straitjacket for cinema, limiting portrayal of women and use of music, were eased considerably starting in December 1987 when Khomeini issued an edict relaxing the application of the codes."[84]

In addition to music, the creation of all visual arts experienced significant alterations with the establishment of the Islamic State. The *hijab* was added to the lifestyles depicted in the visual arts and one of the common features was the complete elimination of the presence of the feminine body. Following the revolution, the *hijab* was always visible in official films, paintings, or photographs, even showing women's solitude. After the Islamic Revolution, a policy of chastity was formed and imposed by the *Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance*, established in 1982. Women's bodies fell under a set of rules that aimed to make Iranian women's modesty a defining

[80] Naficy, "Islamizing film culture in Iran," 125.
[81] Ibid.,126.
[82] Ibid.,128.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.,142.

characteristic of the *Shi'ite* state.[85] "*The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance* was charged with the reeducation of the national sensorium and was commissioned to inscribe a new embodiment of the national-subject-as-spectator severed from the global film industry."[86]

As an example of the regulations that were imposed on Iranian cinema and the presence of women after the revolution, Naficy pointed out that to avoid drawing attention to women's "provocative walk," women, under the roles of Islamic republic performing arts, should always be depicted sitting.[87] The idea behind this, provided by *The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance*, is that this would allow the audience to focus on the "ideologies" present in work rather than the women's bodies.[88] Additionally, men and women should avoid touching and making eye contact, mainly when it shows "love." Due to the mentioned restrictions, women were frequently filmed in long shots with rare close-ups.[89]

Iranian cinema in the years following the revolution may be seen as much more well-known than in the (*shah*) Era. The phrase "The New Iranian Cinema," which refers to the Iranian filmmaking genre that had gained considerable fame at Western film festivals, was initially used in the year 2000 in London to characterize some Iranian movie screenings in the National Film Theatre, London.[90]

The first "Academy Award" for Iranian cinema won by Asghar Farhadi in 2009 might be viewed as the pinnacle of the acknowledgment by the West. Lotfalian believed that "Farhadi's

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[85]Mottahedeh, "Iranian cinema in the twentieth century," 534.
[86] Ibid.,542.
[87] Naficy, "Islamizing film culture in Iran," 140.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Anne Démy-Geroe, "The International Reception of Iranian cinema,"*Cinema Iranica*,July 25,2022, https://cinema.iranicaonline.org/article/the-international-reception-of-iranian-cinema/.

Oscar was a positive opening towards Iranian culture."[91] The West's acknowledgment nevertheless ran counter to the Islamic revolution's principles; however, it altered Iranian film investors' perspectives on cinematic trends.

Santouri **(The Music Man)**

The cinema had a significant role in illustrating musiqi-e pāp and its limitations in the years following the revolution, particularly during the second period of musiqi-e pāp after 1998. One of the well-known Iranian films produced following the revolution, *Santouri* (2007), is discussed in this study. Considerable critiques have been written regarding *Santouri*, and it was widely viewed as a groundbreaking film that introduced a new dimension to Iranian cinema during its era. Mehrjui is one of the directors whose works have attracted the attention of film critics both before and after the revolution. His cinematic expression and characterizations have consistently delighted the fans of his cinema. *Santouri* is a film that frankly represents what is known as the underground musician after the revolution. This film and its connection with the first chapter can be examined from the point of view of dealing with underground music and the limitations of popular musicians in public representation of music. The movie's main character, who comes from a religious family, is eager to learn how to play the *Santour* instrument. Since he chose to pursue music and a music career, his family has rejected him. One of the movie's themes is the main character's endeavor to organize a concert, and the director emphasizes the challenges of obtaining government permission. The main character in the movie will inevitably have singing and playing at weddings when he fails to get governmental authorization. Following that, he became addicted to heroin and divorced his wife.

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[91] Mazyar Lotfalian, "The contested social spaces of film practices since 2009 in Iran," In *Iranian Cinema in a Global Context*, (Routledge, 2014), 5.

Along with the movie's subject matter—the limitations on musiqi-e pāp in Iran and drug addiction—the real-world events that affected the movie are also essential to consider. Mohsen Chavoshi, the film's lead singer and an underground musician, was not permitted to perform because he needed official authorization, and the soundtracks he sang for the movie were censored. The director refused to accept censoring due to the limitations and harm it brought to the film's narrative, and as a result, the movie was prohibited, could not be published, and had never been screened. It was only once shown in Iran at *Fajr International Film Festival*, once more for international visitors (February 2007).[92] The depiction of a failing marriage, economic problems, drug usage and addiction, as well as featuring a popular musician and the restrictions that come with it, are all illustrations of Iran's post-revolutionary social challenges.

At the beginning of the film, the main character, Ali Bolurchi, narrates his life, and in that monologue, he points out the limitations of musiqi-e pāp at that time:

"*During that period, I was very poor, they didn't give me permission, or they gave me permission late, and my works were illegally copied before that. I also couldn't hold a private concert because I might get arrested"* [93]

Near the film's end, when he talks to the doctor after quitting his addiction, he starts talking about his childhood and his passion for music:

"*In our house, my mother was very against music, while music made my soul shine*"[94]

[92] Anne Démy-Geroe, *Iranian National Cinema: The Interaction of Policy, Genre, Funding, and Reception*. (Routledge, 2020),61.
[93] *Santouri*, directed by Dariush Mehrjui (Hedayat film,2007)
[94] Ibid.

Because of his mother's insistence that he choose between the home and the *Santour*, Démy-Geroe interpreted this dichotomy as a symbolic decision between culture and religion.[95] The director appears to think of *Santouri* as "The clown"[96] adaptation since the character is in ideological conflict with his family.[97] In this context, *Santour* serves as both an instrument and a character. It is underground. The forbidden Iranian heritage that drowns young Ali is concealed in the basement of the luxurious house of a reputable businessman, and in his Iranian subconscious.[98] In one of the scenes where Ali and his wife are arguing, Ali tells Haniyeh why she got money from his friend, and Haniyeh reacts by saying that she could not take money from Ali's parents because they consider their life *haram*.[99] Mehrjui, the director of *Santouri* stated that:

> The most bizarre thing that happened to me in the cinema during these years, the saddest event in my life, was the banning of the *Santouri* which caused this movie to fall for no reason. By the time we came to move, the illegal copy of the film had come out, and the commercial possibilities of the film were lost. They wrote to me from all over the world that this movie was terrific, and a family even messaged me that their son was so affected by watching it that he doesn't even smoke anymore. In the *Fajr festival* of that year, the people recognized *Santouri* as the best film. But right on New Year's Eve, after all the investment, the film was banned for no reason. They even called me from the "Ministry of Intelligence" and said that we had no problem with this film, and it was never found out why screening of the movie was stopped, and finally, the future of *Santouri* was destroyed due to the cruelty of some people. I did not get any income from this movie as a writer, producer, or director.[100]

Although Mehrjui stated in an officially published interview that he did not know why his film was censored and banned and that there was no reason, this banning can be examined from

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[95] Démy-Geroe, *Iranian National Cinema*,61.
[96] Heinrich Boll, *The Clown* (Melville House, 2010)
[97] Shahab Darabian, "Mehrjui: Yek omr cinema va adabiat." *Khabargozari ketab-e Iran,* December 8,1398/2019*,* https://www.ibna.ir/fa/report/284349.
[98] Ahmad Mir Ehsan, "Santouri va harkat bar tarhaye larzan jame-e," *Paygah etela resani Hawzah,* June 16,1386/2007, https://hawzah.net/fa/Magazine/View/3814/4868/40526.
[99] *Santouri*, directed by Dariush Mehrjui (Hedayat film,2007)
[100] "Interview with Dariush Mehrjui," *Iranian cinema journal*, April 23, 2015, https://www.cinemajournal.ir/?p=3201

several perspectives. Démy-Geroe believed that this restriction started with the soundtracks of the movie. The leading actor, Bahram Radan, mimed the singer Mohsen Chavoshi, who at the time lacked governmental authorization. However, this issue was resolved, but it seems that the minister of the *Ministry Culture and Islamic Guidance* had personal problems with the movie.[101] Banning of *Santouri* can be considered from different angels, the movie's story is about infidelity and addiction. Ali's wife smokes cigarettes, and married couples touch one another when fighting, while they are not a couple in the real world, in addition, using "linguistic taboos."[102] All this falls under the *Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance's* red lines. The same source that decides whether a piece of music is permitted also determines the film's approval. Although it is claimed that these judgments are based on rules and principles, they appear to be based on the personal preferences of the minister in power and do not adhere to particular norms. After obtaining government permission, the *Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance* accepts responsibility for the published artwork that complies with Islamic principles and rules. As a result, sometimes, they choose to avoid taking a risk and ban artwork that might not be a perfect fit.[103] There are also other opinions about the banning of *Santouri*:

> The famed Iranian director, Dariush Mehrjui has achieved the rare distinction of having banned films in Iran before and after the 1979 revolution, *Dayereh Mina* (The Cycle) and *Santouri*, respectively. Both films share similar traits in that they try to show some aspects of Iranian society that authorities would rather keep hidden: drug addiction and corruption in The Cycle and drug addiction and treatment of musicians in Iran in *Santouri*.[104]

In the review above, written by users on the IMDB website, two issues of drug addiction and being a musician are mentioned. If there were any other problems, these two issues were

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[101] Démy-Geroe, *Iranian National Cinema*,61.
[102] Rahmani, Narges, Behzad Rahbar, and Mohammad Reza Oroji. "Types and functions of linguistic taboos in Iranian movies," *Journal of Language Horizons* 3, no. 2 (2019): 243.
[103] Démy-Geroe, *Iranian National Cinema*,18.
[104] "The Music Man (2007)," *IMDb*, Accessed April 24, 2023, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0385277/reviews/.

inseparable parts of these problems. It needs to be clarified to what extent and how one of these problems had a more significant impact on the film's censorship and ban. It may require interviews with people in charge of the decision committee during that period.

We can also look at another review that indicates the prejudice toward popular musician in Iran: "Director, Mehrjui does a great job creating an atmosphere where one truly feels society's issues in regard to drug addiction. There has been a stereotype for some time now that young Iranians in the music industry are prone to becoming submerged in a world of drugs, alcohol, and womanizing habits."[105] To increase cinema audiences, the reformist government encouraged the social issues genre of movies starting around 2000.[106] These movies cover various subjects, from social injustice to crime and marriage problems. The "social issue genre" in Iranian cinema usually refers to a "middle-class family"; most of the time, obtaining a permit for those movies is more controversial.[107]

Santouri **and musiqi-e pāp: scenes and connections**

After Ali gets involved in addiction and his wife leaves him, we see a scene where Ali is talking on the phone while his house is empty (Figure 4). There are posters of Western pop/rock musicians on the wall (such as John Lennon, Jim Morrison, and others). It appears as though they are witnessing a pop star's downfall. Mehrjui attempted to make Ali identical to the Western pop/rock star by framing him in this way. Additionally, sticking posters of Western pop/rock

[105] "The Music Man (2007)," *IMDb*, Accessed April 24, 2023, http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0385277/reviews/.
[106] Démy-Geroe, *Iranian National Cinema*,71.
[107] Ibid.

musicians on walls alludes to the widespread belief in Iran that a musician who is familiar with Western popular music and its musicians is a more skilled musician.

Figure 4. Ali's apartment (Photo courtesy of the author from *Santouri*)

Demy-Geroe stated that "interpretation of films in Iran is an art in itself. Ultimately obtaining the screening permit lies in the interrelation of many factors of which the content of a film and even the approach taken to the topic are just two. Contemporary political issues and government policy also play a role"[108] In the party scene (Figure 5) we can see that although it appears that the party guests and Haniyeh are drinking alcohol by showing glasses in their hands, which is against Islamic Republic laws, it is meaningful to note that all the women are wearing the *hijab*. The contrasts between showing drinking liquor while wearing *hijab* might indicate that, at the time the movie was being produced, the *Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance* still did not

[108] Démy-Geroe, *Iranian National Cinema*,71.

have defined, written criteria of what was and was not acceptable in the context of films and instead relied on personal judgments of what compliant with Islamic law.

Figure 5. Haniyeh drinking (Photo courtesy of the author from *Santouri*)

The genesis of a popular musician: Mohsen Chavoshi

Although Bahram Radan's acting is impressive, the movie's impact and success would diminish if Chavoshi's voice were to be replaced by another singer.[109] I remember that the film's music and Mohsen Chavoshi's distinctive voice drew attention when it was first screened during the *Fajr International Film Festival*, and unauthorized copies of it were circulated. Through the

[109] Nematallah Fazeli, Eghbal Khaledian, and Mehrave Ferdowsi, "Tahlil neshane shenakhti taraneha-ye siah va rabete-e an ba vagheiat haye ejtemaei dahe-e 80," *Rasaneh* 8, no.108 (1396/2017):144.

creation of *Santouri*, Mehrjui introduced Mohsen Chavoshi, a singer, to the public. A singer who, if not the most well-known singer in Iran right now, is unquestionably one of the most well-known popular artists.[110] *Santouri* was a turning point in the artistic life of Mohsen Chavoshi, although the film was never screened and Mohsen Chavoshi did not have a governmental authorization at the time of its production.[111] Mohsen Chavoshi's presence in the *Santouri*, from the viewpoint of Mehrjui, allowed him to obtain governmental authorization after years of endeavor and become an official musician after years of being underground.[112]

Ardavan Kamkar*,* a famous Iranian *Santour* player, has played the *Santour* parts of the film soundtracks. Four soundtracks were used in the movie and all of them were sung by Mohsen Chavoshi; the *Santour* was used in all parts, and Bahram Radan mimed the songs. Fazeli et al. note that there is a specific type of lyrics used in musiqi-e pāp that originates from the essence of the society and is not intended to be just entertaining. Most of the lyrics that were popular among young music audiences throughout the 2000s expressed frustration, fury, and despair. Fazeli et al., insider researchers refer to them as dark/disappointing lyrics or (*taraneha-ye siah*) in Farsi.[113] *Taraneha-ye siah* are clearly present in most of Chavoshi's songs in the 2000s; his song's gloomy lyrics indicate despair and social issues like suicide, infidelity, or failed love.[114]

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[110] Darabian, "Mehrjui: Yek omr cinema va adabiat."
[111] Démy-Geroe, *Iranian National Cinema*,61.
[112] Bahman Babazadeh, "Hamle-e tond kargardan sarshenas be khanande-e pāp," *Musicema, June 21,2015,* https://www.musicema.com/node/236271.
[113] Fazeli, Eghbal and Ferdowsi, "Taraneha-ye siah," 143.
[114] Ibid.

Figure 6. Performing in a party (Photo courtesy of the author from *Santouri*)

Figure 6 shows a scene from the movie where Ali performs informally at a party. The time shift between Ali's present life as an addict, Ali and Haniyeh's marriage, and Ali's eventual rise to celebrity can be seen throughout the movie. The fall of a pop star and Haniyeh's migration to Canada is how the film concludes. However, the director tries to please the audience, and in the end, Ali is taken to a drug addiction camp and quits there, but Haniyeh never returns.

Haniyeh first meets another man at the party scene that appears in the film's first half, where the audience discovers that there has been infidelity between the couple. The other man is stylish and pleasant. He is also a musician and violinist. After a short conversation at the party, Haniyeh is attracted to the violinist man and seems exhausted from Ali's addiction. The director has tried to visually show the two men's different styles by having the new character wear a suit and tie and

to have him be handsome and gentle. After Haniyeh and the violinist's small talk is finished, Ali appears from a room looking drugged up, and he quickly begins playing the *Santour* and singing.

The instruments that can be seen in this scene include: the *Santour*, *Tombak*, *Electric Guitar*, *Setar*, *Acoustic Guitar*, and *Cello*. However, what is heard from the music cannot be identified as the sound of *Tombak*, *Setar*, and the *Cello*. It seems that the director intended to show an orchestration with symbols of traditional Iranian music; the composer also tried to incorporate elements of Iranian traditional music into the Western popular music style, but the music made in the end sounds more like Western popular music. The song's electric guitar and techno percussion patterns are contrasted with the *Santour*. The presence of the *Santour* has also helped to give a popular song a distinctive cultural identity. I remember when this song became popular, people used to buy CDs from the black market and listen to it in the car or at home. Even when I was in school, my friends memorized the song and would sing it in groups during fun times.

Taraneh Mokkaram wrote the lyrics of the song performed in the party scene, and the official name of the song is “Infidelity.” Contrary to the opinion of Fazeli et al., in an interview, Mokkaram did not accept the claim that her lyrics are considered to be dark/disappointing. Mokkaram stated that: “I did not have dark/disappointing poems; I have romantic protest songs like “Infidelity” from the *Santouri* album. However, the sadness part of my work is more of a complaint than a feeling of hatred.”[115]

[115] “Interview with Taraneh Mokkaram.” *Aka Iran*, accessed February 3, 2023, http://biografiaka.akairan.com/biography/superstar/news20174308183029731.html.

The song starts with these verses:

I am nervous and anxious.

I can't sleep again tonight, and I don't know where you are.

I don't feel okay and stay awake till morning. I stare at the clock.

I ask what this feeling is.

Someone says "betrayal"[116]

According to Shackelford et al., we can organize infidelity into two main categories: "emotional" and "sexual."[117] It seems that the sense of infidelity in this poetry is emotional infidelity. The poet has attempted to portray the feeling of emotional breakdown effectively by describing anxiousness, waiting (in referring to staring at the clock), and insomnia brought on by anxiety. The emotional aspect of infidelity is a theme apparent throughout the movie. Showing sexual infidelity has never happened in Iranian cinema since the revolution. Cultural boundaries and taboos, in addition to the government not obtaining permission for such a film, are the reasons for this absence.

[116]Taraneh Mokkaram, "Infidelity" Lachini media. Accessed February 3, 2023. https://lachini.com/lyrics/Khianat/Mohsen+Chavoshi.

[117] Shackelford, Todd K., Gregory J. LeBlanc, and Elizabeth Drass. "Emotional reactions to infidelity." *Cognition & Emotion* 14, no. 5 (2000): 644.

Figure 7. Haniyeh watching Ali's performance (Photo courtesy of the author from *Santouri*)

The presence of Haniyeh at the party and watching Ali's performance of a song with an infidelity theme, Haniyeh's short conversation with the violinist, and Haniyeh's facial expressions, which demonstrate her dissatisfaction with her marriage and Ali's addiction, make the audience understand that there is infidelity going on. Mohsen Chavoshi's song with Mokkaram's lyrics doubles the effect of the party sequence as an introduction to the central theme of the film.

Conclusion

Musiqi-e pāp, its lyrics, and Iranian cinema reflect the effect of the revolution that dominated the country in 1979 and received the support of the majority of the people. From the *hijab's* role as one of the foundations of women's representation in the performing arts to the use of depressing lyrics in musiqi-e pāp brought on by the economic and social divide following the revolution.

The cinema in Iran was able to depict social aspects of the revolution, either directly and in plain language or indirectly, using phenomena that did not previously exist in cinema, such as the *hijab*. Iranian cinema attracted the attention of the west and recognized international festivals after the revolution. The limitations of musiqi-e pāp also became a subject that was either explicitly or indirectly discussed in Iranian cinema. Even though the *Santouri* was never officially released, the movie directed by Mehrjui drew the attention of many viewers. *Santouri* narrates a popular musician's story without governmental authorization and serves as a testimony of what happened to musiqi-e pāp during the Islamic revolution.

Chapter three: The presence of women in musiqi-e pāp after the Islamic revolution

The conflict between the Islamic approach to ruling a country, and a form of modernity from Western countries, is one of the distinguishing features of Iranian society in the 20th century.[118] Following the 1979 revolution, Islam turned from a cultural to a political term.[119] The Government's Islamic approach accompanied a dogmatic attitude and shaped general policies, including the arts. One of these dogmatic approaches was to be against music performed and sung by women. In this chapter, an attempt has been made to show a picture of what happened to female musicians after the Islamic revolution. It will describe the absence of women in the musiqi-e pāp scene, how limitations imposed, and how situations changed after 1998.

Since the 1950s, the issue of gender has grown to be a significant part of Islamic scholarly works. Some Islamic groups have formed opinions that diverge from those who support "cultural Islam."[120] These disparities center on topics like women's employment and access to education, their involvement in politics and society, and *hijab*.[121] These topics are recognized by other Islamic groups as well, but the approaches and attitudes in the foundations of other groups towards music differ from the view of fundamentalists. For example, the Sufi approach to Islam, which has historical and ancient roots in Iran, not only does not prohibit the performance of music in the

[118] Fatemeh Sadeghi, "Fundamentalism, gender, and the discourses of veiling (Hijab) in contemporary Iran," In *Media, Culture and Society in Iran*, (Routledge, 2007), 207.
[119] Ibid., 210.
[120] Sadeghi, "Fundamentalism," 210.
[121] Ibid.

public space but also introduces it as a means to achieve the exaltation of the soul. Based on my conversations with a friend who knew Sufi groups in Tehran and *dhikr* gatherings, some Sufi groups use traditional Iranian instruments such as *Tanbur*, *Kamanche*, and *Daf* for religious ritual purposes. However, it is difficult to determine the stance and opinions of Sufi and other religious groups that are not in political power regarding musiqi-e pāp and its acceptance in public spaces because the use of Western instruments is uncommon among these groups.

Bakhshizadeh believed that the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988) gave the Islamic government an excuse for suppressing organized opposition parties, including those that are in support of women's rights. As a result, a restrictive government was in place, and many activists fled into exile while others were arrested and imprisoned. However, women started to raise awareness of women's rights and to criticize the government's gender policies in a more easily tolerable manner to the hard-liners. More Muslim women took part in critiquing the government from an Islamic perspective, highlighting how crucial it is for establishing an Islamic society.[122]

Iranian women have long fought for equity, although they suffer from substantial discrimination due to the laws enacted after the revolution. After President Khatami's victory in 1997—who had numerous female supporters—the conversation around women's rights became a hot trend, and Khatami was able to remove some of the harsher restrictions imposed on women. However, With Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's victory in 2005, even those minor liberties won under Khatami's administration failed.[123]

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[122] Marziyeh Bakhshizadeh, "Women's Rights in Iran and CEDAW: A Comparison," In *Changing Gender Norms in Islam Between Reason and Revelation*, 1st edition (Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2018),67.
[123] Paria Gashtili, "Is an 'Islamic Feminism' Possible?: Gender Politics in the Contemporary Islamic Republic of Iran," *Philosophical Topics* 41, no. 2 (2013): 124.

In order to avoid generalization about women and music in post-revolutionary Iran, we need to define a context and narrow the framework. Music and women in Iran after the revolution can be examined from two perspectives: women's presence as music performers and women's singing. The presence of women in music (as a singer or performers) has been a frequently debated issue since the Islamic Revolution. From 1979 to 1998, the Islamic Republic's government outright forbade women from performing or singing any genre of music, ranging from traditional music to popular music. After the 1998 reforms, these restrictions were eased for musicians but remained strict for women solo singers. After 1998, and with the beginning of the new century, women could go on stage and perform with Western instruments such as electric guitars and violins, although with restrictions on movement and clothing. Legal limitations, societal discrimination, and gender segregation constitute additional challenges that women confront. Women are prohibited by the *Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance* regulations from releasing music as single vocalists. For musician women in Iran, this reality alone has led to a scenario where they are more likely to seek jobs as instrumentalists, teachers, or "sing in duets or vocal ensembles with a male."[124] The only place where women's solo singing could be heard was female-only festivals. Popular music in its more subdued varieties is accepted, and rock and rap are performed privately and offered on the internet and illegal CD market. With time and the individuals in power in the *Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance*, the prohibitions and limitations on music-related activities changed. Rap and rock music have consequently confronted the most significant obstacles. In order to rarely

[124] Mehdi Semati and Nima Behroozi, "Paradoxes of gender, technology, and the pandemic in the Iranian music industry," *Popular Music and Society* 44, no. 1 (2021): 9.

appear in public, they have also discovered new modes of expression through Internet and social media.[125]

Semati and Behroozi stated that The *Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance* has also permitted a specific event where female-only ensembles can play just for females. Female performers may be able to perform as soloists rather than backup singers. Since the implementation of this program in recent years, there has been a notable rise in the proportion of female musicians.[126] It may be possible to point to the increase in women's music in recent years, but mentioning the appearance of women's concerts and festivals as the reason for this increase should be used more carefully. The "female-only concert" programs are considered a failed project among the youth, which the people do not receive well. According to DeBano, Women-only events' gender segregation can be restricting and unsatisfying from an artistic standpoint. However, due to the strict gender separation of space at women-only festivals, male musicians who would otherwise perform with female musicians are absent. One negative outcome of holding women-only music festivals is that women frequently cannot bring the entire family to these events, which is ironic considering that those festivals are designed to celebrate women's familial roles.[127]

Women's Veiling

The topic of *hijab* or veiling, and making it mandatory, is one of the critical issues that women faced after the revolution. Although *hijab* has been culturally present in Iranian society, its politicization and compulsion date back to the 1979 revolution. During the revolution, women and men supported Khomeini and his effort to establish an Islamic state. After the revelation, in

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[125] Parmis Mozafari, "Negotiating a position: women musicians and dancers in post-revolution Iran" (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2011) 116, White Rose eTheses Online (uk.bl.ethos.579532).
[126] Ibid., 9.
[127] Wendy S. DeBano, "Enveloping music in gender, nation, and Islam: Women's music festivals in post-revolutionary Iran," *Iranian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2005): 453.

order to express support for the revolutionaries, some women who had never worn veils before began doing so.[128] The hijab has come to represent opposition to Western modernity and colonialism, which pose a threat to the Islamic Republic. Women's *hijab* challenges cannot be viewed only through the lens of Islamic fundamentalism when viewed in this manner. The wearing of veils is supposed to represent the characteristics of the country and Islamic society as it fights for independence from the west. The wearing of the *hijab* by women and their adherence to the strict Islamic gender norms became symbols of such an identity.[129]

The presence of women in society and their acceptance in terms of power depended on the acceptance of what the government had imposed on them. The government took control of extremist ideas by making the *hijab* mandatory and turning it into a criminal record if people did not obey. However, writing about the *hijab* requires careful research, and it is beyond the scope of this chapter since it is a controversial topic among Islamic sects and theologians. This chapter argues the roles and restrictions imposed by the Islamic republic government to limit women's activities in the musiqi-e pāp scene.

Soon after the revolution, women's solo singing was considered *Haram* (forbidden); "the female voice has been considered to be as seductive as her body."[130] They were forcing some of Iran's most famous musicians into silence. This stillness, the almost complete lack of the female voice in post-revolutionary Westernized popular music, is considerable. The complete silence and lack of presence of women's voices in the musical scene significantly contrasted with the Pahlavi era, when the presence of female singers and pop stars such as Googoosh and Haydeh occupied a

[128] Sadeghi, "Fundamentalism," 217.
[129] Ibid., 219.
[130] Mozafari, "Negotiating a position," 157.

prominent part of the popular music market.[131] Although women's solo singing was forbidden from the view of the Islamic State, according to some theologians, women's voices are permissible if they are in groups and choirs. According to Mozafari, the ban on female solo singing prevented women from becoming the leading figures in Iranian music after the revolution. It increased the chances for male singers who performed in traditional Iranian music. Women's solo singing was completely outlawed after the revolution, but it was not promptly introduced on a specific day and hour; instead, it gradually took place before being officially declared. Female solo singing steadily vanished from television and radio after the revolution under the cover of Islamic law, which deemed female solo singing provocative. Many famous musicians left the nation in the early 1980s due to the prohibition of musiqi-e pāp on radio and television and the fear of arrest and penalty.[132] There are rare exemptions that happened in Iran after 1998 that women solo singing allowed to perform. Mozafari described one of the events:

> Darya Dadvar's performed as Tahmineh in *Rostam va Sohrab* opera by the Iranian-Armenian composer, Loris Tjeknavorian, performed in Iran with the symphonic orchestra of Armenia in 2003. The permit was originally issued because Dadvar's solo performance had been categorized as being in an altered voice. However, though tickets had been sold for several nights, the actual performance was cancelled after the first night in response to the protests of some radical newspapers.[133]

Siaumdoust state that, when youth artists began helping an underground music community independent of the government to develop, the long-term effects of the government restriction became clear. Since they shared their music through unofficial networks and later the internet and only occasionally played outside the underground. Underground musicians were, for the most part, unconstrained by governmental regulations. The lack of female musicians, even in the

[131] Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the Revolution*,3.
[132] Mozafari, “Negotiating a position,” 170.
[133] Ibid., 184.

underground scene, may be partially explained by the lack of female musicians in the "public sphere."[134] Women playing underground music were at significantly greater risk than men. Women had an equal chance of being arrested for underground musical activities as men musician could. However, because societal and cultural boundaries and taboos complicated women's arrests, it can be said that after 1998, women were less willing to take the risk of joining underground music bands. Siamdoust, in the book the *Soundtrack of the Revolution* (2017), interviewed an Iranian woman rapper, Justina, who stated:

"Even now in Iran, if a woman enters music as a singer, especially the underground scene, her life changes. People start looking at her differently; it's still not socially palatable."[135]

This is the picture of women's musical activities that have prevailed in Iran for the 44 years of the revolution. A fragile position that both the Islamic government and society impose pressure on. Being underground as a musician has always been associated with the risk of arrest, and as a woman, it may include ostracism from a religiously minded community. The presence of women in musiqi-e pāp increased after the reforms and from 1998 onwards. With the advent of the internet and increased communication with the West, the desire of young men and women to be a part of the Westernized popular music scene grew. However, the road to obtaining authorization was much rougher for women. Internet users, particularly women, are testing the liberation the web offers them by finding a substitute means for expression in social media that is not available to them in public. Internet space provides a unique new window into the dissatisfied lives of Iranian youth who have grown up under strict Islamic republic regulations. Most of the new generation

[134] Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the Revolution*,32.
[135] Justina,Interview by Nahid Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the revolution: The politics of Music in Iran ,*Stanford University press,(2017):243.

has created online groups on social media where partners can chat, and young women can be seen without fear of being arrested or fined.[136]

According to Tehranian, nearly 90 percent of women between 15 and 24 are now literate in Iran.[137] With access to the Internet and communication with the West, young Iranian women consume Western cultural products and are interested in passing restrictions and actively participating in the field of Westernized popular music.

Women and music bands

The widespread presence of women in musiqi-e pāp dates back to the 1950s, when Torch Songs, "an elegy to unrequited or no longer requited love"[138] were popular in Iran. Female singers such as Dalkash and Marzieh were considered torch singers and gained popularity. Their music had strophic form, with catchy and simple melodies blending Western and Iranian traditional instruments. Their next generations appeared in the 1960s and 1970s, but with the revolution, these voices were silenced until after the reforms of 1998. Around 2005, the first Iranian women's rock band was founded by Swedish-Iranian sisters outside Iran called *Abjeez*. However, Mahshar Nasrallahi, nicknamed *DJ Maryam*, with the primarily Western popular style, could attract audiences from inside Iran around the beginning of 2000s.[139] Musical activities inside Iran should be separated from foreign activities and the Iranian diaspora music production. The conditions of musiqi-e pāp production and its political and social complications after the revolution are influential in shaping the music content and quality.

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[136] Rahimi, "The politics of the Internet in Iran," 41.
[137] Majid Tehranian, "Epilogue: Whither Iran?," In *Media, Culture and Society in Iran*,. (Routledge, 2007),267.
[138] John Moore, "The Hieroglyphics of Love': The Torch Singers and Interpretation," *Popular Music* 8, no. 1 (January 1989): 32.
[139] Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the Revolution*,33.

The *Arian* band was the first official presence of women who had governmental authorization in Iran's Post-revolutionary Westernized popular music scene. Sanaz Kashmari, Sahar Kashmari, and Sharareh Farnejad were the three women who performed and sang in the *Arian* band. The group achieved considerable popularity at the beginning of their work and attracted the attention of the audiences. [140]

According to Nooshin, after the reform period in 1998, in addition to providing musician access to a broader range of music than ever before, the more liberal climate since 1998 has pushed many artists to experiment stylistically. This is mainly because of the development of the internet. The age-old criticism that Iranian commercial popular music is a copy of the west and evidence of cultural reliance has also been revived by this "new eclecticism,"[141] particularly in light of the fact that most musicians do frequently look to the west for inspiration when searching for new sounds.[142] *Arian's* music has a distinguishing musiqi-e pāp language at its core, but like many other modern bands, it also includes "techno, jazz, Latin/flamenco, and rock."[143] Various factors contribute to *Arian's* success, including an effective blend of witty lyrics, catchy melodies with lasting appeal, creative and popular arrangements, talented and handsome young players, and smooth performance. Additionally, despite its commercial success, the band has been able to maintain a "grassroots feel" and a feeling of being in contact with ordinary people.[144]

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[140] Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the Revolution*,32.
[141] Laudan Nooshin, "'Tomorrow Is Ours': Re-Imagining Nation, Performing Youth in the New Iranian Pop Music," In *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia*. (Routledge, 2009), 252.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid.,255.

Sharareh Farnejad stated that:

> During the formation of the *Arian* band, one of the founders of the band, Payam, told me that they do not allow the presence of a single girl in the group, bring your cousins, so I told Sahar and Sanaz to join us. In the beginning, we considered it a hobby, and I did not believe we could get governmental authorization and perform live, but in 1999, we had our first concert on Qeshm Island, and I became the first woman to perform music on stage after the revolution.[145]

Farnejad's mentioning of adding two other women to the band in order not to be the only woman in the *Arian* band confirms that even after the restrictions were reduced after 1998, no woman is allowed to sing solo. Despite occasional casual performances featuring female singers throughout these years, women are still not allowed to sing solo in public. After 44 years since the Islamic revolution, no woman has been permitted to publish a solo album or single track. Farnejad stated that: “One of the significant factors that made our album a hit and best seller was the presence of three women in the *Arian* band. People told me that we could not believe it when we passed by the music stores on the street, we saw a poster of a band with three young women.”[146]

In Figure 8 we can see one of the first official posters of the *Arian* band. Ali and Peyman, the founders of the band, are in the front of the picture, and all the members of the group are wearing white clothes; the female members of the group are in the center of the picture and are wearing a red scarf. With the red color, they are clearly distinguished from the rest. Although the *Arian* band with female members was eventually able to perform concerts and release several albums despite the restrictions, the barriers persisted for them in other ways, such as the requirement that women wear more modest clothing, such as fuller hijab, than what is expected in

[145] Sharareh Farnejad, “Music Nova Interview Sharareh Farnejad,” Interview by Music Nova, January 14,2019, YouTube video ,2:35-14:30, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Stj-i4-2oFI.
[146] “Music Nova Interview Sharareh Farnejad.”

the public and streets. They also had to behave dignifiedly and not dance or act seductively, nor could they sing solo. Fatemi and Breyley described a concert from *Arian* band in 2010, they mentioned that “As audience members moved rhythmically in their seats and sang along, the band’s female members performed with less movement than they had during the sound check, but with equal force.”[147] Dancing, like women singing, is prohibited in the government system of the Islamic Republic. The desire to dance increased after the permission to hold pop concerts among young people. Those who want to dance in pop concerts must sit in their seats, accompanied by clapping and cheering. Sometimes popular musicians play their pieces with faster tempo to make them more danceable and exciting.[148] Although they do not have such permission and if this dancing continues or if the audience gets up from their seats, the hall's security officers ask the audience to stop. In order to control enjoyment and self-expression outside of the government's eyes, the state expends a lot of people and funds resources for censoring. In all concerts, a control room with cameras or human supervision does not accept expressive cheering. Observers still watch all music audiences to ensure nobody gets up to dance or becomes overly excited in the concerts.[149] Nooshin stated that, “At every pop concert I attended, audience members were visibly moving in their seats and clearly eager to dance as they would in private. On one occasion, some young women got up to dance, but were asked to stop by the event organizers (they could easily have been arrested instead).” [150]

Dancing was one of the restrictions imposed on both male and female musicians, although these restrictions and strictures were more rigid for women. Not only was the audience not allowed

[147]Gay Jennifer Breyley and Sasan Fatemi. *Iranian music and popular entertainment: From motrebi to losanjelesi and beyond*. (Routledge, 2015), 157.
[148] Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the Revolution*,138.
[149] Ibid.,12.
[150] Nooshin, “Subversion and Countersubversion,” 248.

to dance freely, but also the members of the music bands they have not permitted to dance. Nooshin points out that those who dance freely and get up from their seats may be arrested. However, this is not common. At the beginning of the freedom of concerts and after 1998, the strictures were stricter about dancing, but after a number of years and in 2023, concert organizers may warn the audience that dances rhythmically and enthusiastically or expel them from the concert hall. After around 25 years since the restrictions on musiqi-e pāp have been reduced, today, in order to keep the audience and maintain a nice global picture, it is unlikely and rare that someone will be arrested and thrown in jail on the concert stage. However, the government have the ability and authority, and it may happen.

According to Nooshin, in one of *Arian's* concert tours in 2002, "Arian presented a total of fourteen concerts over seven nights in Tehran's Milad Hall. According to official sources, an unprecedented 28,000 tickets were sold in the first six hours." [151] The emergence of the *Arian* band can be defined as a turning point in the development of Iran's popular music industry. The *Arian* band was able to attract the attention of young people. The band can be said to make young people hope for a future where they can produce their own music and see it as part of their career. The band members were young, like their audiences (all band players were between the ages of twenty-five and thirty) and they grew up during the Islamic Republic and survived the upheaval of revolution and conflict. As a result, there is an emotional connection between performers and listeners that is mainly absent in Iranian consumption of foreigner's Westernized popular music (*Los Angelesi*).[152]

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[151] Nooshin, "Tomorrow Is Ours'," 245.
[152] Ibid.,263.

Brief view on social stratification and musiqi-e pāp consumption

One aspect that merits consideration is how people's class and financial situation alter their musical preferences. Undoubtedly, the reforms of 1998 influenced people's musical tastes; as musiqi-e pāp started to be produced in large quantities after changing policies in 2009-2009, different classes of Iran society started to listen to it. As the access of the middle class and different strata of society to musiqi-e pāp production increased, the judgments and stances regarding banning musiqi-e pāp in society decreased. Families with different dress codes and different beliefs, from religious to non-religious, appeared at popular concerts, and ignorance about a forbidden topic turned into favor and interest. Nooshin stated that:

> The post-1997 legalization and the emergence of a local industry has lent pop music a social acceptance, and started to attract an audience, among sectors of Iranian society which would previously have been unlikely to listen to it – with its associations of secularity, affluence, decadence and Westernization – let alone attend a concert. In particular, as mentioned above, the recent changes have served to reframe popular music within discourses which locate it 'at home'. class and other social divisions in Iran are visibly marked through dress codes (particularly for women), and it is interesting that whilst the 2002 concert DVD shows a primarily middle-class audience, there are also audience members from ostensibly more traditional, religious backgrounds, with women wearing the enveloping *chador* veil and without make-up.[153]

With the spread of musiqi-e pāp and permission to hold extensive concerts, such as the *Arian* band, different layers of society began to know more about musiqi-e pāp and put aside prejudices about music. Different classes of society, from religious to non-religious and poor to rich, were exposed to the spread of music. This expansion allowed musicians to create music in a more relaxed atmosphere and work more freely.

[153] Nooshin, "Tomorrow Is Ours'," 257.

According to Fatemi, when Western popular music reached Iran with all the limitations, it was considered a "cultural privilege" for its audiences and the propensity towards the west and its culture becomes a distinguishing characteristic among people in third-world countries.[154] This can be interpreted as Western popular music was usually consumed by society's elite. In the first period, only those who had access to Western popular music had access to the devices to play music and could also bypass the restrictions by using their economic and social status. Also, in the second period and with the reduction of limitations, the elite's access to high-speed Internet and technology tools was easier. In addition, listening to Western popular music required knowledge of English language, and those who listened to Western popular music in its original language, were considered intellectuals and educated people among youths. Popular music's role as something that should be available to the public was reversed in Iran. Westernized popular music, which was produced and sung in "Farsi" in the second period, in its early years, from 1998 to around 2006, still belonged to the underground and was available to certain classes, but after the mass production of musiqi-e pāp was allowed by the government, this music became accessible to the majority of people and began to live its natural life as "popular." However, Western popular music in its original form, in English, was still considered a sign of "cultural privilege," which was the taste of the elite class.[155]

Fatemi and Samim pointed out that those who have a weaker social stage and are from the lower class do not tend to consume diverse music, they consume the music that is presented to them.[156] After the revolution, the majority of people had access to national radio and television,

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[154] "Interview with Sasan Fatemi about popular music of Iran," Produced by Cadance Music mag.2020, Aparat video, 1:36:18, https://www.aparat.com/v/HqL6x.
[155] Ibid.

[156] Sasan Fatemi and Reza Samim, "Pajohesh jame shenakhti dar bab masraf-e musiqiae dar bein afrad ba paygah-haye ejtemaei motafavet dar Tehran," *Honarhaye ziba*, 127, no. 32, (1386/2007): 133.

and the government provided its musical content according to the policies of the *Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance*. This music includes traditional Iranian music, patriotic hymns, and religious songs in Islamic ceremonies (*nohe khani*). Until around 1998, musiqi-e pāp had no place on national radio and television; therefore, a group of people who had access to musiqi-e pāp could access the Internet first and then the high-speed Internet. A significant portion of musiqi-e pāp consumption occurred before the Internet became ubiquitous with satellite TV access. However, access to satellite TV was illegal and the equipment to connect was expensive. As a result, that segment of society who were from the upper middle class and prosperous had access to musiqi-e pāp, and musiqi-e pāp was a luxury product for consumption until the mass production of musiqi-e pāp in 2008-2009.

Figure 8. Arian band members, (Photo from Wikimedia common)

Figure 9. Sharareh Farnejad in live concert, Arian band (2007), photo by Azin Zanjani.

Figure 10. Sahar and Sanaz Kashmari, singing together during a concert (photo courtesy of the author from YouTube video of Arian concert)[157]

[157] Mehdi Sanaei, "Arian Band Full Concert Tehran 1381," YouTube, September 20, 2016 ,20:10, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rex7FRA7UM8.

Thesis conclusion

Musiqi-e pāp and cinema reflect various aspects of the revolution and its effects on music and arts presented in public spaces. After 1998, Iran's use of technology and the internet began to grow, significantly influencing how the idea of concealed private music developed. The advancement of technology and the reduction of music limitations had coincided, accelerating each other's progress. Musicians encountered a place in the shadowy realm that was able to operate beyond the restrictions placed on public spaces by engaging in private music activities and recording and distributing their music. Technology made it feasible to publish more freely in private music spaces that were less affected by government interference and restrictions.

It is imperative to use the term *musiqi-e zirzamini* instead of “underground music” after defining it in the framework of Iranian society following the Islamic revolution. Musicians were compelled to work in basements due to the challenges of getting official government permission (*mojavez*) and the absence of legal recording and practice spaces. As a result, the word “underground music” or “*musiqi-e zirzamini*” in Farsi, eventually came to be used to describe both Western popular music and musical styles that were not widely popular in Iran prior to the reform era, such as rap and hip-hop. The creation and distribution of music after the Islamic Revolution can be split into two time periods: from 1979 to 1998 and from 1998 to the present. However, many events have occurred during the periods, which merit further historical study.

Despite its limitations and challenges, musiqi-e pāp persisted and flourished underground with the aid of technology, becoming an undeniable phenomenon for the government. From the view of popular music scholars such as Nooshin and Siamdoust, Iran's underground music discussion and mention are examples of resistance culture. In this resistance movement,

underground musicians disregarded the rigid rules of government despite the possibility of being detained and fined. They developed into the pioneers of what is today known as musiqi-e pāp. Today, there is less need for covert operations and enclosing walls, giving various companies more freedom to produce Westernized popular music. Even though the limitations adopt diverse forms, governmental approvals are still used to impose the essential criteria. There is a risk around scholarly writings about musiqi-e pāp to falling into the trap of exaggerating the issue of repression and restrictions. An all-around suppression, a constant and without compromise pressure, are not real concepts. When describing and explaining the restrictions, narrowing down the issue that these restrictions are mainly in the circulation of music in public spaces such as radio and television and music venues can help us better understand the musical atmosphere of post-revolutionary Iran. Over time and after 44 years, compromises have been made in various fields of music with the will of the people; for example, the presence of women in the *Arian* group or the initial permission to make films with the theme of social problems can be examples of compromises.

The movie *Santouri* (2007) has been discussed in the second chapter of thesis. The limitations of musiqi-e pāp through the cinema have shown themselves in the years after the revolution. *Santouri* can testify to what happened to musiqi-e pāp following the Islamic revolution. The analysis of the movie's soundtracks indicated that the composer attempted to combine Iranian traditional music with Western instruments such as electric guitar and percussion. The presence of the *Santour* has also helped to give a popular song a distinctive cultural identity. Throughout the movie, the main character's family insists on choosing between the home and the *Santour*. Démy-Geroe interpreted this dichotomy as a symbolic decision between culture and religion.[158] Showing such a dichotomy and portraying the life of a popular musician was unique in Iranian cinema at its

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[158] Démy-Geroe, *Iranian National Cinema*,61.

time and made the film one of the most controversial movies after the revolution. In recent years, the limitations of musiqi-e pāp started to be a topic that was directly or indirectly shown in Iranian cinema, such as *Nahang-e Anbar*, mentioned in chapter one. Considering that *Santouri* was never officially released, Mehrjui's film captured the interest of many people.

Women's presence in musiqi-e pāp is one of the topics discussed in the writings about popular music in Iran after the revolution. Women's veiling (*hijab*) is a phenomenon that had not previously mandatory been used in the cinema and music scene. With the mandatory hijab for women and restrictions on singing solo or dancing, the field of performing arts and music for women became significantly different from the (*shah*) era. Women's solo voices were banned after the revolution, and women could perform as backing vocals or in choirs. When the presence of men in musiqi-e pāp was accompanied by many challenges even after the reform of 1998, these challenges were many times more severe for women. Eventually, the restrictions forced women to stay away from musical professional activities. However, women tried to show their presence in musiqi-e pāp by participating in music bands like *Arian* or underground activities like *DJ Maryam*. Social boundaries, in addition to the restrictions that the government imposed on women's music, were the factors that led Iranian women to silence and lack of significant presence in the Westernized popular music scene after the revolution. Although musiqi-e pāp gradually became available to different strata of society with mass production, until 1998, musiqi-e pāp was mainly at the upper middle class and upper-class taste and had lost its popular function. After 2008-2009 and the beginning of the second term presidency of Ahmadinejad, and the mass production and permission of musiqi-e pāp, Westernized popular music played a more "popular" position among the different social classes of Iran. However, being a fan of Western popular music in original language remained a "cultural privilege" and the cause of distinction.

After my research as an autoethnographer and review of Iranian popular music scholars' works, an element that connects these three chapters and unifies the thesis is the restrictions imposed on musiqi-e pāp after the revolution. This thesis has discussed how the dynamics of restrictions have been challenged. Restriction intensity has changed and reduced over time with the changes in government policies, society, and technological advancements. The expansion of technological devices and access to free alternative public spaces, such as social media, gradually caused musiqi-e pāp to break the restrictions barrier.

Islamic theocratic governments in the Middle East are not limited to Iran. Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt are examples of countries with a majority Muslim population, and Islamic laws with various interpretations play a direct or indirect role in their government policies. In these countries, music and discussed topics are treated in different ways, from the uncompromising ban on the presence of women in the field of music in the new government of Afghanistan to the widespread presence of iconic female singers such as *Umm Kulthum* in Egypt.[159] In the meantime, as the dynamics of Iranian society are changing and the restrictions are no longer applied to music as in the past, these changes also occur in the region's countries. For example, Saudi Arabia has started to teach music in elementary schools for some time under the name of a Modernization process.[160]

For further research, the Modernization processes in the Middle East countries should be investigated from the perspective of their impact on the Westernized popular music of those countries. Although this thesis refers to the life of musiqi-e pāp in the public space, before 1998

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[159] Virginia Danielson, "New Nightingales of the Nile: Popular Music in Egypt since the 1970s," *Popular Music* 15, no. 3 (October 1996):299.
[160] Rena Upitis, Maresa Donaldson, and Fathiah Osman, "Introducing Music in a Saudi Arabian Elementary School," *The Elementary School Journal* 122, no. 3 (March 2022): 433.

and the reform era in Iran, musiqi-e pāp existed and was performed privately. Those private musiqi-e pāp performances and the possible recordings that remained from them are worthwhile sources for researching and showing the life of musiqi-e pāp in private spaces in the post-revolutionary era.

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