

Tehran in hook

Tehrani “underground” musicians
“keeping it real”

Tiina Valjanen

University of Helsinki

Faculty of Social Sciences

Social and Cultural Anthropology

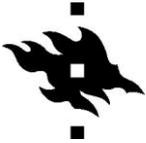
Master's thesis

May 2021



HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Tiedekunta – Fakultet – Faculty Faculty of Social Sciences		Koulutusohjelma – Utbildningsprogram – Degree Programme Master's Programme in Contemporary Societies (COS)	
Tekijä – Författare – Author Tiina Valjanen			
Työn nimi – Arbetets titel – Title Tehran in hook: Tehrani "underground" musicians "keeping it real"			
Oppiaine/Opintosuunta – Läroämne/Studieinriktning – Subject/Study track Social and Cultural Anthropology			
Työn laji – Arbetets art – Level Master's thesis		Aika – Datum – Month and year May 2021	Sivumäärä – Sidoantal – Number of pages 107
Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract			
<p>This thesis is an ethnographic study about rap, rock, and metal scenes in today's Tehran. The study takes off from hip-hop scholars Pennycook's and Mitchell's proposition of hip-hop as "dusty foot philosophy" which is rooted at local dusty ground while articulating philosophies of global significance. This study aims to examine what kind of spaces are these dusty streets in Tehran and how does Tehran's urban landscape inform music making and music aesthetics.</p> <p>This study focuses on how notions of belonging, space, and place have been expressed by rappers and rockers both in their music making and their embodied use of urban spaces. Followingly it will observe how urban realities, urban space, and geographical segregation are perceived, challenged, and reclaimed through their craft. The study asks how underground musicians are debating questions of authenticity that have risen along music's localization, and how musicians strive for artistic legitimacy which would verify their street credibility both within their local music scenes and wider society, as well as within global music community.</p> <p>The study is based on an ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Tehran between 2012 and 2014. This is a multi-sited ethnographic research and employs phenomenological approach to analyse subjective and embodied experiences in the urban space. Methodologically it is based on participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and email interviews. The study includes dozens of rappers, rockers, and metalheads, most of whom are young male between 19 and 35 both from lower-class and middle-class backgrounds. Few of the musicians are young female as well.</p> <p>This thesis is a contribution to Iranian popular music studies and to our understanding of everyday realities of Tehrani rappers and rockers and music life in the city. It aims to shed some light to the ongoing democratization of music production which is rapidly changing the demographics of Tehran's underground music scene. The study aims to underline that Tehran's underground music scene is a heterogeneous space consisting of musicians from different socioeconomic backgrounds and genres having diverse and contradictory aspirations, music aesthetics, and styles. Accordingly, it applies intersectional approach which helps to grasp multiple experiences within the same and shared social space.</p> <p>The study aims to problematize the persistent understanding of underground music scene as inherently subversive and emancipatory space, and argues that individual musicians don't have an equal access to these allegedly "emancipatory" spaces nor equal opportunities to make a professional career out of music. Furthermore, it is argued that this highly politicized understanding might do more harm than good for underground musicians who are considered defiant against their own aspirations.</p> <p>The study argues that the spatial surroundings of rap and rock scenes look very different. While rock and metal musicians mainly gather, rehearse, and record indoors, rappers have more visibly taken over public spaces by gathering and battling at different urban locations around the city. The study concludes that socioeconomic background and gender affects to a great extent in how musicians experience public sphere and musical spaces and how they move in them. Simultaneously, the study aims to show that global hip-hop discourse that privileges "ghetto life" and hardships in life can be self-empowering narrative for rappers from lower-class families, mainly from south Tehran which has been historically perceived as poor, traditional, conservative, and backward.</p> <p>The study argues that the democratization is gradually going beyond rap music as well, and there exists increasingly more rock and metal musicians from low-income and religious families. The study concludes that music is a powerful tool for constructing self-identity and demanding social and cultural change. Ultimately, the study aims to show how conscious Tehrani musicians are pushing for wider cultural and global change by telling local philosophies of global significance.</p>			
Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords Tehran, Iran, rap, hip-hop, rock, heavy metal, underground music, urban space, authenticity			
Ohjaaja tai ohjaajat – Handledare – Supervisor or supervisors Tuulikki Pietilä			
Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited			
Helsingin yliopiston kirjasto, Helsingfors universitets bibliotek, Helsinki University Library			
Muita tietoja – Övriga uppgifter – Additional information			



HELSINGIN YLIOPISTO
HELSINGFORS UNIVERSITET
UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Tiedekunta – Fakultet – Faculty Valtiotieteellinen tiedekunta		Koulutusohjelma – Utbildningsprogram – Degree Programme Yhteiskunnallisen muutoksen maisteriohjelma	
Tekijä – Författare – Author Tiina Valjanen			
Työn nimi – Arbetets titel – Title Teheran in hook: Tehrani “underground” musicians “keeping it real”			
Oppiaine/Opintosuunta – Läroämne/Studieinriktning – Subject/Study track Sosiaali- ja kulttuuriantropologia			
Työn laji – Arbetets art – Level Pro gradu -tutkielma		Aika – Datum – Month and year Toukokuu 2021	Sivumäärä – Sidoantal – Number of pages 107
Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract Tämä on etnografinen tutkielma Teheranin rap-, rock- ja metal-skenestä tänä päivänä. Tutkielma lähtee liikkeelle “tomujalkaisesta filosofiasta” (dusty footed philosophy), jollaisena hip hop -tutkijat Pennycook and Mitchell kuvasivat hip hopia. Samaan aikaan, kun hip hop on juurtunut paikalliseen tomuiseen maahan, sen kautta artikuloidaan globaalisti merkittäviä filosofioita. Tutkielma tarkastelee millaisia nämä paikalliset ja tomuiset kadut ovat Teheranissa ja miten Teheranin urbaani maisema näkyy musiikinteossa ja musiikin estetiikassa. Tutkielma tarkastelee, miten rap- ja rock-muusikot ilmaisevat kuulumisen, tilan ja paikan käsityksiä ja miten he ovat käsitelleet, haastaneet ja uudelleenmääritelleet kaupungin todellisuutta, urbaania tilaa ja sosiaalista segregatiota musiikinteossaan. Tutkielma pohtii, miten musikit rakentavat autenttisuuttaan paikallisella tasolla ja miten he pyrkivät vahvistamaan taiteellista legitimeettiään ja katu-uskottavuuttaan paikallisessa musiikkiskenessä, Iranin yhteiskunnassa ja globaalissa musiikkiyhteisössä. Tutkielma pohjautuu etnografiseen kenttätööhön, joka toteutettiin Teheranissa vuosina 2012-14. Tämä on monipaikkainen etnografinen tutkielma ja lähestymistapa on fenomenologinen. Tutkielma perustuu osallistuvaan havainnointiin, henkilökohtaisiin haastatteluihin ja mailihaastatteluihin. Tutkielma käsittelee kymmeniä musikoita eri genreistä. Valtaosa heistä oli nuoria 19-35-vuotiaita miehiä sekä alemmasta sosiaaliluokasta että keskiluokasta, joskin mukana on myös muutama naismuusikko. Tutkielma osallistuu keskusteluun Iranin populaarimusiikista ja syventää ymmärrystä Teheranin räppäreiden ja rock-muusikoiden arkitodellisuuksista. Tutkielma valottaa, miten musiikkituotannon demokratisaatio muokkaa nopeasti underground-musiikkiskenen väestörakennetta. Tutkielma korostaa, että Teheranissa tämä skene on heterogeeninen tila, johon osallistuu musikoita erilaisista sosiaalisista ja taloudellisista taustoista ja eri genreistä. Näin ollen musikoilla on lukuisia eri pyrkimyksiä ja käsityksiä musiikin estetiikasta. Tutkielman lähtökohdanna on intersektionaalinen analyysi, joka auttaa tarkastelemaan moninaisia kokemuksia samassa jaetussa sosiaalisessa tilassa. Tutkielma pyrkii kyseenalaistamaan yleistä käsitystä underground-musiikkiskenestä vastarinnan ja emansipaation tilana ja väittää, ettei musikoilla ole yhtäläistä pääsyä näihin oletettuihin “vapauden” tiloihin eikä yhtäläisiä mahdollisuuksia luoda uraa artisteina. Tutkielma väittää, että tämä vahvasti politisoitunut ymmärrys aiheuttaa enemmän haittaa kuin hyötyä musikoille, joita mielletään uhmakkaina vastoin heidän omia tarkoituksiaan. Tutkielma väittää, että rap- ja rock-skenejen tilalliset ympäristöt eroavat toisistaan. Samaan aikaan kun rock- ja metal-muusikot kokoontuvat, harjoittelevat ja levyttävät lähinnä sisätiloissa, räppärit ovat ottaneet julkista tilaa näkyvämmiin haltuun, kun he kokoontuvat ja bätläävät erilaisissa paikoissa ympäri kaupunkia. Tutkielmassa todetaan, että taloudelliset ja sosiaaliset taustat sekä sukupuoli vaikuttavat keskeisesti siihen, miten musikit käsittelevät julkista tilaa ja musiikkitalaa ja miten he liikkuvat näissä tiloissa. Samalla tutkielma pyrkii osoittamaan, että “ghetto-elämää” ja vastoinkäymisiä korostava globaali hip hop -diskurssi saattaa olla voimaannuttanut narratiivi alemmasta luokasta tuleville räppäreille. Moni heistä on kotoisin etelä-Teheranista, jota on historiallisesti halveksittu köyhänä, perinteisenä, konservatiivisena ja takapajuisena alueena. Tutkielman mukaan demokratisaatio on hiljalleen ulottumassa myös rap-musiikin ulkopuolelle ja rock- ja metal-muusikoita tulee yhä enenevässä määrin myös vähävaraisemmista ja uskonnollisista perheistä. Tutkielmassa päätellään, että musiikin kautta voidaan voimallisesti luoda identiteettiä ja vaatia yhteiskunnallista ja kulttuurista muutosta. Pyrkimyksenä on osoittaa, miten Teheranin tiedostavat musikit ajavat kulttuurista ja maailmanlaajuisesta muutosta artikuloidessaan globaalisti merkittäviä paikallisia filosofioita.			
Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords Teheran, Iran, rap, hip hop, rock, heavy metal, underground-musiikki, kaupunkitila, autenttisuus			
Ohjaaja tai ohjaajat – Handledare – Supervisor or supervisors Tuulikki Pietilä			
Säilytyspaikka – Förvaringställe – Where deposited			
Helsingin yliopiston kirjasto, Helsingfors universitets bibliotek, Helsinki University Library			
Muita tietoja – Övriga uppgifter – Additional information			

Table of contents

1. Intro.....	1
1.1. Outline of the study.....	2
1.2. Short overview of music politics in Iran.....	6
1.3. Anthropological arrival.....	10
1.4. Methodology.....	12
1.5. Ethical questions.....	15
1.6. Overview of the previous research.....	17
2. Verse I: Where is “underground”?.....	20
2.1. Just Do it Yourself.....	20
2.2. “Underground is a virus that causes trouble”.....	25
2.3. What about permits?.....	32
2.4. “Underground” the battleground?.....	36
3. Hook: Keeping it real, making it local.....	46
3.1. Urban landscape of Tehran.....	48
3.2. Voices of the streets of Tehran.....	51
3.3. Selling out without selling anything.....	59
4. Bridge: When things go south.....	64
4.1. Yet another brick in the wall.....	65
4.2. Going to south.....	73
5. Verse II: Telling local philosophies of global significance.....	80
5.1. Making self.....	83
5.2. Making culture.....	87
5.3. Reaching out to the world.....	91
6. Outro.....	94
6.1. The final fade-out.....	97
Songs.....	99
Bibliography.....	101

1. Intro

To me rapping is all about what people say, and that's why I listen to the voice of the streets (*seday-e xiaboon*). I write and rap about social problems, about our culture. When I talk about culture and cultural issues these questions don't have any answers. That's why we need to listen to people. And talk.

When I asked Tehrani rapper Omid (30)¹ about his musical influences, he told me his inspiration came from the streets. There was a whole world of rappers he could have chosen from and, being one of Iran's prolific first-generation rappers, I knew he listened to quite a bunch. Even so, he wanted to emphasize he was listening to the ordinary men and women in the street.

His words would later come to my mind as I ran into hip-hop scholars Alastair Pennycook and Tony Mitchell (2009, 25-26) who called hip-hop as dusty foot philosophy. Inspired by rapper K'Naan's record title *Dusty Foot Philosopher*, they depicted how hip-hop is deeply grounded in locality, rooting its barefoot on the dusty ground, and at the same it is philosophical, "articulating local philosophies of global significance" (*Ibid.*, 27).

In global hip-hop language "street" is a two-way street heading both towards global and local. Since its early days rap music has of course shared a particular relationship with these dusty streets and some might argue it is this connection to local realities that makes it so powerful tool of telling stories and writing personal histories. And in Persian streets storytellers have always had a prominent role.

When Tehrani-born anthropologist Roxanne Varzi (2006, 2) was in her early twenties her uncle had told her: "If you want to learn about your country, Roksana, you must read poetry. (...) Poetry could save your life." It must have been my first weeks in Tehran when a poem, if not

¹I am using pseudonyms for all the musicians I met in Tehran to protect informant anonymity. I will discuss more about this decision in the subchapter 1.5. *Ethical questions*.

saved my life, at least helped me through a cold I had caught. I had bought a tissue package from a street vendor and, as I was about to sneeze, found Hafez's prophecy poems inside.

If tissue packages come with centuries old poems, you know poetry must be serious business. Indeed, in a country where "poets have the status of rock stars," as Iranian-born poet Sholeh Wolpé (2012) once eloquently wrote, for centuries a rich poetical language has been central in diverse formulations of cultural identity and possibly the most often cited source of national pride. From Hafez, Ferdowsi, Mowlana (Rumi), Khayym, and Sa'di to more modern poets Ahmad Shamlou and Nima Yushij, Persian literature has had a long history of social commentary that has escaped from censorship by using multilayered metaphors, hidden meanings, and intricate wordplays.

Thus, it comes as no surprise that today this poetic language is kept alive in constantly growing and evolving music scenes in Iran. Compared to earlier poets though, these music genres have introduced a new uncensored language that, as Omid might say, speak the language of the streets. In the past decades, particularly rap has overtaken Iran's music scene and today, much like elsewhere in the world, it is the fastest growing genre in Iran. One might even say that today's Iran is a country where poets have the status of rock stars and where rock stars have the status of poets.

This thesis is a story about today's poets in Tehran.

1.1. Outline of the study

I lived in Tehran around one and a half years, first time August 2012 – March 2013 and the second time October 2013 – August 2014, and this is the period I will mainly concentrate on this thesis. As seven years have already passed since then it might seem narcissistic to limit the focus that way, as if Tehran only existed the while I was there, as if "you are there, because I

was there” (Clifford, 1983, 118). Thus, rather than putting historicity aside I want to emphasize that my ethnographic data needs to be situated in that historical moment.

As much as time informs our experiences, “music informs our sense of place,” as ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes (1994, 3) infamously formulated, and thus the focus of my thesis will be on the urban streets of Tehran. In global hip-hop discourse “street” is a multifaceted term that embodies the demand “to keep it real”. As rap music is migrating to different locations around the world, it always needs to be localized and made relevant to its immediate surroundings.

Alastair Pennycook (2007, 14) claimed that, in order to “keep it real” and “telling it like it is,” rappers are obliged to define locally what authenticity means. In this thesis I will mainly concentrate on today’s rap, rock, and metal musicians in Tehran, and ask how underground musicians are debating questions of authenticity and how they strive for artistic legitimacy which would verify their street credibility both within their local music scenes and wider Iranian society, as well as within global music community.

I am interested in how notions of belonging, space, and place have been expressed by rappers and rockers in their music making and their embodied use of urban space. Followingly I will ask how urban realities, urban space, and geographical segregation are perceived, challenged, and reclaimed through their craft.

I argue that in previous academic and journalist writings too lot of weight has been put on resistance and emancipation as the main motivation of Iranian underground musicians. I am aiming to move away from primordial identities of protest and of generation, and instead apply intersectional approach by taking into consideration how subjective experiences stem from multiple intersections which neither should be reduced to pure identity politics.

Anthropologist Thomas Csordas (1990) urged scholars to approach culture and self through embodiment, and his request serves as analytical lens for this study. My analytical approach is

phenomenological, and accordingly I approach body on the level of lived experience and not an object of discourses. I am interested in how musicians talk about their subjective experiences regarding music spaces without prejudging whether their stories were always true or not.

It might be useful to note, that as far as musicology goes this is not a study about music per se. Rather this is a story about musicians. This emphasis is mainly due that I have decided to use pseudonyms for all musicians I got to know in Tehran which is why incorporating music analysis to this thesis would have practically meant writing two separate studies.

I have included some lyrics in this thesis though and I have translated them by mainly concentrating on the rhymes and meanings rather than grammatical structures and wordplays. The language and expressions used in Farsi rap are often so rich that trying to capture them in the translations would have taken proportionally lot of time for the purpose of my writing.

The outline of this thesis follow's a rap song structure: Intro, Verse I, Hook, Bridge, Verse II and Outro.

In the Intro chapter at hand I will first take a historical overview of music politics since the revolution and the context in which “underground” music genres were born in Tehran. Followingly, I will present my methodological approach and ethnical concerns, and lastly, introduce the most central English-language studies about Iranian underground music scene.

After intro comes the first verse, the second chapter, in which I examine what exactly constitutes “underground” music in Tehran. In that chapter I aim to shed some light on how both unlicensed and licensed musicians talk about underground music space, and argue that the highly politicized understanding of their music might potentially be harmful for them. I intend to problematize the recurrent understanding of “underground scene” as inherently subversive space of oppressed youth against the state, and show that underground musicians form a heterogeneous scene where individual musicians have multiple aspirations and don't have an equal access to these allegedly emancipatory spaces.

What follows is the hook, which is the catchy part of the song that some might call as earworm. In the third chapter I will mainly concentrate of Farsi rap, and study what kind of urban geography and landscape Tehran offers for music making – both in terms of lyrical inspiration and musicians’ mobility in urban spaces. I will demonstrate that rap and rock scenes take place in different kind of spatial surroundings, and observe that whereas rock musicians are rehearsing and playing mainly indoors, rappers have more visibly taken over public spaces around the city. Furthermore, I will analyse how musicians are “keeping it real” by localizing rap music into urban realities of Tehran and what kind of debates over authenticity have arisen along rap’s localization process.

After that comes the bridge, that bridges the previous and the following parts together. In the fourth chapter I am examining how musicians have been dealing with questions of belonging and attachment and, particularly, how they articulate their embodied sense of belonging in musical and public spaces around the city. I will examine sensations of loneliness and unattachment to the official surroundings, and followingly wonder why particularly the rock and metal musicians have so often felt isolation from their immediate environments. Then heading off to south Tehran I aim to show that socioeconomic background affects to a great extent in musicians’ experiences and mobility within the public sphere.

After that comes the second verse, fifth chapter, in which I will study how musicians are talking about music as a tool for change, firstly, in their personal lives, secondly, broader in the whole culture, and lastly, on a global level. Through music they are thus telling local philosophies of global significance. In that chapter I will mainly concentrate on Farsi rap and give a small overview on how urban landscape and segregation, social inequalities, and questions of belonging have been addressed in Farsi rap lyrics.

The last chapter is the outro, in which I will make the final conclusions, wrap up the thesis, and fade away.

You might wonder why would I organize my thesis in a structure of a rap song, as I am not even writing about rap music and rappers alone. The answer is simple; I see rap as

anthropology's artistic cousin. Rap is fictional anthropology of local realities, the streets. Although the definition doesn't automatically apply to all rap, nor all anthropology for that matter, on a general level hip-hop culture puts a lot of weight on cultural ownership and realness (Krimm 2000, 9). In a sense, anthropologists are also a type of "dusty footed philosophers" who put their feet on the ground and from these streets and alleys construct philosophies of global importance.

Also, much like anthropology has historically been underestimated field among "hard sciences" condemned as not serious enough, rap has also often been looked down by musicians from other genres as not high culture enough. Nevertheless, more recently both underdog sciences have vocally taken the global stage. Rap has become mainstream all around the world, and in today's fragmented and conflicted world lessons from anthropology are more important and more valued than ever, or at least, they should be.

1.2. Short overview of music politics in Iran

Soon after the Islamic Revolution 1979, the state imposed rigid control mechanisms on all artistic production, and various art forms associated with Pahlavi's modernization efforts and their claimed westoxification were prohibited (Nooshin 2005a, 2005b; Youssefzadeh 2000).

For Ayatollah Khomeini the Islamic Revolution was first and foremostly "a cultural revolution", and music became one of its main targets (Siamdoust 2019). This revolution wasn't only informed by Islamic moral code but also by the anti-Pahlavi-spirit among the revolutionaries (Rastovac 2009), and although artistic censorship was nothing new, soon after the enactment of sharia law, the censorship hit the whole music field particularly hard.

Concerts, music education, and sale of musical instruments were prohibited, while popular music, with its "un-Islamic" dance movements and song lyrics, was banned and remained as such until Mohammad Khatami's more liberal presidency (1997-2005) and cultural reforms

two decades later. Since then, women have been forbidden to sing publicly in front of mix-gender audiences and dancing has been criminalized by law (Youssefzadeh 2004). Furthermore, since 1986 musicians have been obliged to get state authorization from Ershad, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, to release their music and perform concerts. In consequence, in the years that followed many musicians left the country, and today, “secular ideas are probably stronger in Iran than anywhere else in the Muslim world” (Keddie 2006, 316).

After the Iran-Iraq war 1988 and Khomeini’s fatwa the same year the music restrictions have been gradually relaxed starting from traditional and classical music. A crucial historical turning point was Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) taking presidential office and replacing the foreign policy from “cultural invasion” and fear of westoxification to “dialogue among civilizations” (Siamdoust, 166, 2017). Popular music ban was lifted 1998 which eventually paved the way for the emerging rap, rock, and metal scenes in urban centers of Iran.

Although only a very few rap and rock musicians have gained Ershad’s authorization to date, this hasn’t stopped the new music movement booming. By the time conservative president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) took presidential office 2005 with hardline rhetoric targeting the whole cultural sphere, the youth population that had already enjoyed the relaxed cultural policies for years had grown too large to be sent back to the gloomy days of the 1980s (Nooshin 2009, 263).

Throughout Ahmadinejad’s both terms cultural institutions were closed, cultural centers were cut off from funding, and venues and permits diminished (Siamdoust 2017, 214). Governmental and media campaigns represented underground musicians as Satanist worshippers who spread immoral behavior, drink alcohol and use drugs, and from time to time even drink each others’ blood.

Needles to say, these sociopolitical developments had a significant influence on underground music scene. Around 2007, Ahmadinejad’s government launched a crackdown against

underground musicians, further intensifying the already highly-politized atmosphere. Particularly rap music produced at that time was often very poignant and even directly political. This era, which many still reminisce with a splash of nostalgia as the golden era of rap and underground music in general, culminated in the Green Movement protests 2009 that inspired many previously apolitical musicians to take part in the politics.

When the demonstrations were violently crushed and social and cultural politics toughened up in all sectors of society, many previously vocal rappers silenced themselves and vast majority of the most prominent first-generation rappers left the country.

In a personal email communication 2013, Farsi rap site Bia2rap's admin explained me that musicians' political silence was a result of the toughened politics during Ahmadinejad's second term:

There were rappers who supported the Green Movement, but it didn't resolve anything. After that some (critical) work has also come out but not by famous artists. Because of the closed political space and lack of freedom, underground musicians don't often get involved into politics, except the ones abroad. It is already an issue to be underground and they don't want to risk of getting more charges.

In the years that followed online became increasingly central platform for underground musicians (Nooshin 2005b; Siamdoust 2017) although it hasn't come without its challenges either. After the Green Movement protests and arrests of dozens of activists, the government founded Iran's Cyber Police (FATA) 2011 to control the internet which has further facilitated the repression of music.

Postrevolutionary cultural policies have thus been in a constant flux. The legislation concerning the cultural production is rather ambiguous and leaves a lot of space for officials' personal interpretations and political preferences (Siamdoust 2017, 168). In her historical overview on music policies, Siamdoust (*Ibid.*) observes that the relaxed cultural policies during Khatami's presidency stemmed from reformists' personal and political views rather than any legislative amendment concerning cultural production.

Much like the legislation concerning cultural production, Iran's legislation on private space is complicated and quite vague. It is based on both sharia and the secular legislation on national security and blasphemy, the latter being often used as a pretext in arrests of underground musicians, human right activists, and the like. Basically, sharia secures people's privacy but remains open to interpretation in terms of defining what exactly constitutes as public and private space (Kadivar, 2003). Whereas Khatami's government had been more concerned about policing the "public" sphere in its traditional sense, Ahmadinejad's government had a different interpretation of the law and expanded policing to more "private" spaces, people's homes and online (Mark LeVine 2008, 179).

Over the past decades, music has thus been an object of constant battles between reformist and conservative factions which has made the cultural policies unpredictable and changing overnight. Hasan Rouhani's electoral victory 2013 shed some hopes about relaxation of the bans, and at the time the cultural minister Ali Jannati even talked about terminating the whole permission system once and for all. None of the musicians I knew in Tehran believed that would happen though, and they were right.

On the other hand, it seems that since Rouhani's inauguration there has been some relaxation as far as publishing albums and performing in public goes. On the other hand, it seems that policies have toughened up at least towards metal bands and some sources say the censorship, arrests, and working bans are on the rise, simultaneously as even already licensed concerts have often been cancelled last-minute. Siamdoust (2018, 202) even argues that the increasing policing over cyber and offline space has put underground music in recession.

At the lack of reliable sources, it is difficult to get an objective overview of the actual situation in Iran. Being as it may, one thing is certain; the more the creativity has been restricted over the years, the more creative ways artists have had to come up with to balance with the ever-shifting cultural policies. Although along this process many musicians have left the country, the strict cultural policies have also paradoxically led to even greater creativity inside Iran. Thus, Nooshin (2005, 237) suggests that the control over music has only "increased its subversive potential and thereby empowered it further."

In the same tone Bia2rap's admin saw that every cloud has a silver lining:

Underground is a culture in Iran, just like hip-hop is a culture and a way of life in the US. It has taught us a lot about how to solve our problems. When you're here, you see the hard conditions everybody gotta work with. It's difficult to find motivation in these conditions, but people can also overcome their problems and reach the goal of (rapper, addition by author) Yas who says: 'No matter who runs Iran, limited surroundings is what makes a star.'

1.3. Anthropological arrival

The first time I arrived in Tehran coincided with the Non-Aligned movement (NAM) summit at the end of August 2012. The government had announced a week-long public holiday and provided cheap petrol subsidies to attract the more affluent and liberal city residents to take their cars and abandon the city to northern holiday resorts or anywhere away from the international press. Those first days I didn't quite foresee how that heavily guarded and relatively deserted, almost quiescent city would turn into the crowded metropolis it was in the following days to come.

And there it suddenly was, the buzzing Tehran with its 9-16 million inhabitants, depending on who you ask, and quite possibly the same amount of old Peka cars, busses, shared and private taxis, and motorcycles cruising around the city and locking themselves on traffic hour's notorious gridlocks. Due to heavy traffic, you can pass weeks in such a thick smog that the whole city landscape is blurred out of sight. On those rare days you can see the northern skyline with its snowcapped Alborz mountains from the city center any casual street conversation will most definitely begin with a delighted, "what a nice weather we have today!"

Nevertheless, the air pollution seemed to be the least unsettling concern Tehranis had on their mind those days. The US and Europe imposed economic sanctions on nearly all economic sectors of Iran and the simultaneous monetary policies and economic reforms by Ahmadinejad's presidency had led to an unprecedented economic crisis with the bravest figures estimating inflation rate as high as 70 percent (officially 40) together with economic

fluctuation, dramatic decline in the value of rial (Iran's currency), shortage of essential goods, and high unemployment rates. Day by day people were more disillusioned with the political establishment and the general atmosphere remained melancholic whole along my first stay.

On a single day at the end of September 2012 the value of rial plummeted from 25 000 rials to US dollar to 35 000 rials, and on a few days that followed it continued dropping to 40 000 rials. To give a wider perspective, just couple of years earlier the dollar had exchanged for 10 000 rials. At the same time, over a decade long dispute over Iran's nuclear program continued fueling international tensions, which some feared would escalate in an open war between US-Israel forces and Iran.

The governmental crackdown that had been launched in the aftermath of the Green Movement protests a few years earlier hadn't seemed to ease up either. Human right organizations kept on warning about a humanitarian catastrophe on its way as political arrests were on the rise. Those days, the streets were visible patrolled by the moral police, and the months heading towards presidential elections 2013 the internet was severely slowed down.

As a policy analyst Alireza Nader (2013) had rightly predicted at the beginning of the year, 2013 was about to turn as "one of the most challenging years – both at home and in relations with the outside world – since the 1979 revolution."

Those days there seemed to be shortage of everything, and the lack of freedom, civil rights, work, money, and foreign visas became the most recurrent themes of my everyday conversations in Tehran. It was almost possible to sense the melancholy in the air – an expression I had never fully understood in the whole meaning of the term. When some months later during my second stay I was talking about this weary atmosphere with Tehrani rocker/DJ Payam (28) he remarked a tremendous change in moods that had followed Rouhani's election 2013: "But back in the days you couldn't really see anyone smiling at the street. You see, Iranian are like mirrors. When we see someone's upset and tired, we get upset and tired ourselves."

Rouhani's presidency was greeted with cautious relief, and although no-one believed in miraculous changes, during my second stay in Tehran, summer 2013 – summer 2014, the atmosphere was seemingly different. I feel like for the start it is worth stressing my data is from this particular historical moment, as this socioeconomic context affected essentially on the topics I was talked about, how I was talked to, and why I was talked to.

1.4. Methodology

At the end of my first stay in Tehran I was fortunate enough to get an interview with Omid, one of Iran's first and foremost rappers today. As I was heading towards his apartment in northern Tehran I naively kept on rejoicing I had finally found my niche in the city – an illusion which was broken at once as, after welcoming me politely, he cleared out: "I only agreed to meet with you because you're foreigner." While I stayed pondering how to react to such an upfront statement, he added without pause, "you know, all the Iranians already know how the things are here."

Methodologically speaking there was thus no turning back to the classical days of anthropology when acknowledging ethnographers' own emplacement in the field was considered a definite no-no. In Iran, the fact I was always spotted as *xareji* (foreigner), didn't only affect to the topics I was talked about, but also allowed me a relative mobility and access to move between different places and spaces in the city.

As I ended up staying in Tehran much longer than I initially had planned, at the end my "field" had grown into a monumental patchwork, composed of different genres, individuals and groups, and multiple places and spaces. All in all, my field data now consists of conversations with a way over hundred musicians, some of whom I got to know better and some who I only met once or twice.

All the rappers in this study are young male in their early twenties and thirties. Most of them were south Tehrani guys from lower-class backgrounds, and a few rappers came from a middle-class family and lived in the more affluent northern part of the city. Apart from the in-person communications in Tehran, I also conducted two email-based interviews with admins of two Farsi rap websites, bia2rap.com and farsihiphop.com. Bia2rap is the oldest and arguably the most popular website for Farsi rap. Farsihiphop was an active site between 2009 and 2014.

Majority of the musicians I met were playing in rock and metal bands. Some of them had been active in the rock scene since its birth (late 1990s) and some were playing in starting up bands. Equally as rappers, rockers and metalheads in this study are young male in their early twenties and thirties. Most of them came from middle- or upper-class families and lived in north and west Tehran, but I also met quite a few starting up rockers and metalheads from lower-class families living in south Tehran.

Apart from rap, rock, and metal musicians, I got to know many official musicians, some music producers, studio owners, street musicians, and DJs playing electronic music. Obviously, there are many musicians my study doesn't reach, but neither is it my aim to represent the "underground scene" as a whole. Rather the contrary I aim to problematize some recurrent generalizations that perceive "Iranian youth" as a homogeneous group.

Even so, I tried to find more female rappers and rockers because currently my data doesn't include any women who at the time being would have been active in the scene. To fix this gender disparity I included some female musicians who had previously played in underground bands and left the scene, admitting that the evident disparity prevails.

Both the times I lived in Tehran I was studying Farsi at the International Center for Persian Studies and was obligated to live in a student dormitory the whole time. For five months I lived in Velenjak, which is an affluent neighbourhood at the northernmost edge of the city at the gateway to the mountains and poorly connected by public transportation as most residents have their own cars. Thus, I was more than thrilled to live the rest of the time, over a year, by the

Enghelab Square downtown which, thanks to its proximity to the Tehran University, is a bubbly and energetic area full of cafés, bookstores, and people from all walks of life. Most importantly, it is well connected to all city parts by busses, metro, and shared cabs (*darbast*).

Although both dormitories were quite comfortable and basically very apartment-like, I couldn't invite people to my home. Thus, the urban geography and spatial arrangements became crucially important for me and my study, and simultaneously meant that I would spend most of my time hanging out somewhere else: at other people's homes, gatherings, cafés, parks, studios, concerts, galleries, parties, cultural centers, and most importantly walking around and getting lost in the streets. In theory the online was the only place I could have somehow accessed from home, but in practice the connections were as painfully slow as my laptop was old which kind of ruined that access as well.

All the talks and interviews in this study were conducted in Farsi apart from one English conversation with metalhead Bijan I met some weeks after I had moved in Tehran. To protect the privacy of everyone I talked with, I never wrote down any simultaneous notes or recorded any talks. This meant I would write all, even the hours long conversations and interviews only afterwards at my laptop. To make sure my field note files wouldn't be readable to outsiders I opted to use such a cryptic language that, as I would later find out, even I haven't been able to puzzle out some of the notes myself.

What this also means is that nearly all citations from my informants are reconstructions that have went through multiple interpretations from my part. First, I have translated the conversations in my head from Farsi to Finnish, then some hours later I have tried to memorize everything and write it all cryptically down, then many months later I have cried while piecing the obscure notes together, and lastly many years later I have written this thesis in English. The only direct citations in this thesis are from the two Farsi rap website admins who I interviewed by email, albeit translated from Farsi to English.

Although I am sure some scholars would be looking at my unstructured methods in horror, I felt and still feel strongly that such an improvised approach allowed more space for the conversations to flow freely here and there without any stress of going anywhere. Although most of the situations could thus be described as “participant observation” I also conducted some unstructured interviews.

At the end of it all, I cannot but agree with Clifford Geertz (1973, 29): “Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete.” The longer it has been since I left Tehran, the less complete my analysis feels. Nevertheless, I am more than happy to be on this side of the history which has already passed the reflexive turn, because as far as my cultural analysis goes, I am left with an overwhelming sense I am “not quite getting it right” (*Ibid.*).

1.5. Ethical questions

I had agreed to go to a band rehearsal of a new metal band at an underground studio located on a buzzing spot close to Vanak square in northern Tehran. The studio wasn't only underground in terms of licenses but, as it often happens, underground in the basement. Three older guys were sitting indifferently on their chairs as we made our way inside and had that certain kind of deadpan look which makes you think nothing in this life is going to surprise them anymore. The studio itself was a relatively big space and with its bright red walls, cigarette odor clinging to the air, and the drowsy vibes I had a sensation we had cinematically travelled in time and space into David Lynch's *Twin Peaks*.

The vocalist had been in “million bands” and this newest one was still forming. The guitarist had only recently joined the band whereas the bassist was rehearsing with the band for the first time that day. After their play we ended up talking about my thesis but didn't get too far before we ran into a thought-provoking discussion that took the rest of our studio time.

When I told the band members I wasn't sure whether to use musicians' artist names in my thesis, two of them firmly objected: "You see, in Iran all the bands want to be famous." Although, I am afraid they might have overestimated the magnitude of readership Master's thesis gets, my main concern was that I didn't want the bands to get famous for all the wrong reasons: "Nobody's getting into trouble if you use names. And even if they do, you already know, everybody wants to leave the country anyway."

This question has been one of the most tenacious ethical concerns I have been battling with over the years. If I don't use the artist names, am I disrespecting the musicians, their music, careers, and all the time and effort they put into this study. How can I argue in my thesis that musicians' work isn't acknowledged enough – which I argue – if I am not even going to use their names. After all everyone was fine with me using their artist names and some of them had already given interviews to musicological scholars and journalists from English-speaking press.

At the same time, it has already been seven years since I left Tehran, which means the society and people have changed, many contacts have been lost and I have no way of confirming are all the participants still fine with appearing in this study.

Eventually, I decided to use pseudonyms for everyone involved in this study. I am neither revealing musicians' exact ages but instead use close estimates which I put in brackets the first time I mention them in the text. This decision is far from being ideal and it complicates my writing quite a bit. I am obliged to write about musicians without being able to talk about their music which is basically the whole point of writing this thesis in the first place. However, the unpredictable and rapidly changing cultural policies in Iran often felt more surreal than *Twin Peaks*, and that is to say they felt very surreal indeed. Thus, due to this uncertainty I feel like I made the right call.

Even so, another ethical concern immediately follows, and that is, why am I even writing about musicians when they are already doing that themselves. And more importantly, as Lila Abu-

Lughod (2013, 218) might ask, to whom am I writing to: “As long as we are writing for the West about ‘the other,’ we are implicated in projects that establish Western authority and cultural difference.”

Even if in today’s world of transnational connections and flows it is becoming increasingly harder to define what does it mean to be “an outsider” or “other” in different cultural contexts, or at least that is how I feel, there is no escape from the fact that writing always establishes narrative authority. In the same manner as Geertz (1973, 29) declared cultural analysis as intrinsically incomplete, writing is always a kind of a demarcation process in which the writer chooses their points of views and edits realities from a subjective position.

This is the reason I wanted to emphasize my own emplacement in this study. If I am to write from some sort of ivory tower, I better be honest about it. I am hoping that by being transparent with my presence in this study I am leaving some room for human error, and instead of claiming cultural authority, I acknowledge that no matter how tuned I am to the topic of this thesis, eventually I might be hitting just as many wrong notes as I am hitting the right ones.

1.6. Overview of the previous research

Scholars have only recently been writing about popular cultures in the Middle East (Breyley and Fatemi 2016). Yet, throughout the past decade and around the time I was in Tehran myself, there has emerged an increasing body of studies about the topic of my thesis, Iranian “underground” music.

Before the time of my own field work, most of the studies had been conducted from distance. Those included lyric analysis (e.g. Zahir 2008), genre classification (e.g. Mehdi Mowlaei 2008), and a whole bunch of internet studies and diaspora studies. At the time, dance/music scholar Heather Rastovac (2009) and musicologist Ameneh Youssefzadeh (2000, 2004) had also written about the music politics in Iran and topically touched on underground music scene.

One of the most productive authors who has done fieldwork in Tehran is musicologist Laudan Nooshin, whose writings have served me well throughout my thesis writing process. She has written extensively about various music styles in today's Iran from classical music (2003) to pop music (2005a, 2009), rock music (2005b, 2008) and rap (2011), covering a variety of central issues in musicological theory such as identity formation, cosmopolitanism, and self-expression.

In her book chapter *Hip-Hop Tehran* (2011), she not only showed rap as the fastest growing music genre among the Iranian youth but also argued that today's rappers, who didn't need to spend excessive amounts of money to buy expensive music equipment, were now challenging the old social class dynamics. Rappers from less affluent backgrounds had marched into the popular music scene that was historically associated with middle and upper classes.

Musicologist Brownen Robertson's (2012) year-long ethnographic research on Tehran's underground rock scene might as well be the most comprehensive study written about Tehrani rockers in the English-language literature to date and it has certainly been important ethnography for my study as well. One of the most recent ethnography-based studies is musicologist Nahid Siamdoust's (2017) book *Soundtrack of the Revolution: The Politics of Music in Iran* which is an interesting historical analysis of Iran's music politics from Pahlavi times until today's underground music scene.

During the past half a decade more and more scholars have raised criticism regarding some deep-set essentialist assumptions, namely the resistance literature which has dominated Iranian youth and music studies since the 2000's. One of the critiques was Nooshin (2017) with her recent article *Whose liberation? Iranian popular music and the fetishization of resistance*, in which she underlines, among other things, that the notion of social class has been neglected from the large part of Iranian studies. Another recent critical voice has been music scholar Nasim Niknafs (2016, 2018) who equally criticized the recurrent resistance assumptions youth versus state and aimed to show that, rather than protesting against the state, musicians are challenging the Euro-American centrism in music education. Similarly, Siamdoust's (2017) book takes distance from the resistance literature.

The underground music scene has interested sociologists and anthropologists in Iranian universities as well and a plethora of Farsi-language studies were published throughout the past decades. However, I only touch them very cursorily in this thesis, as the English-language literature has mushroomed in the recent years and offers a sound basis for further questions and debates that I may investigate throughout this thesis.

2. Verse I: Where is “underground”?

*You were a bargaining chip
Seeing a saviour in the face of a hick
Seventy percent on this guy's lane
Who has a sound of a nightingale and a parrot's brain
Manager, the ticket tout
Building a wall between the truth and you
Don't turn inward, search your inward
Keep away from hibernating henceforward*

“Sefareshi” (“Tailor-made”) by Yas, translation by author

In this chapter I aim to study what exactly is “underground music” in Iranian context and why would I put the term in brackets. At first, I will look at the DiY pragmatics behind “underground’s” formation, and then move on to some conversations I had with Tehrani musicians about the music space this vague term refers into. With this chapter I wanted to shed some light on how “underground music” space is perceived and talked about not only by musicians who are willingly underground but also by musicians who are there unwillingly and licensed musicians who aren’t there at all.

I will take a closer look in what kind of representational problems the term “underground” often brings about in academic and journalist writings outside Iran and what kind of obstacles Iranian underground musicians might face due to highly politicized understanding of their craft. On a theoretical level I aim to problematize understanding of “underground scene” as a metonymic space of subversive music and liberation by oppressed people, and underline that underground musicians form a heterogeneous group where individual musicians don’t have an equal access and opportunities in this allegedly emancipatory space.

2.1. Just Do it Yourself

For some popular music scholars “underground” has become a synonym for Do it Yourself (from now on DiY) as it blurs the line between performer and audience (Forman 2013, 64).

The definition is, without question, one of the most apt ones to capture the essence of underground space in Tehran.

Since the revolution, Tehrani musicians have been creating their music space from scratch. Tehran's underground scene can be easily seen as a textbook example of DiY ethos, so much so that during the instrument ban right after the revolution even the bigger music instruments were smuggled into the country in pieces and pieced together in secrecy from the officials. Quite aptly Robertson (2012, 91) describes Iranian musicians as "musical bricoleurs, creating their own unique voices out of the sounds and ideas that are available to them."

Since the revolution the strict restrictions on cultural production, constantly changing cultural policies, volatile global affairs, and Iran's geopolitical isolation led into conditions in which musicians had to learn everything by themselves. Along with many other scholars, musicologist Nasim Niknafs (2018, 156) saw that eventually this DiY history provided "a rich and highly contextualized space of creativity" for Tehran's urban youth.

What is interesting in today's underground scene is that, historically, Iran's pop music has been associated with the middle and upper classes. As a matter of fact, until today English-language Iranian youth studies have mostly concentrated on the more affluent north Tehran. With rap music attracting musicians also from the less affluent and religious families from south and east Tehran and Iranian provinces this division is now about to change. For Nooshin's (2011, 97) astonishment, this would have been unthinkable two decades ago.

Farsihiphop's admin explained this democratization was happenings along with the technological development: "Today in Iran it's like anyone with a simple microphone, sound card, computer system and music software can record a song and put it online where everyone can download it." Alternatively, he added, there are also various underground studios in Tehran where people can record for low prices, and sometimes even for free if they are supported by other rappers.

And indeed, the number of underground studios has been mushrooming since the 1990s. The music production software is becoming more affordable, accessible, and improved, which is furthermore narrowing the gap between the officially produced music and underground music. In rapper Omid's opinion, the improved quality of studios meant that the quality of underground music videos was often even better than on the licensed music scene. According to him, the city was so full of studios everyone would easily find a place to record, and if he found promising stars, he would support them himself.

The easiness of production also implies that the estimates of the number of rappers might be misleading. These estimates are commonly based on the tracks uploaded to different Farsi rap websites and many of these rappers remain as "one-hit stars"; they only record one song, and that's it, or so I was often told.

Since its early days, rapping has challenged our conventional perceptions of music production as it doesn't require expensive instruments, a full band nor music education. In fact, at a Conference on Freedom of Expression in Music organized in Beirut 2005, the editor of the online music competition TehranAvenue Sohrab Mahdavi claimed that the recent technological developments might have even favored the rural poor youth in some cases (Korpe 2005, 21). As Tehrani metalhead Kamran (27) explained to me: "Anyone can go to Jomhuri Eslami street or bazaar and get the proper software for their computers (to make rap). But to buy a trumpet, that's worth of 40 of my bass guitars."

Kamran's comment reveals another common perception, and largely also a demographic fact until very recently. Whereas the rock scene has been thought to belong to the affluent youth from north Tehran, rap, instead, has been perceived as a scene for youth from the less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds (Nooshin 2011; Robertson 2012).

Even so, I managed to meet some rock and heavy metal band members from south Tehran as well, many of them coming from religious and conservative families. Thus, the demographics

constituting underground music scene are changing rapidly. That is because democratization, although maybe not as obvious, has been characteristic for Tehran's rock scene as well.

Nasim Niknafs' (2018) study about Tehran's DiY music education observes how, at the lack of institutional music education, musicians have created an alternative and self-sufficient model for music education which she took as an apt example of Arjun Appadurai's formulation of "deep democracy." In Tehran's music education this deep democracy meant that exchange was based on seeing, hearing, and sharing rather than teaching and learning.

"This improvisatory attitude toward musicianship, not only in sound but also in approaches to music learning, originates from a city that generated a savvy, creative, and spirited populace capable of creating bottom-up spaces for their musicianship and a meaningful placeless place" (*Ibid.*, 169). Niknafs sees that, by creating new improvised forms and new kinds of creativity, the DiY ethics in Tehran's musical education are challenging the Euro-American hegemony in music education rather than being automatic resistance towards the state. Furthermore, she proposes that Tehran's DiY form of music education could move us away from the old binaries of teaching/learning, formal/informal, professionalism/amateurism, and oppressive/emancipatory practices (*Ibid.*, 159).

Needles to say, not everyone has been as delighted of the ongoing democratizing process which particularly professionally trained musicians have been watching with resentment. One of them was licensed contemporary music artist Mehrdad (30) who experienced a bit of a musical shock when he was invited to a rehearsal session of an underground band in Mashhad: "Their sound was completely off. When I told them to tune their guitars the musicians didn't even know how to do that. Every musician needs to understand that sort of things."

Because many underground musicians don't have music education, they tend to get accused of unprofessionalism. But not everybody takes this critique personally. In one of her interviews one of the first well-known female rappers Salome MC answered to her critiques:

I know that these academically educated musicians that are stuck in some rules and other gibberish, will hate my work and I understand them with a bit sorrow. What these guys don't get is, I am not a musician, I am a lyricist, my music is very simple. Even hitting a pot with a spoon rhythmically could create rap music. They have to be an 'outsider' like me to understand my work. But the point I agree with them is, I am weak technically as a vocalist, and it is possible that someone with a sensitive ear cannot stand it. However, I try my best to get better. (Reshad, 2006.)

Many musicians considered that unprofessionalism was most severely affecting rap music production. Farsihiphop's admin saw the democratizing development mainly in a positive light, but also added:

There are more and more rappers everyday (...) Most of them don't have enough knowledge and they just want to sing about whatever. But 'Knowledge, lost element of hip-hop' (originally in English, note by author) is true both in the US and Iran. Information and education are the most important factors in this work and the ones who get this have more weight and thought in their work.

Conscious rappers often emphasized that if one was to be a credible rapper, they needed to have the right knowledge about hip-hop. What was this right knowledge though, was, obviously, a matter of debate as I will show later in this thesis.

Although, as Robertson (2012, 97) rightly points out, at the end Tehrani DiY ethos might not differ that much from the bricolage mentality of starting-up musicians and bands all around the world, considering the limited access to music training and lack of official sources of income it is certainly more complicated for Iranian rap and rock musicians to make career out of music. In the following subchapters I will move my focus into discussions I had with musicians about these specific circumstances that constitute the underground music scene in Tehran.

2.2. “Underground is a virus that causes trouble”

*I am not talking about birds and flowers
I am connected to the underground womb through my belly button
I do not have a rejection letter from Ershad
I say no to any kind of supervision system
Supply and demand is the law of on-the-ground*

“Bahaye rahayi” (“Price of Freedom”) by Salome MC, translated by Salome MC

“So, you want to meet underground musicians,” Farbod (30) asked me right at the introduction. He was a vocalist/guitarist/bassist/songwriter at a folky mellow rock band, and a friend of mine who also came along had set us up for the meeting in a café close to Vanak square.

At that point I had been in Tehran over a year and in the meanwhile lost all the clarity of the term “underground.” Broadly speaking, underground music in Iran refers to any music produced without permits whether intentionally or not. When I told him I sometimes had a hard time to determine where the boundary between official and unofficial music goes, he instantly corrected me: “The boundary is very clear.”

I went ahead and asked him what about the bands that might get a permit to perform but not to publish their music: “The bands that work like us, you know, without income, are underground.” For him the common characteristic of underground musicians was the lack of copyrights and financial sources.

And he wasn’t alone. Roughly 99 percent of the musicians I met in Tehran were lamenting the same thing. Tehrani rocker Payam, also a DJ and photographer, made fun of the whole scene: “Elsewhere underground music is music that people don’t want money from. In Iran it’s understood wrongly as music people can’t get money from.”

It is commonly thought among musicians that the term “underground” is used sloppily in Iranian music context. Afsoun (30), who had been active in Tehran’s rock scene since its birth,

put it this way: “Every country has its underground music but in Iran we mistakenly name it as music that doesn’t have permits.”

It is due to this schism why “underground” as a term came under a wide scrutiny by musicians during the past decades. Much of this rumination has resulted from the fact “underground music” is so often conceptualized according to the Euro-American music jargon. In the “West” “underground” is characteristically something independent and often small-scale, something that goes against the mainstream. In Iran this is necessarily not the case.

Much of this ambiguity also reflects the difficult translation of the term. In Farsi *zirzamin* doesn’t only refer to “underground” but also a “basement,” which was the very space where metal, rock, and punk bands started their musical journeys at the 1990s. After Iraqi war, the vast basements used as bomb shelters became places where affluent Tehrani residents organized parties and concerts, and these basements would later be a solid ground for musicians to build their rehearsal spaces and studios. (Siamdoust 2017, 180.) This is also the historical context from which the term *zirzamin* circulated into popular use among musicians.

Despite these conceptual problems, much like Siamdoust (2017, 224) I have decided to stick with the term because currently it is still the most widely used and established concept for this music space and there exists a certain consensus of its meaning. It is “either music for which someone has tried and failed to receive official permission for its production and distribution or else music whose makers are not even attempting and do not desire to be government-licensed” (*Ibid.*).

Thus, regardless of the challenges musicians face due to their criminalization, there is a bunch of musicians who often emphasize they would be underground even without Ershad’s permission system. This has been particularly the case among conscious rappers for whom staying underground is often a question of artistic freedom and credibility. Underground as independence and freedom is lucidly expressed by Salome MC:

When I say I'm an underground musician it doesn't mean I go underground because I have to, but because I chose to. (...) Some of these underground artists do want to be mainstream, want to be talking to the masses, but they can't because the government is not letting them. So, it's a special situation in Iran because you don't have a choice, and I always want to make it clear that I would be underground no matter what. Even if the Iranian government wasn't like this, I wouldn't try to get any kind of permission from any government anyway. That's just going to limit my creativity. (Stransky 2011.)

Apart from losing creative freedom various conscious rappers have stressed that you cannot credibly criticize the society from "above." Underground thus serves as a metaphor for the grassroots of the society, much like often understood in the Western music jargon. According to Farsihiphop's admin many Iranian rappers see underground as "a platform that targets higher levels."

One of them was rapper Omid who told me: "Underground is a virus: it's a problem that causes trouble (*aziat mikone*)." For him underground was a troublemaker that got its power precisely from its counter-position: "If it goes over ground it ceases to be a problem, it ceases to cause trouble."

In the same tone, Nooshin (2005b, 475) sees that underground music derives much of its power from the very restrictions that difficult its existence. Music scholar Heather Rastovac (2009, 72) has suggested that as popular music was legalized 1997 it simultaneously lost its peripheral status and since then this status has been taken over by the underground scene. The new music genres of rap, rock, and metal offered a space to express otherness and identity through creation rather than merely consumption as had been the case with the imported pop music before.

It might be good to add that conscious rappers aren't the only musicians who say they are willingly underground. This oppositional status rarely gets determined as opposition towards the state, but rather as a marginal status within the society which legitimates wider cultural critique. The idea of being underground is closely linked to questions of authenticity and musicians' credibility as certain kind of social critiques.

Thus, the notions of authenticity and credibility play a central role in these debates. These debates also make it understandable why so many conscious rappers have watched the mainstreaming of their genre with mixed feelings of annoyance and nostalgia. In fact, a decade ago rap hit the mainstream so hard that some musicians question can it even be called underground anymore.

For instance, in one his interviews Hichkas, often perceived as the godfather of Farsi rap, answered whether he considered himself to be part of the underground movement: “I actually don’t know whether you can call it an underground movement when so many people listen to your music. But if you are talking about not having the permit and not being official, then yes.” (Monebatti 2009.)

Thus, unlike the Euro-American “underground”, in Iran “underground” is not a synonym for small-scale and unknown. The recent mainstreaming of rap music also supports the claim by many Iranian musicologists (e.g. Nooshin) that the political restrictions have only made the underground more attractive for wider audiences and thus increased its appeal.

Licensed musician and songwriter Farhad (30) had made similar conclusions: “We have two kinds of musicians in Iran. The ones who are after fame, and the ones who are after money. Those who are after fame play underground, and those who are after money get themselves permits.” Thus, he saw that those who play underground easily become famous.

Another licensed musician, Mehrdad, was seemingly frustrated by this hype. He played contemporary music no-one in Iran seemed to understand, let alone appreciate. For his lamentation no-one supported music in Iran, neither the government nor the people. Bigger crowds were only interested in rockers, not professional musicians who had education from the field. Thus, he felt like his education was wasted in Iran where not even his friends would come to see his shows: “If I was after fame I would go underground and be famous in few months. But that’s not for me. I’m probably just too idealistic.”

For him music didn't supposed to have any other goal than music itself. Echoing the century old assumption by Igor Stravinsky which still partly carries its traits in today's Western musicology (McClary 1991, x-xi) he considered music as autonomous art unaffected by its surrounding culture. He thought music should be appreciated only through its inherent aesthetical value, not due to its marginal position in the society.

But it has been precisely this marginal position that has attracted, not only Iranian consumers, but the international media as well particularly in the aftermath of the Green Movement protests when various underground musicians were arrested and left the country. While still in the 2008 Nooshin (2008, 74-75) stressed that Western audiences wouldn't find Iranian underground rock unless musicians emphasized their exotism and "Iranianess," this global unawareness was rapidly turned around a year later in the wake of the broad international coverage frantically looking for protesting bodies in the Islamic State, and months later all around Middle East.

Until today, transnational press has been mainly concerned about different excitement factors around Iranian underground scene and the journalist stories have emphasized elements of danger and protest at the expense of the actual music. I must admit, this media hype and the news stories of arrested musicians and raids on underground concerts also struck a chord with me and as my first introduction to Iranian underground music strongly influenced on my understanding of the scene before I had ever visited Tehran myself.

Many underground musicians have been lamenting that, despite the wide media exposure, the interviewers have been hardly interested in their music per se. In her tellingly named article, *In a box: a narrative of a(n) (under)grounded Iranian musician*, musicologist Nasim Niknafs (2016, 357) tells about a rock musician Raam who had moved to New York due to political issues and imprisonment he faced in Iran, but after a while, and particularly after the infamous incident in Brooklyn when one of the members from Iranian rock band Yellow Dogs got shot, he got so frustrated with the attention he received from sensationalist journalists that eventually he moved back to Iran:

I realize that it's a very... orientalist sort of approach of, 'oh, look at these exotic animals in a cage from the Middle East. They know how to play guitar.' (...) I really got sick and tired of having to keep

talking about Iranian underground, this and that. I wanted to talk about my music. If it sucks, tell me it sucks. (*Ibid.*)

In her other article, Niknafs (2018, 162) criticises that “fetishizing Iranian popular music as the voice of resistance endorses a kind of liberation privileged by ‘Euro-American neo-liberal norms.’” When such stories of protesting voices have made headlines in the Euro-American press they have often been based on journalists’ own presumptions and romanticized ideas of resistance rather than any real interest in hearing how musicians define their artistic craft themselves. Niknafs cites YouTube post by artist Ehsan Fardjadniya: “(T)hese stories aren’t told with the intention of understanding—they’re told for the sake of consumption” (*Ibid.*).

Robertson (2012, 79) suggests that bands’ commercial success in the West has been “dependent on their ability to emphasize difference and exaggerate their backstories,” and as such musicians are well aware of the politicized stereotypes which they don’t only challenge but use for their own benefit as well. But even if musicians may occasionally exoticize Iran’s “underground scene” to attract Western media (*Ibid.*, 123), they rarely explain being underground as resistance against the state. In fact, this highly politicized understanding of “underground” has made many musicians to object the term altogether and replace it with “alternative”, “unofficial”, or “unlicensed.”

After her extensive ethnographic work on Tehran’s rock scene Robertson (2013, 139; in Nooshin 2017, 182) points out that the use of the term underground overpoliticises the rock scene which “works strongly against these musicians who are struggling to gain acceptance and a public platform within Iran through which to disseminate their work.”

Similarly, musicologist Nahid Siamdoust (2017, 180) notes that many musicians didn’t want to be called as underground because they worried this might difficult their intentions to gain permits in the future. These heated debates also made the organizers of TehranAvenue, the first ever online competition of underground music in Iran organized at the 2010s’, to change the festival’s name from “Underground Music Contest” to “TehranAvenue Open Music.” The

organizers had been contacted by Iranian officials who advised them to “avoid calling bands ‘underground’ because that could put them ‘in harm’s way’” (*Ibid*).

TehranAvenue’s editor Sohrab Mahdavi reasoned their decision by saying:

Originally it (“underground”, addition by author) was a playful term... but once it took on a serious tone we tried to distance ourselves from it... The term ‘underground’ was hijacked by the western mass/global media to attribute [a] political agenda to young, middle class musicians most of whom didn’t have any such intentions or claims. (Steward 2013, 205; in Nooshin 2017, 182.)

All in all, “underground music” in Iran refers to a very heterogenous space shared by different musicians from different genres with different and contradictory views, aspirations, music aesthetics, and styles.

In the rest of the chapter I am aiming to dig into this space and demonstrate how the boundaries between official and unofficial are in constant flux and how musicians move in these music spaces while modifying them and redefining their meaning. Such factors as gender, social class, and ethnicity play a crucial role for these movements, but even after the intersectional calculations we are left to wonder how to account for subjective aspirations that arise from a set of personal experiences and coincidence.

Therefore, I am aiming to move away from epistemological understanding of space to phenomenological approach towards space. By this I mean that underground space shouldn’t be understood inherently as subversive, emancipatory, or anything else for that matter, because such a romanticized understanding of music as something makes it difficult to grasp the material world where musicians have different aspirations and opportunities of action. Basically, it erases the possibility for any other kind of action.

2.3. What about permits?

Now that I have introduced “underground music” as music that doesn’t have permits, it might be clarifying to take a closer look what exactly are these permits.

In music’s context this state-authorizing process means that Ershad, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, scrutinizes that all released music production meets religious standards both lyrically and aesthetically (Nooshin 2005b). This authorizing process has three phases. Firstly, the lyrics are approved by the lyrics committee, secondly, music is scrutinized by the music council, and thirdly, the cultural committee ensures that the final recording and live performance meet Islamic standards (*Ibid.*).

Only a few rap, rock, and heavy metal musicians have ever gained permits to date, and even those permits have been temporal most of the times. For instance, rapper Yas got a permit once in 2007 for a rap song dedicated to Bam earthquake victims, and rock band O-Hum got a permit once in 2012 for a concert in Azadi Tower.

Although never easy, particularly during Ahmadinejad’s era (2005-2013) gaining authorization became nearly impossible for rap and rock musicians. For this reason, many musicians see the permission system as a big joke and the vast majority don’t see the trouble of even trying to get authorized. In 2011, Ershad’s Deputy Culture Minister for Artistic Affairs Hamid Shah Abadi estimated that only 20 percent of all music produced in Iran was sent to the application process at the Ministry, and the rest 80 percent remained unlicensed (Khosravi and Mowlaei 2013, 44), thus “underground.”

Even so, every Tehrani musician will certainly have a story to tell about the Ministry. One metalhead told me about his friend’s metal band that had applied for permits: “Ershad had asked about their songs why don’t they sing about religion. As if it’s any of their business!” It might come as no surprise the band’s solicitation was denied.

The sentiments musicians have towards permits are in constant flux though and affected by the changing cultural policies of the state. As already observed in the introduction, the laws regarding the matter aren't very clear which is why individual interpretations by officials have played a central role in the decisions and cultural policies in general. Being such a volatile ground, musicians might also change their minds rather quickly.

During Ahmadinejad's last months in office and early months of Rouhani's term practically none of the musicians I talked with were even thinking about applying for authorization. One of them was rock vocalist and songwriter Farbod who was convinced the whole process of applying for permits would just be a waste of time: "Electric guitar alone is a problem for the people of Ershad. For them playing guitar means worshipping Satan. Just like the whole rock scene itself."

His band was playing melodic rock that could be characterized as a fusion of soft, indie, country, and folk. He wrote the lyrics himself, and in their philosophy and intertextuality they often carried a deeper social message, but they were far from being political. For him, much like for many other musicians, the main lamentation about working without the permits was the lack of income. His band gathered most of its money from underground concerts. This wasn't much and all of it went to the band's future projects, not to individual band members.

In his opinion, those musicians who applied for permits needed to sacrifice in quality: "Ershad's people will just be suggesting their own ideas in every turn they can: why don't you say this and that." He was convinced his band would never get permits even if they tried:

We have decided to stay independent because nobody's gonna tell us what to do. Normally in music business managers are important so that you get to buy instruments and other necessities. Here in Tehran's music field there are some circles supporting the bands, but very few. So, when I went to buy my guitar, who sponsored me? Me, myself. That's our story.

We had this discussion during the early months of Rouhani's term and, as it happened, a few months later in the cautiously optimistic political atmosphere Farbod's band had already

applied for permits. His hunch seemed to be somewhat on point though as, eventually, their solicitation was denied.

Their flip-flop was not the only one I testified at the time. Rouhani had taken office with a discursive aura of freedom and together with the minister of culture Ali Jannati they were talking about relaxation of cultural restrictions and even terminating the whole permission system altogether. These talks created some cautious hopes that more liberal cultural policies would follow, and the same musicians who had been mocking the permission system a year earlier were now sending their work to Ershad.

Thus, the romanticized idea of Iranian outlaw musicians protesting against the state little acknowledges the fact that the main nuisance among musicians, at least as far as I was told, is the “notorious lack of copyrights” and thus financial resources. Golpushnezhad’s (2018) study on Iran’s rap scene points out that when musicians cannot make money out of production such a system will eventually favor those who already have financial support and can afford to play music. For musicians who come from lower social classes with limited economic resources and for women who lack the general social acceptance as musicians it becomes harder to continue their careers after a while.

That being said, it might be good to add that having permits alone won’t solve all the monetary issues and neither are they the only path to earn money in Iran’s music field. One increasingly popular source of income is to make music for others. For instance, rapper Omid who has gained a wide fan base couldn’t make money from his music either. He lamented that all musicians in Iran need to have a side job which often has nothing to do with music: “Music is not a profession in Iran. Here music is seen as a hobby.” He was selling lyrics to make a living which he didn’t want to do but that was “the only way to make money.”

It is thus understandable why musicians would want to get the authorization even though they might have to make changes in the lyrical content. One rock band was requesting permits for dozens of their songs at the time I met its members who all had been in the scene since the

1990s and none of them had permits before. “There’s a chance, but nothing’s certain yet,” their manager-friend Kian (30) explained. He was a young rock veteran in Tehran’s music scene himself and had been in the scene long enough to have a pragmatic grip on their work and the music field in general: ”All music is complicated in Iran. But if you get permits, you have better chances to succeed in your music career and get name because there are so few other licensed (rock) musicians. It’s fucked up and it shouldn’t be that way but that’s how it is.”

On the other hand, it seems that more and more rock musicians have indeed been gaining permits after 2014, such as the rock band Bomrani (Niknafs 2018, 165), and the state has allowed an online music show *ChaarGoosh* to feature many such musicians online that would not air on national television, including rapper Reza Pishro and the alternative rock band Comment (Siamdoust 2017, 221). In Golpushnezhad’s (2018) opinion, rap music’s legitimization by the Islamic State has even went that far it has deradicalized the music and pretty much stultified the whole genre.

On the other hand, the promised lift on bans hasn’t been fulfilled and there’s been more cancellations of already licensed concerts last minute. Some sources claim persecutions against musicians have been on the rise. Heavy metal, with its supposedly antireligious mentality, seems to be the most conflicted music area today. Nevertheless, at the lack of reliable statistics and news sources, it is very difficult to get an objective overview of the situation from abroad, as it is already rather difficult from within the country.

The history of gradual relaxation of music production policies shows that it is not out of the question these genres would be legalized one day. There is a lot of scepticism towards such a move though. When I asked Bia2rap’s admin what he thought about the possible termination of the permission system, along the lines with many conscious rappers he considered this was a matter of artistic integrity:

They always talk a lot but don’t put it in practice. Rap is a sound of heart, it involves swearing. How could they permit that? It’s not the US here. Even if they did, most musicians wouldn’t go to that direction because they are writing the lyrics themselves. If they want permits they need to censor themselves, and a true artist won’t do that. By Shahin Najafi’s words: “We are walking a different path from those who are tempted to request insulting permits from Ershad.”

Thus, while some musicians take advantage of the relaxed space and apply for permits, some see that by getting permits musicians lose their creative freedom and need to censor themselves. It should also be added that such differences in opinion don't follow any genre lines. Musicians apply for permits from all genres, and musicians from all genres have also gained them, although until today only a very few musicians from the rap and metal scenes.

2.4. “Underground” the battleground?

*Where are our artists now, aren't there any?
They sing from underground 'cause they're prohibited
What should I say?
What do you expect me to give away?*

“*Az chi began*” (“What Should I Say”) by Yas, translation by author

“I am not afraid of the police,” Behnam (30) declared with a humorous tone in his voice. “At most what they can do is put you in a prison. I take one week in prison like a holiday, I like prison.” He had been actively involved in Tehran’s rock scene since its early days and at the time played in a fusion rock band whose music was uplifting and had a sarcastic undertone towards Persian classical music. That night I had joined him and his friend at a jamming session at his home situated in a middle-class residential area in west Tehran where he had built a proper studio and rehearsal space – more the norm than the exception in that part of the city.

His friend playing the piano politely agreed to disagree: “I don’t like that place. I’m afraid of police. And snakes.” Behnam remained loyal to his declaration: “I’m only afraid of snakes.”

Even if he was joking, he also had a point. As far as his music goes, he doesn’t have much reason to worry about getting into trouble. The few times I have seen him play the music has been very energetic and humorous in tone but shying away from political topics.

Behnam's sarcastic stance towards police unravels common sentiments musicians share about their craft. They might not have permits but they aren't too worried about such elements of danger that until very recently have been dominating representations about Iran's underground scene in youth studies and journalist accounts outside Iran.

It has been extensively documented that after the revolution Iranians have learned to ignore the rules under the Islamic Republic and live in a way that has often been perceived through dualistic frameworks such as veiling/unveiling, official/unofficial, public/private, and so forth. As a friend of a friend once explained to me in a home party while sipping vodka and smoking cigarettes in chain: "For the Islamic Republic of Iran it's all about representation. What we do in our homes and in privacy, if we drink alcohol and so on, is not important for them. It becomes important when something harms the representation."

Roxanna Varzi (2006) captures this dualism in the concept of a "public secret" by which she describes how the state is allowing people some liberties in privacy as long as they behave according to the state's Islamic modesty rules in public domain. It is of interest that these dualities have been often expressed in music lyrics as well. For instance, rapper Bahram begins his track "*Inja Irane*" ("This is Iran", translation by author) bemoaning that people pretend to be something they aren't:

This is Iran, a 7,000-year-old cat staying alive as long as it has oil

It has four seasons, but you will only find winter snow and frost in people's heart

Here the mirrors don't show you who you really are

This doesn't mean public spaces are void of social critique though. Instead, "politics of nagging" (Bayat 2013, 100) are very much present all over Tehran's public areas from streets to busses, shared cabs, cafes, and stores. As I was talking about this widespread grievance one day with one Green Movement activist, he explained: "Here people can criticize the power, it's not like in the Soviet Union or DDR. But if you participate in political action, then you're in trouble."

In music's context such dualism means that its permissibility depends "to a great extent on social acceptability and convention" (Siamdoust 2017, 228). Musicians can make music more or less freely as long as they don't question the legitimacy of the state.

The guidelines regarding what exactly questions the state's legitimacy aren't rock solid though. Rock musician Davoud (31), who was working as a music teacher, explained: "In Iran nobody goes to prison just because they play music. The music needs to have some triggering message to that to happen." He exemplified his point by playing me Shahin Najafi's song "*Naghi*" in which Najafi had mocked the religious leaders and religion and gotten the infamous fatwa for apostasy in return. Najafi has resided in Europe ever since.

Today religion and politics are without doubt the most controversial themes that would trigger the authorities. Other taboo subjects such as sex and drugs won't give musicians permits but aren't necessarily seen as harmful for the state legitimacy although, again, there are no clear guidelines on the matter.

As a consequence, most musicians have been cautious to criticize the government even though they wouldn't intend to get permits. In Mark LeVine's book *Heavy Metal Islam* (2008, 196) a metalhead Ali Azhari explained: "When you breathe in our country, it's political (...). But even so, we're not doing stuff to harm the system, we're just trying to survive." LeVine concludes: "Most Iranians don't want revolution; they just want to manage their lives with as little interference as possible from the government" (*Ibid.*).

The musicians I met were often telling me the same. One of them was metalhead Aftab (25) who was allergic to politics: "Everything in Iran is political. But we don't care about the politics." Robertson (2012, 93) observes how musicians would often discuss about freedom as "a distant ideal," not necessarily as something achievable. Thus, Tehrani musicians have learned to work "around the rules rather than against them" because working against them would be tiring and fruitless. She concludes that although the regime has politicked underground scene musicians keep away from politics and regime change. (*Ibid.*)

For this reason it is rather baffling that so many scholars on Iranian youth and popular music throughout the 2000s have first acknowledged that musicians, or youth, aren't that interested in politics and yet the theoretical conclusion has often been the same: musicians (or youth) are protesting but they just don't know it yet. Resistance literature was dominating Iranian youth studies large part of the past decades and has only recently been questioned by such scholars as Niknafs (2016, 2018), Nooshin (2017), Siamdoust (2017), and Olszewska (2013).

Having done field work among Afghan refugees living on the margins of society Zuzanna Olszewska (2013) claims that the notion of "social class" and the aspiration to upward mobility haven't received enough consideration in ethnographic studies on Iran which have often privileged "resistance" to repressive state as the theoretical model to analyse everyday life in the country. She observes that the aspirations Afghan refugees have are more related to status contestation than the "kind of mourning," pessimistic approach that had dominated autobiographic ethnographies throughout the 2000s.

Olszewska criticizes autobiographic tradition by Iranian diaspora scholars, mainly the works of Roxanna Varzi (2006), Pardis Mahdavi (2008), and Shahram Khosravi (2011), and argues that by concentrating on a very small sector of society, that is, the middle and upper class youth living in north Tehran, they had generalized this small group to represent all Iranian youth as a whole without taking into consideration how symbolic values don't translate equally among all social classes in a given society. Thus, autobiographic works often reflected authors' own political agendas and gave a distorted picture of Iranian society. (Zuzanna Olszewska 2013.)

The three mentioned researches are well acknowledged works in Iranian social studies, but I only touch them very cursorily in this thesis as they are not primarily interested in music. Nevertheless, Olszewska's introduction of "social class" is a very welcoming critique indeed to this academic canon that has often stressed the importance of two identity categories of "generation," particularly the one born after the revolution, and "gender", particularly women, and taken less note of other crucial aspects such as socioeconomic and ethnic background.

Olszewska's article offers food for thought for musicologists as well as Laudan Nooshin illustrates in her well-rounded article *Whose liberation? Iranian popular music and the fetishization of resistance* (2017). Having read Olszewska's study, Nooshin immediately recognized similar representations of Iranian popular music outside Iran which have narrowly concentrated on discourses of resistance and freedom without acknowledging musicians' individual motivations at play.

As Nooshin (*Ibid.*) points out, fetishization of resistance is not afflicting only Iranian studies but is present on popular music studies in general, particularly on hip-hop studies. And considering the theoretical trajectory the scholarship on "underground culture" has followed, it might not seem surprising that debates over resistance have been so heated and central to the field.

This academic tradition can be traced all the way back to the Chicago School beginning of the 1900's and particularly the Birmingham School (CCCS) at the 1960s which partly emerged as a counterreaction, or as continuation, to positivist assumptions maintained by such authors as Adorno and Horkheimer whose Marxist writings about culture industry left little space for political action. CCCS's tradition was setting off from the Marxian cultural theory, French structuralism, and semiotics, and being so central in the birth of subcultural studies their legacy has been integral on a considerable body of punk, rock, and more recently the hip-hop studies since then.

CCCS scholars considered resistance as the most central aspect in the formation of subcultures while simultaneously ignoring other important aspects such as aesthetics and affection. Their focus on resistance, social class, and white male dominated subcultures has come under much scrutiny over the past two decades and there has been a paradigmatic shift towards more phenomenological or at least more ethnographic understanding of subculturalists and their DiY ethos on a less theory-driven and more pragmatic level. (e.g. Jenks 2004.)

While scholarship on resistance became increasingly popular in many academic fields throughout the 1990s, the definition of resistance divided scholars. Others have considered resistance should be intentional whereas others see everyday defiance doesn't need to be articulately expressed by its subjects (Einwohner and Hollander 2004).

Political theorist Jodi Dean (2000, 6) argues that within the western political theory which reduces every action into politics, such politization of everything will eventually result in depoliticizing everything: "The claim that everything is political makes action seem, if not impossible, then at least pointless – there's no need to bother with organizing, consciousness raising, or critique if everything is already political." She claims that such a totalizing understanding of "everything" neglects "the *how* of politics."

In Iran such depoliticizing effects may be witnessed both at the level of theory, in that scholars and journalists reduce all action in subversion against the repressive state, and at the level of pragmatics, in that the state policies politicize all life and consider everyone as its potential enemies. In effect, some claim that Iranian youth – while paradoxically still protesting through consumption – has become extremely apolitical.

Rocker Davoud was lamenting this phenomenon:

One foreign friend of mine once said that the most common saying you hear in Iran is 'no problem' (*moshkel nist*). Maybe people here always say 'no problem', because there always is! There's too lot of problems, so people don't have another option, at the end they just don't care about them anymore. But I personally don't like this. When it goes on long enough, when people always keep on saying 'no problem', at the end the problems have grown too big. And what can you do about it then? Here the problems are growing all the time.

In another sociological study of Iranian music production (Fatemi, Ghasemi and Samim 2012, 490) the participant group expressed they hardly even felt living the country: "We have no relations with governmental institutions, neither relevant institutions, nor irrelevant ones. A short while ago I went to the passport office to renew my passport. I felt like a person who had

left his cave after a long time.” The authors conclude that nearly everyone they interviewed felt indifferent towards the state and were often trying to keep away from official spaces.

Varzi’s (2006, 128) idea of sleepwalking is a poetic portrayal of similar ignorance. She writes that Iranians have learned to ignore images of the public sphere and navigate the space unconsciously: “The transgression in Iran is about being consciously unaware in spaces one does not want to be in: to walk through the city like a sleepwalker or somnambulist” (*Ibid.*).

Although I am not completely abandoning the idea of “unintentional protest” – that, for instance, ignoring authorities and rules can be a form of protest – the main pitfall with such reasoning is that it is more concerned about the form and style than the substance. My biggest frustration can be expressed, following Jodi Dean, in very simple terms: what’s the point? As it often happens, resistance becomes yet another form of “ritual(s) of consumption” (Hebdige 1979, 103) in which emancipated – and stylish – individuals reach a happy ending by taking unnerving haircuts and singing the chorus of “Get Up, Stand Up” along with Bob Marley every time they hear it at a club (guilty of both).

If all underground music is considered automatically subversive only due to its style regardless of the content, then all the subversive voices become one and the same, and eventually such equalization of underground voices makes it difficult to make any ethical judgements on the matter. Popular music scholar Michelle Phillipov (2006, 386-387) criticizes similar tendency within punk studies which cherished the representation of punk as always emancipatory and progressive while theoretically ignoring the existence of conservative and skinhead punks or sexism in the scene. The same obviously applies to rap as well, as Pennycook (2007, 11) stresses, which can be equally conformist, conservative, misogynist, and homophobic.

In her historical overview of rock music, Sheila Whiteley (2000, 10) reminds that the allegedly progressive and revolutionary counter-culture ethos of the 1960s wasn’t extended to women who for long time were considered as intruders and outsiders to the whole culture. Even though punk movement intended to challenge rock’s elitism and open space for women performers in

the late 1970s (*Ibid.*), it wasn't before the Riot grrrl movement at the 1990s that the male-dominated gender dynamics within punk subcultures became challenged from their core.

Equally in Tehran, I met some metal musicians who held anti-Semitic beliefs and dissed rap music due to obviously very racist reasons. I didn't include these musicians in this study though as, quite simply, I did not want to see or talk to them again. When it comes to sexism within Tehran's underground music space, I will look at this question more in depth later in the fourth chapter, but for now it suffices to remind of the struggle I had with finding any active female musicians to take part in this study in the first place.

Ultimately, the perception of underground scene belonging to defiant youth against repressive state ignores how different actors don't have an equal access to the allegedly "emancipatory" and "subversive" spaces. The link between underground music and resistance is problematic also because in a sense it makes its opposite, the official music space, seem like inherently submissive and obedient – which is hardly the case in Tehran. One might ask isn't the epistemological understanding of underground as subversive by its very definition downplaying the fact that the same state policies affect licenced musicians as well.

In a sense it almost feels like much of this discussion is only a matter of semantics and that it would be useful just to invent another term for unintentional protest and move on. Political scientist John Street (2012, 6) solved this theoretical conflict by concluding that although music isn't necessarily political for individual musicians, it becomes political in a wider social context, when it "spills over into the public realm and into the exercise of power."

As Nooshin (2017, 173) writes, "(i)ndividually, none of these statements is untrue." But she then continues, "collectively, however, they can be understood as part of a broader discursive network—a 'regime of truth'—by which Iran is represented in certain ways, and in which music also plays a role." Importantly, Nooshin (*Ibid.*, 164) asks "whose agendas such privileging might serve and how and why certain kinds of music and other art forms come to

be positioned in relation to discourses of resistance and liberation, while others are less likely to be.”

Similarly, Elham Golpushnezhad (2018, 262) acknowledged a glaring disjuncture between international and domestic understanding of Farsi rap. While Iranians living inside Iran were dancing to the beats of growingly popular party rap, the international Farsi speaking media was only concerned about the political rap.

It is true that the era when international media got interested in Iranian underground musicians coincides, and by no coincidence, the years around the Green Movement when music content was generally much more political than today. Nevertheless, the essentialist assumption of underground being inherently subversive can be counter-productively, if not directly dangerous, at the very least harmful for musicians who are classified as such against their own aspirations.

Today’s – and even yesterday’s – youth in Iran is connected to global cultural production and music industry aesthetics as much as their peers are in the West. Certainly, global aesthetics translate differently in different localities but it is problematic to assume Iranian musicians are consuming and participating in global music production only strategically to bother the state.

Thus, to propose certain kind of music is inherently subversive overlooks other and often more crucial aspects of music making such as affection, emotions, and passion. As subjective aspirations and motivations are multiple and possibly even contradictory at the same time, in this thesis I am less interested in the actual motivations behind music making and rather concentrate on narratives and stories through which musicians authenticate their craft and search for legitimacy and credibility for their work and, ultimately, for themselves. Some of the musicians I talked with were very articulate in their goals whereas others weren’t, and I will shed some light into these discussions later throughout this thesis. For rappers, the question whether their music should be conscious or not is at the core of the current authenticity debates.

The questions I wanted to raise in this chapter are part of larger ethical debates of course, and I was only focusing on a brief overview by concentrating on what kind of ramifications these discourses have in Iran's music context. At the end, I see these discussions are closely linked to enquiries of cultural authority. Nearly four decades ago, anthropologist Dorinne K. Kondo (1984, 83) illustrated colonial legacy and its "symbolic violence" in ethnographies poignantly by saying: "(C)olonial hubris seeps into the very process of cultural representation, leading the ethnographer to affirm that 'I know you better than you know yourselves.'"

3. Hook: Keeping it real, making it local

*This is Tehran, damn, it's no joke
No flowers and ice-cream in our borough
This is jungle, dog eat dog
Others are savages, the rest are cowed*

“Ekhtelaf” (“Dispute”) by Hichkas, translation by author

Already 2011 Nooshin (2011, 96) observed rap as the fastest growing genre in Iran. This was around the time I was in Tehran, when estimates about the number of rappers ranged from anywhere between 1,000 and 5,000. And rap’s popularity has only been growing since. To give some perspective of the hip-hop hype, in 2013 when I was interviewing Bia2rap’s admin for this study their Facebook page had 81,168 likes. Now, eight years later, the number has reached to half a million. For another comparison, during the same period Bia2rap had gotten twice as much likes as Bia2, which until the summer 2020 was a similar website concentrating mostly on popular Persian music and whose Facebook page currently (2021) has around 834,000 likes.

Obviously, Facebook likes don’t qualify as a reliable statistical source, but at the lack of official statistics they give some idea of the rapidly growing popularity of the rap scene. It could also be that Farsi rap music has more non-Iranian listeners (or Facebook likers) than popular music, which is still interesting all the same.

Unsurprisingly, rap’s mainstreaming has attracted wide curiosity by scholars both abroad and inside Iran. Throughout the past two decades an extensive body of rap studies has been published also at Iranian universities scrutinizing why is this genre so popular among the youth. There are many reasons for rap’s breakthrough, and this is not really the question of my thesis. Nevertheless, in this chapter I will shed some light of the social conditions that have been central to rap’s popularity.

It could be said one of the most obvious reasons for rap’s appeal is that Farsi rap has technically advanced so rapidly over the past decades. Rap that is produced today is technically high quality and clever bars and linguistic sense of rhyming is following the long poetic tradition in

the country; wordsmiths have always had an important role in the cultural consciousness. But it is equally important to note that rap is not popular just in Iran. It is occupying the top charts worldwide today and this global appeal shouldn't be ignored in any musicological study in the ongoing globalized era of migration, online, smartphones, and all that jazz.

I will also pay attention to other genres, mainly rock and metal scenes, and observe some genre-specific spatial dimensions of music making. In this and the following chapters, I am thus interested in how notions of belonging, space, and place have been expressed by rappers and rockers both in their talks and music, as well as their embodied use of urban space.

As Nooshin (2011) notes, hip-hop is a music of the city, and at the time of her writing Farsi rap was most dominantly music of Tehran. Nowadays there are many other big cities with thriving rap and underground music scenes, such as Mashhad, Isfahan, and Shiraz, but my focus will be in the capital and not in the whole country. My capital-centrism is not to disrespect other cities, but it is relevant to make this delimitation as I conducted my own field work in Tehran.

Tehran was the birthplace of both the hip-hop and the overall underground scene in Iran. At the early 2000s' one of the first prominent rappers Hichkas formed his rap crew 021, which refers to Tehran's city code, and for a while 021 symbolized all rap that was rhymed in Farsi. It is telling that in 2013, 70 percent of the Bia2rap's Facebook likes were from Tehran and Karaj. As the website's admin explained: "Farsi rap was born in Tehran and it is still most active there because there are better opportunities, more activity, working expenses are lower, and there is more interaction between people."

Farsihiphop's admin was thinking very much along the same lines: "[Since around 2005] rap's development has been impressive. There are more underground studios in Tehran, more interest towards rap, more rappers, more talent, third rap generation forming, more walls with graffiti, and many other things that show that it's growing everyday specifically among the young people."

In this chapter I will study how rap was localized into urban realities of Tehran and what kind of controversies over authenticity have arisen along this localization process. First, I will nevertheless take a glance at the urban landscape of the city and illustrate what kind of geography it offers for music making – both in terms of lyrical inspiration and physical movement in space.

3.1. Urban landscape of Tehran

*We all came from a single drop
And now look at the gap between us
The Earth's not rotating for gravity
Money makes the Earth go around, ain't that funny*

“Ekhtelaf” (“Dispute”) by Hichkas, translation by author

Tehran is one of the most practical cities to get lost in because walking downhill you always know you are heading towards south. Metaphorically speaking, Tehran's social segregation also follows geographical landscape of the city. The highest point of the upper-class north Tehran is nearly one kilometre higher than the lower-class neighbourhoods in the lower parts of the city. The higher and norther you go geographically the higher you go socioeconomically.

Before moving forward, I want to take a look into Tehran's urban landscape, as these spatial arrangements play such a pivotal role in the way how musicians move and use different music spaces, have access to these spaces, and think, talk, and sing about these spaces.

Setha Low's (2011, 392) conceptualization of “spatializing culture” offers a useful analytical point of departure for how to approach space. It presents a dialogical process between three theoretical standpoints on space, namely space as socially produced (Lefebvre Harvey), space as socially constructed (Bourdieu, Rodman), and embodied space.

Her understanding of social production of space draws on Lefebvre's and Harvey's works which help to analyse the historical emergence and political-economic formation of urban space (*Ibid.*). I am equally starting with a brief historical overview of political construction of Tehran's urban space, and, as Lefebvre would have had it, aim to paint a geographical picture of Tehran by looking at its spatial representations and spatial practices.

Low's take on social construction of space is influenced by Bourdieu's legacy. It enables a phenomenological approach towards space which is useful to analyse how different subjects enter spaces from different positions and thus their symbolic experience of the same socially produced spaces is never the same (*Ibid.*).

Lastly Low introduces her conceptualization of embodied space to solve the two-dimensional structure of the socially produced and constructed space model. With this addition she introduces the notion of body and allows us to perceive person as "a spatiotemporal unit with feelings, thoughts, preferences, and intentions as well as out-of-awareness cultural beliefs and practices" (*Ibid.*).

Keeping Low's model on mind, in the rest of this thesis I aim to study how different musicians from heterogenous backgrounds enter and talk about their experiences in urban spaces. To do that, it is useful to start off with a historical glimpse of the city's social production.

During Pahlavi times, since the 1930's till the revolution 1979 Tehran's urban policies based strongly on class segregation. Owing to these policies, a long transverse street Enghelab Avenue, or Revolution Street (at the time called Shah Reza Street) downtown had become a symbolic frontier that separated the upper city from the lower parts. Illustratively Asef Bayat (2013, 158) named it as "a sociological 'green line'." During Pahlavi era the life quality between these parts was drastic. Whereas the affluent north Tehran's neighbourhoods had provided a solid ground for the first gated communities in the present day's Middle East, the neglected south was poor and the communities inhabiting it were perceived as religious and traditional. (*Ibid.*)

In the early days of the revolution north/south division had initially narrowed when residents from all over Tehran had been demonstrating side by side. This encouraging "spring of freedom" (Bayat 2013, 287) soon fade away though and the old segregated layout remained as the new revolution government started to Islamize society and urban spaces.

Public spaces were modified to correspond Islamic moral values and sex segregation which ultimately transformed the whole city into an "Islamic revolutionary space" (Varzi 2006, 108). The previously colourful and lively streets with its night clubs, bars and cabarets were now occupied by revolutionary posters and murals, moral police, and new revolutionary street names. In consequence, many liberal and affluent north Tehranis disappeared from the public spaces either to the privacy of their own homes or abroad, mostly to the US and Europe (Bayat 2013).

After the revolution many of the neighbourhoods also experienced a demographic transformation due to internal migration. One of the movements was from south Tehran to north as the new ruling class confiscated homes that had been left unoccupied after their previous residents fled the country. Another movement entailed war refugees from Iranian provinces heading to south Tehran. Sociologist Masserat Amir Ebrahimi recalls how south Tehran's new social landscape further intensified the upward movement as the "new heterogeneous mix of social classes in the south was too much" for the old residents (in Zolghadr, 2002). In consequence, many previously homogeneous neighbourhoods, such as Shemiran or Jordan, became more mixed and at the same time more fragmented as the residents didn't feel like communicating with their neighbours anymore. (*Ibid.*)

Due to postrevolutionary tensions and geopolitics Tehran might not be very cosmopolitan city today but, as Bayat (2013, 172) emphasizes, the city hasn't been isolated from the globalization: "In some sense the 'West' is more present today, through the new media, goods, styles, and the three-million plus Iranians living abroad, than it was three decades ago. Economic liberalism, even though it is checked by occasional populist urges, is of course also part of this trend."

It is these transnational flows that paved the way for the emerging underground music scene throughout the 1990s and 2000s. But as much as the underground music scene exemplifies West's presence in Tehran, the musical subcultures are also necessarily localized into particular urban realities. These glocalizations are what I am about to study next in the following subchapters.

3.2. Voices of the streets of Tehran

*We are a bunch of soldiers with Masters' degrees
From the biggest university in Iran
I mean the streets, not formal education
I chose the pavement over the school chair*

“*Ye mosht sarbaz*” (“Bunch of soldiers”) by Hichkas, translation from the YouTube video

On the early days of my second stay in Tehran 2013, I met Armin, rapper from the hoods of south Tehran or “the ghetto” as he expressed. He was 24 years at the time, yet he had already been involved in the rap scene for nearly a decade. Thus, if there was anyone who could offer a perspective on rap's formative years in Tehran's streets, it was him.

With his introduction, in this subchapter I aim to analyse how Farsi rap has been localized to urban realities of Tehran. Along with most hip-hop scholars, Nooshin (2011, 93) saw rap as a global genre that becomes “indigenized” in particular locations. She was particularly interested in how this “migrant music par excellence” had travelled to Tehran and how the rappers were reconstructing new sense of connection to place, to their city, while taking part in the global arena of transnational meanings.

Armin recalled how the first Tehrani rappers had mimicked the US hip-hop scene when it came to music, dance, and clothes: “We listened to Tupac and Eminem and copied the styles from the US.” A lot of rap was happening at the streets as rap battles were spontaneously organized at parks and other public spaces.

By 2013 many things had changed, and in his opinion, one of the biggest changes in the development of rap had started around the Green Movement 2009. Farsi rap had reached a completely new level. Armin explained that Farsi rap had become more local and more Iranian. The mimicry had been replaced by local voices and sounds. Traditional Persian instruments and classical Persian poets had become recurrent features in the new forms of Farsi rap.

In general, hip-hop scholars agree that what makes this genre so particular is its close connection to locality. The rhymes, the beats, and samples often reflect local realities. “Hip-hops’ urge to locality” (Krimms 2002, 191) is evident in Farsi rap which hasn’t been “indigenized” only in terms of language and the words but also in the use of traditional Persian instruments such as setar and santur at the background of rap tracks. Although most rap is made with the conventional rap rhythm 4/4, some musicians have even talked about using the Persian time signature 6/8 in their songs.

Iranianization of rap language is evident also in the frequent use of intertextuality in the lyrics. Some rappers have referred to classical poetry in their rhymes and occasionally used such a local version of language that only Tehranis from a particular part of the city will understand (Nooshin 2011, 99). It is a common perception among Tehrani rappers that due to its grammatical structure and poetic rhythm, Farsi language is made for rap. I always found this recurrent emphasis on Persian poetic heritage genuinely interesting considering that in the US rap had also thrived so solidly from a long tradition of poetic storytelling in African-American communities.

Armin explained that the vast majority of rap was characteristically *kucheh-bāzāri*, literally meaning “street and bazaar” and referring to “colloquial language of the streets” (Siamdoust 2017, 245) which was historically considered as the language of the bazaar’s shop keepers and lower social classes. In her historical overlook of the popular music development in Iran, Siamdoust discusses how Persian rap godfather Hichkas’ rhymes sprang from this *kucheh-bāzāri* language but in an updated, rougher, and more critical form (*Ibid.*). In a sense, today’s updated *kucheh-bāzāri* could thus be also translated as a youth slang.

However, simultaneously as Farsi rap had gotten more local, Armin noted its content had become less conscious. Apart from socially conscious rap, which had dominated the first-generation rap, there was now a new form of *allaqe-rap*, as Armin expressed, that is, “musicians are interested in rap but don’t have any goal in their music.” Much for his lamentation, he didn’t consider *allaqe-rap* as rap at all: “Rap needs to have a goal but *allaqe-rappers* are just rapping about girlfriends and parties.” Now that the technological development had made rap production more accessible to everyone, suddenly “everyone can become a rapper.”

For Armin, this question was essentially linked to musicians’ socioeconomic background: “In Iran you always need to consider from which social classes musicians are coming from. Those from the higher classes are talking about parties and those from the lower classes talk about social issues.”

Surely, there has been exceptions such as Hichkas who came from a middle-class background and, at times, has been very poignant in his social critique. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the entrance of lower classes in the rap scene necessarily questions and problematizes the common stereotypes many middle and upper class Tehranis hold about the poorer south Tehran, often perceived as a place of religious fundamentalists and conservative youth.

It might also be good to point out that, albeit the harsh stereotypes, south Tehranis aren’t necessarily a marginal group in the society due to their large population size and social policies over the past decades which have made public institutions such as education and public office more accessible to all social classes (Siamdoust 2017). This is particularly the case with south Tehrani musicians I got to know as most of them were university students and all of them were male.

Most of the conscious rappers I met in Tehran were from below the so-called “sociological green line,” whereas most rock musicians were from more affluent north and west Tehran. This was not always the case though as I will later show. Therefore, it is useful to think of Lefebvre’s

(1991, 226) take on “differences” which according to him aren’t situated in the space itself, in neighbourhoods, their streets, squares, and parks, but instead they get produced by “sediments of perception, representation and spatial practice,” that is by the way the space is practiced.

Apart from the north-south segmentation, there is also another division that goes horizontally from east Tehran to west and this disunion has equally left its mark in the rap produced both sides. Rappers from the western neighbourhoods are mainly affluent and have a higher social status, whereas rappers from the east part come from the lower middle class and lower class (Golpushnezhad, 2018, 263). The rap rivalry between the east and west parts has been so pronounced in Tehran that Golpushnezhad (*Ibid.*) has even paralleled it to the East vs. West coast war in the US.

Although Tehran’s rap rivalry might not be as heated as it was across the Atlantic, some aesthetic similarities remain. Many socially conscious rappers come from south and east Tehran with a somewhat aggressive rapping style which in a way compares to the US East Coast rap in its rawness, lyrical complexity, rich use of the language, metaphors, wordplays, and most characteristically the social critique. Rhythmically Tehrani party rap might not compare to West Coast’s gangsta rap as much, but the rhymes have been similarly more concerned about having fun, sex, bragging, and self-staging than solving social problems. However, one of the remarkable differences is that, unlike within much of US gangsta rap, the self-boasting in Tehran’s party rap is hardly related to “rags to riches” narrative of “making it” as most of the Tehrani party rappers are already quite well-off in a socioeconomic sense.

These geographical rap rivalries offer an interesting take on what ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes (1994, 3) meant when he asserted that “music informs our sense of place.” He saw that music has a unique power to evoke collective memories and organize our experiences of place. Simultaneously, these “‘places’ constructed through music involve notions of difference and social boundary” (*Ibid.*).

And it might as well be that in no other genre are music’s intimate connections to place expressed more explicitly than in rap music. Overviewing the US rap history, Murray Forman

(2004) argues that the spatial awareness evolved from the more generalized and abstract notions of “the ghetto” to more localized and place-concentrated discursive construct of “the hood” at the end of the 1980s. This hood-consciousness anchored rap music and hip-hop culture to their immediate environments simultaneously as they were marking the difference which set them apart from other environments and hoods.

According to Forman (*Ibid.*, 203), “(r)ap music takes the city and its multiple spaces as the foundation of its cultural production.” For him, it was this spatial awareness that distinguished rap and hip-hop culture from other subcultural youth formations.

This powerful connection between music and place has always been very explicitly expressed in rap rhymes, and it is easy to understand why rappers so often emphasize rap music as voice of the streets. “Street” is a global concept central to universal hip-hop language which rappers often use locally to authenticate their music, and as such it represents one of “the repeated stylizations involved in Global Hip Hop Culture(s)” (Alim 2009, 105).

The relationship rap music shares with the streets is both metaphorical and physical. Rap rhymes often deal with urban realities and street life, but hip-hop culture also often happens physically in urban locations; rap was born at the streets.

As a hybrid music form combining different artistic traditions, such as poetic storytelling and turntable-spinning, it might not be totally unproblematic to trace rap’s birth to the 1970s’ Bronx. Thus, although rap’s origins could be traced even further in history, its musical journey has always been closely related to the community. Although Tehran’s first rap pioneers met and recorded at home studios, rap soon took the streets as well when young rappers started to gather and organize spontaneous rap battles at parks, remoted alleys, and car lots.

Interestingly the spatial surroundings rap and rock scenes took their first shapes in Tehran – and elsewhere, for that matter – look very different. While metal, punk, and rock bands had started to rehearse at basements throughout the 1990s, rap pioneers entered the new millennium by taking over public spaces as they were gathering at different urban locations around the city.

It might be good to point out that Farsi rappers who record at studios might not have any relationship to street rap, and vice versa. Due to surveillance over public spaces a wider and more visual hip-hop culture of graffiti, breakdance, street wear, and the like has been evolving more cautiously in Tehran, although against some common claims it does exist. Not all Farsi rappers have much contact to it, however.

During the past five years or so, rap battles have nevertheless become increasingly popular in the city. Battle rap is usually improvised which makes these freestyle sessions unique happenings that will never take the exact same form again. As an illustrative urban "guerrilla" strategy (Baker 2006, 233) freestyling might just be a prime example of Temporary Autonomous Zones (T.A.Z.), a concept introduced by anarcho-Sufi scholar Hakim Bey (1991) by which he described anarchist operations that took place in varying locations and thus were liberated from particular locations and times. Some rap battles are organized beforehand but most of them are rather spontaneous events that happen when the right people happen to be in the right place at the right time. As most battlers are under 30-year-old male, it is clear these zones are very gendered.

The urban battle locations usually situate in secluded spots at parks and streets, but even so they aren't totally hidden as the sessions are often filmed and posted on Instagram and YouTube. To some extent these sessions are also advertised online by last-minute notifications posted on Farsi rap websites (Zahir 2008). It is certain that the technological development has challenged the traditional boundaries between public vs. private and online vs. offline, and provided a fertile ground for the semipublic and semiprivate spaces where the underground music scene takes place.

As Nooshin (2005b, 472) argues, underground music has provided an opportunity for young people in Iran to feel a new sense of ownership. Citing Geoff Baker (2006, 225-6; in Nooshin 2011, 94) Nooshin sees that with rap music rappers are reclaiming the space for marginalized: "It may be argued that music-making can enable a community to generate (rather than simply embody) a different social order and a distinct set of moral values." Baker underlined that rap

shouldn't be perceived as mere "resistance" but rather as an attempt of marginalized musicians to gain ownership over social space.

This is also music that for the first time belongs specifically to young Iranians and reflects their experience. Before the revolution pop singers rarely wrote their own lyrics (Robertson 2012, 24), and unlike the pop music that belonged to older generations, underground music genres emphasize "a strong collaborative ethos, stylistic eclecticism, meaningful lyrics, and an increasing role for women musicians" (Nooshin 2011, 467).

Nooshin (2011) is particularly interested in rappers' close relationship with the urban space and how their lyrics talk about Tehran's social realities and inequalities. Rappers are now explicitly talking about taboo topics, such as sex, drugs, and suicide to name but a few, by using a novel language that is uncensored and socially poignant. It is "current everyday language of the youth" (*Ibid.*, 106).

Many authors have considered this explicit language as a fundamental novelty in a society where artists have been used to veil the language, hide meanings, criticism, and censor themselves. O-Hum's guitarist Babak Riahipour commented rap's popularity by saying: "(I)n current Iranian culture, where a lot of two-faced or hypocritical behaviour reigned, rap offered a clear, straightforward language that facilitated criticism, which young people appreciated." (Siamdoust 2017, 44.)

Due to this localized language and poetic heritage in today's rap, Siamdoust (2017, 234) claims that rap has been much more "Iranianized" than rock music. Unlike rappers, first Tehrani rock musicians seemed to be more concerned about playing for international audiences. They often wrote the lyrics in English and, to borrow Nooshin's (2008, 85) words, tried to sound like western bands. Robertson (2012, 58) recalls that many rock musicians complained Farsi is rhythmically hard to fit to rock music.

Much has changed in the past decade though and by looking at the most known bands it feels like today majority of the active rock bands in Tehran are singing in Farsi. Furthermore, rock musicians have created many interesting fusion styles that experiment with traditional music elements, instruments, and vocal styles.

It holds true that currently metal music remains as the least “Iranianized” genre and, much like all around the non-English speaking world such as in Latin America and most European countries, Iranian metal music is most often sung in English. I would hear the same explanation from Tehrani metalheads all over again: “Farsi doesn’t fit to heavy metal.” On the other hand, this was also a reason why some metalheads I met preferred metal as music consumers but played in rock bands themselves because they wanted to get their message across locally and thus sing in Farsi.

Even so, Tehrani metal music draws its significance from Iran’s sociopolitical context and it might as well be the most contested music genre in Iran today. Later in this thesis I will analyse more closely the alternative status that metal music carries according to many metalheads I met in Tehran.

It could also be argued that, unlike for rock and metal music, the localizations have been crucial for rap’s wider legitimization among Iranian youth. Many musicians I met judged rap music based on its lyrical content, that is how candidly rappers rhymed about social issues and taboo topics. Rock and metal music, instead, were often considered alternative simply because they were, well, rock and metal music, regardless of the lyrical content which, I might add, has often been more personal than socially conscious. Nooshin (2005b, 488) saw rock as “rebellious rather than directly political” and following her though Rastovac (2009, 74-75) added that rap was considered more progressive in terms of expression and social critique.

In many ways this genre distinction applies elsewhere as well. Narratively the genesis of rap embodies the struggle of the marginalized, and for US rap pioneers, music was a way of making it and getting out of the hood. Therefore, rap music is often expected to be poignant and deal

with urban inequalities, and when it's not, it is dismissed as not being authentic and credible rap.

Although similar authenticity debates have gotten rappers worked up around the globe, this definition of rap is far from being carved in stone. As Forman (2013, 70) reminds, meaning and value in hip-hop is perceived differently by different generations and definition of “mainstream” constantly change in time.

Thus, rappers' demand to “keep it real” is also subject to local interpretations and definitions which, according to Pennycook (2007, 14), create “constant tension between the ‘global spread of authenticity’ – a culture of being true to the local, of telling it like it is – and the constant pull towards localization that this implies.” In the following subchapter I will take a closer look on the ongoing debates over authenticity and the wide resentment the mainstream rap has caused among rappers and other musicians in Tehran today.

3.3. Selling out without selling anything

*Had I ignored my honour and integrity
By now I must own half the city
I'm a sea of petrol waiting to get lit
My head wasn't hit by a rock, it was me who hit
20 years of sweat to prove I'm all set
I even washed my clothes with my own sweat*

“Lal” (“Mute”) by Yas, translation by author

Unlicensed rapper Ashkan (21) had been involved in the rap scene since its birth, from the age of 13. When I met him 2014, he had been studying engineering in another Iranian city for three years as he didn't get in the universities in Tehran. Luckily, I managed to meet him on his visit to the capital.

We were off to a licensed studio where he was about to put his album together: “It’s more relaxed to record in an official studio. I guess that’s why I haven’t been caught.” He used to have a recording studio at home, but once it got raided and all the equipment was confiscated, his father wouldn’t allow him to build a new studio there anymore.

That day he had asked me to come along to a studio downtown Tehran where he was going to hear his recordings for the first time. The studio had a young and energetic atmosphere, and after much of taroofting and other chit-chatting we finally headed to the booth where Ashkan got to share his visions with the sound engineer mixing the tracks. His sound was raw and hard hitting which I find characteristic for conscious Tehrani rap. Even without understanding the lyrics you could hear from his voice he wasn’t happy. He was rapping about urban realities in Tehran.

But rap didn’t inspire him too much anymore. Just like so many other rappers I had met he thought Farsi rap was ruined: “Nowadays 90 percent of rap is about material stuff, you know, parties, alcohol, women, and drugs. Not interested.” He was so done with the scene he was ready to leave it altogether: “After this album, that’s it. I’m gonna move into rock.”

I guess he wasn’t completely done with rap, though, since six years has passed and he is still putting rap tracks online. But that’s beyond my point here. I met many rappers who were lamenting the same. Democratization of production and depoliticization of the content seemed to go hand in hand, and not everyone was happy about such tradeoff.

Songwriter and vocalist Farbod from a folky mellow rock band wasn’t happy particularly about rap produced in Tehran around 2013 nor the dance music in general: “Just think about that, what’s his name,” and after a moment of thinking and my riddling he continued: “Well, let’s say Pitbull who sings about parties and stuff. No-one’s gonna remember those songs in few years. But Led Zeppelin is timeless. His music will be listened to even thirty years from now.”

And it has been precisely the party rap that has mainstreamed inside Iran, more so than the socially conscious and critical rap. You can hear the danceable party rap being played all around Tehran at cars, homes, parties, and even family gatherings, and undeniably the more critical and aggressive conscious rap might not be as well received in the middle of a wedding reception.

As the admin of Bia2rap reminisced, around 2007 more and more musicians from outside of rap circles started to mix rap with dance beats: “These musicians are still hated by many rappers and people who listen to rap because they didn’t want socially conscious rap music that tells about people’s suffering to be mixed with dance music. But even so, this is how rap soon became the most loved genre among people.”

In essence, similar questions of authenticity and selling-out have preoccupied musicians all around the globe, rockers ever since Beatles hit the mainstream in the 1960s (Peterson 2005, 1085) and rappers ever since the first commercially successful rap single “Rapper’s Delight” by Sugar Hill Gang was released in 1979 (Rehn and Sköld 2007, 50). Authenticity debates have been instrumental for all genres that were initially born out of a subcultural status, from jazz to grunge, folk, punk, and most recently rap music.

By the 1990s US hip-hop had been completely commercialized and rappers found themselves in the middle of an intense conflict between the new lustrous bling-bling culture and the demand to remain loyal to the hood. During that decade the divide between mainstream rap and socially conscious rap was becoming more and more pronounced.

Despite the many resemblances, in Iran musicians haven’t been selling out by signing to major labels. From the official point of view the mainstream rappers, no matter how shallow and unintellectual they are condemned to be, still mostly remain unlicensed and underground. Instead, in Tehran questions of selling-out are often debated within three grand topical regimes; Firstly, musicians who are trying to appeal to masses and aren’t socially conscious; secondly,

musicians who are getting permits and lose artistic freedom; and thirdly, musicians who are leaving Iran and lose credibility as critical and observational voices of society.

Thus, in Tehran mainstream rap isn't defined so much in terms of its commercialization nor is it seen internationally marketable. At the first glance, it almost seems that the opposite is true. The more local rap has gotten, the more mainstream and less alternative it has become. However, simultaneously as the content and sound worlds are more local, Iran's party rap hype cannot be divorced from the global aesthetics affecting and being affected by today's Euro-American music industry.

It is interesting that many musicians I talked with considered the stylistically less localized heavy metal as more alternative genre these days. As already mentioned, Iranian metal is often, yet not always, sung in English and aesthetically it follows more closely its English counterpart than Farsi rap. It has also been the most targeted music genre by the changing Islamic governments until date which have consistently perceived metal music as inherently blasphemous and Satanic business.

Thus, the alternative status the underground music genres have or don't have in people's minds is intrinsically linked to the actual cultural policies by the state and a mix of different aesthetical evaluations rising both from the local realities and subjective experiences as well as the global music industry. Against the backdrop of these genre battles it feels worthy to turn to Richard Peterson (2005, 1086) who noted that authenticity isn't something the objects, such as a music track, performance, or performer, carry in themselves. Rather, it is "a claim that is made by or for someone, thing, or performance and either accepted or rejected by relevant others" (*Ibid.*).

Accepting Peterson's idea, Aaron Klassen (2015, 242) argues that punk authenticity is socially and relationally constituted and "required in order for artists and genres to stay relevant to the communities with which they interact." He applies Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to grasp punk as embodied and felt experience rather than merely a stylistic and rational answer to existing institutions and discourses. His emphasis seems fruitful because apart from rational

debates over lyrical content, music's authenticity is also judged through "the perceptions of experience that are lost in translation *by the practitioners themselves*" (*Ibid.*, 243).

Debates over authenticity appear instrumental for musician who are striving for social acceptance, street credibility, and respect. No matter who they target lyrically in their music, the authenticity claims are always targeted towards the community. By participating these discussions Tehrani musicians are thus establishing their position and clout in the underground music scene, among their peers, and formulating their subjective musical identities.

4. Bridge: When things go south

*I'm in a limbo
Between good and evil
Between sleep and being awake
Between illusion and reality
Between right and wrong
I am a stranger to the world
Wondering which will it be
The strength to stay or courage to jump?*

“Boresh” (“Cut”) by Bahram, translation by author

During my first weeks in Tehran on yet another national holiday in Iran I was introduced to a friend of a friend at a park. After I told him I was going to write my anthropological thesis on Iran he instantly burst into apologies: “I’m so sorry for you! That’s going to be difficult because Iranians have lost their identity a long time ago.”

I was slightly amused as his lamentation reminded me of what Roxanne Varzi (2006) had written about Tehrani youth few years earlier. She described Iranian society suffering from identityless (*bi-hoviyat*) or schizophrenic existence at the tension between the self-realization (*khod-sazi*) and self-annihilation (*bi-khodi*). Varzi observed how the self-realization had become more and more popular among young Iranians who were now looking for themselves from yoga, hypnosis, self-help classes, Sufi poetry sessions, and so forth. Self-annihilation, instead, had transformed from the earlier glorification of martyrdom into contemporary youth’s escapism by drugs and suicide. (Ibid, 7-11.)

Here it might be worth adding that this friend of a friend was a yoga teacher, and that night we ended up meditating in a circle while sitting on the grass. At the time I wasn’t too concerned about the lost identity though because I hadn’t run into examples of nations that would have succeeded in maintaining one.

Furthermore, I sensed that the emotional detachment Varzi describes can be seen characteristic for the whole postmodernity. Social psychologist Kenneth Gergen (1991) asserted that in the world of ever-expanding communication technologies self has become so saturated with never-

ending stories from other people that it struggles to anchor itself in any meaningful way of being in the world and instead disperses all over the place.

Being as it may, I quite soon came to realize that questions of identity and a fear of losing one have preoccupied Persian philosophers and authors long before the postmodern era, from Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* (1010) to the Pahlavi era's intellectuals whose fear of "westoxification" played a pivotal role in the developments that lead into the revolution 1979.

In this chapter I thus wanted to study how musicians have been dealing with the related questions of belonging and attachment and, particularly, how they articulate their embodied sense of belonging in musical spaces and public spaces around the city.

I will start off by examining common sensations of loneliness, isolation, and unattachment to the official surroundings, and followingly wonder why particularly the rock and metal musicians have so often felt isolated from their immediate environments. Then heading off to south Tehran I will observe musicians' mobility in urban spaces and argue that Tehran's municipal policies might have favoured mobility of lower social classes for whom the created public spaces have been playing a crucial role in the forming of new music communities.

4.1. Yet another brick in the wall

Licensed contemporary music artist Mehrdad was heading to Germany to participate in a music workshop. He was filling out visa applications and in one of forms he was asked about his relationship to Iran:

That transformed into a philosophical question in my mind as I was laying in my bed for two hours that night, smoking cigarettes, and thinking about my relationship to Iran. Apart from my parents there wasn't any. Then I recalled a university café where I have lunch almost every day. For one month I didn't go, and the next time I had my lunch there the waitress came to me asking where I had been. She told me

she had been cooking *ghorme sabzi* every day thinking about me. Then it hit me: that café is my relationship to Iran, that's all.

The mail exchange with the German workshop organizers alone had inspired him more than anything else he had experienced for years in Iran. They had seemed genuinely interested that he was able to participate whereas no-one in Iran, not even his university, cared less about his plans. The sensation he described wasn't just an isolated case. If I had gotten a penny every time someone in Tehran expressed similar feelings of loneliness and isolation, I could have bought myself a nice garden house by now.

A nice garden in the northern Iran was also a reason that kept another licensed musician, Farhad in the country, or at least that's what he once humorously told me. He wanted to leave Iran as all his friends had already left abroad. When I first met him, he told me he didn't really have connection to other musicians in Tehran although when I got to know him better that hardly seemed to be the case. We would often go to his *Ostad's* (teacher) studio and, in fact, once we even made a weekend trip to the northern garden together. There he had grown trees with his father as, for his lamentation, "all the forests have been cut down in Iran." Far away from hustle and buzz of the city it was a calming sanctuary indeed. It wasn't enough to keep him in Iran though, as few years later he had also left the country.

In the same tone, metalhead Bijan (25) felt isolated from his peers as well. To me, he didn't outstandingly stick out from Tehran crowds with his dark clothes, rock band t-shirts, and longish hair, yet his experiences were quite the contrary:

Iranians aren't really friendly with each other. People are easily outcasted for being different, for not being religious. I have never felt like I belong here. Me and my friends are the outcasts of this society. I cannot understand patriotism. How can anyone talk about 'my land'? It doesn't make any sense to me. Young people in Iran don't have any sympathy towards this country. Our parents do because they've lived before the revolution, but we've always only lived this. And it's getting worse every day.

He used to play in a rock/heavy metal band with his friends, but they had quit after his family moved to another house and their rehearsal space was left behind in the basement. Another

reason for quitting was the fact that all the band members were planning to leave Iran right after their graduation:

Many people here don't think at all. Some people are scared that thinking might be dangerous, and some don't have time to think because they're working all the time. Some just don't care. Iran has rich natural resources but it doesn't take advantage of its' potential. I'm the same. I don't have motivation to do anything. Maybe it's because of the government or then I'm just lazy. But there are no future perspectives here. I'm not even interested in my studies. I'm only studying because it's my ticket away. I'm only concentrating on leaving this country. My life at the moment is as good as it gets here. And it's not good.

Few years after he had moved to Europe. At the first glance, Mehrdad, Farhad and Bijan didn't have much in common, but their sensation of isolation and loneliness brings their stories closer together. Many Tehrani musicians I got to know felt isolated and lonely as their friends were leaving the country while their own movement was extensively limited due to excluding national discourse, restrictive policies over public and musical spaces, and strict visa policies. For most north Tehrani rockers and metalheads, home was the center of musical, social, and personal life.

In Hanna Arendt's (1951, 475) view, totalitarian governments needed to destroy public realm of life and establish loneliness by isolating people from each other and create terror in order to exist. For Arendt loneliness was the most desperate human experience – a desolate condition in which nothing gets done. Following Arendt, Khosravi (2012) saw the experience of deep loneliness at “the heart of totalitarian regimes” and the use of isolation at the heart of Iranian power politics before and after the revolution.

For Arendt (1958) totalitarian rule implied a lack of agency, and of course such a theoretical conclusion isn't very fashionable anymore. However, similar reasoning is nothing more than business as usual when it comes to Middle East and the way its assumed “lacking public” often gets talked about in the international media and western popular discourse.

Seteney Shami (2009) has addressed the issue by critiquing Habermasian construction of public sphere which gives priority to such visible everyday places where strangers meet each other,

discuss and change opinions. On continuation Shami notes that communication doesn't require only speech but also the public sphere as "a stage for performance". For him 'publics' and 'self' are intertwined and constructed through interconnected processes of bodily practices, symbols, and performative acts. As a result, he highlights public spheres as 'spaces of contestation', processual, emergent, and multiple instead of static, pre-established and immutable. (*Ibid.*)

Indeed, such spaces of contestation and stages for performance seem to be vital for the genesis of Tehran's underground music scenes. Just consider rocker/DJ Payam who at the end of Khatami's era used to go to play at an Orthodox Church nearby his home. These concerts were organized during worship services and as such they were semi-open events where musicians would play music and people would drink alcohol. Ahmadinejad's government quickly put an end for those gatherings.

Those days when I met Payam in Tehran (around 2013), he was playing records every now and then but hadn't been performing in concerts for a while. Instead, he was mainly playing music from his home where he had built a proper jamming space that took practically all the living room. Now his friends would come there every night to jam.

Although Payam didn't hold all the strings in his hands he made the best out of the situation and adjusted to the changing rules. I might be saying the obvious now, but the main recurrent theme behind the stories of loneliness was the lack of interaction with others. Musician who didn't play in bands, jam with other musicians, or cooperate other ways – and surely this doesn't apply just to Tehran – were more prone to have a sensation they work in a vacuum (Nooshin 2005b).

Concerts, although not the only, are undoubtedly one of the most central and immediate platforms in which musicians are interacting with the audience and connecting with others. For instance, Tehrani rock/blues musician Jamshid (30) once opened up to me about a difficult moment in his life, when he was feeling isolated and lonely. For quite a while he had been

working alone, “in a vacuum.” Beginning of the 2000s he had performed in a joint concert with another rock band, and the performance was followed by such a supportive feedback from both the audience that was present and the audience online, that this concert had been, by his words, a life-changing event for him.

Some musicologists might even argue that musicians need to perform, and although I am not going that far, it is evident that concerts are embodied experiences in which subjective becomes collective and interaction becomes immediate. Not everyone was a big fan of Tehran concerts though. One of them was music teacher Davoud who used to play in a rock band but didn't really participate in Tehran's music scene anymore. By his words, due to poor acoustics and lousy music he neither went to concerts in Iran. In fact, he rarely left the house at all which is rather telling as he was living with his parents in a small flat downtown. “Tehran is too crowded,” he said. He preferred to stay alone in his small room, smoke weed, play guitar, and imagine of being somewhere else.

Even though one would have a band, cooperation with its members wasn't smooth sailing either. Rock vocalist and songwriter Farbod was playing in a promising folky mellow rock band when I first met him and had been active in the rock scene for years. Talking on a general level, Farbod opinionated that people in the underground scene weren't to be trusted. They would first come off as cool collaborators but when the reality hit and there was no money coming in from anywhere, they got tired, broke their promises, and gave up. Many musicians complained band members were constantly fighting with each other. Some months after our talk, this happened to Farbod's band as well and, eventually, its members split their parts.

Many rock and metal musicians I met had already played in various band constellations that had eventually broken up. Everyone seemed to complain about the same thing: most of the bands were short-lived as they weren't able earn money with music and in the long – or sometimes very short – run band members got tired and split. The lack of income forced musicians to work other jobs which resulted in that it was always difficult to fit the schedules, particularly as for some reason band members so often seemed to live completely opposite sides of the city – in which during the worst traffic jam hour the average speed on highway is

around 100 metres per hour and metros cannot fit one walnut more, although miraculously they always do.

Scheduling issues also made it difficult to tour abroad, although in most cases the bands couldn't travel anyway as there was always one member doing his military service and another one who hadn't served at all and both reasons equally prevented them of leaving the country.

Many of these grievances might sound just basic complaints you would hear from any band member living in any big city in the world. Nevertheless, Tehran has its peculiarities. Robertson (2012, 51) has argued that the lack of communication and collaboration in Tehran has resulted in "distrust and paranoia and a vast amount of criticism of the works of others." This has also meant that while the music scene is hidden from the larger audiences, different groups and musicians are easily unaware of each other's existence. She saw that "the lack of centrality and openness is one the biggest obstacles musicians face" (*Ibid.*, 61).

Reasons behind the lack of cooperation might vary from case to case but interestingly Tehrani rapper Omid had much to say about the matter when I asked him if he cooperated across genre lines:

Here people don't want anything to do with each other if they don't agree on things. If they're not the same and think the same way they cannot be friends or cooperate and do business with each other. But I shouldn't talk to people by force, like a dictator. The problem is in us. We need to change as a culture and democratize ourselves. We need to democratize the streets. This has nothing to do with the government. The same people, who say we should democratize ourselves, there's a dictator living in them. We don't really know what democracy is here.

Omid's cultural critique raises another important point I was already making earlier the second chapter. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, it feels worthy to repeat that underground spaces where musicians work at aren't inherently democratic, inclusive, nor emancipatory. Although they are alternative in a sense of not being officially recognized that doesn't mean they would follow different logic than officially recognized spaces.

Bahar (28) would agree: “We have a cultural problem, not just with music but in the arts field in general.” She used to play in a rock band but not anymore: “In the art circles guys think all the women are easy. Their attitude is that everything goes, everybody with everybody, you know.”

This was also the reason why she quit the band:

I wanted to keep my relationships professional but every time I started a music collaboration with a guy who seemed cool at first, a second later they were already asking to have sex. You can be friends with someone for years and then one day he'll say he wants to sleep with you. At the end it will always happen.

Eventually she had left the whole music scene because she couldn't take this behaviour anymore: “Behaviour is very important for me. Why don't guys think it's important? They're only complaining about the system but then do nothing to change their own behaviour.” She added that if women are fine with this it is easier for them to stay in the scene. Otherwise they'd have to fight all the time: “That's why women prefer to work in NGO's.”

Bahar wasn't alone with her thoughts. Nearly all female musicians I met in Tehran were complaining about the same thing; male-dominated music field holds sexist attitudes which makes it difficult to work with men. Due to similar reasons vocalist and pianist Shohreh (30) had also left her rock band:

I got tired of all the rumours. Guys in the bands often have girlfriends but at the same time they still have not-that-clandestine-affairs with some other girls in the band. When I left my band, I decided that from then on I'm only going to play in all-female groups.

Ultimately, Bahar's and Shohre's experiences sound depressingly familiar for female musicians all around the world who are raising similar critique towards the misogyny and sexism within the field, musicology being no exception. As Susan McClary (1991) pointed out feminist theory was introduced to musicology relatively late when other fields already deemed it old-fashioned, “pâsse.” In fact, she saw musicology to be in “the vanguard of antifeminist backlash” (*Ibid.*, 6).

It has been two decades since Sheila Whiteley's (2000, 4) study in which she criticized western music industry for being male dominated field where women have significantly less positions of power in production, management, execution, and technics. Although social inclusivity has been improving throughout the past decades, the gender disparity is still noticeable in all the aforementioned areas.

In Tehran's music scene, gender disparity goes even further and touches musicians and listeners alike. For instance, looking at the rap scene, around 2012, 73 percent of Bia2rap's likers were male and 27 percent were female. As for Farsihiphop, 85 percent of the likers were male and 15 percent were female.

Of course, this is not to say there aren't female rappers and rock musicians in Tehran nor that it is impossible to be a female musician in Iran. Since the formative years of the underground scene early 2000s there has been constantly more women, and not just as background vocalists but as instrumentalists and lead singers too. In some official music fields, particularly classical music, and theatre women have been increasingly visible in the past years and occasionally even defied the solo-singing ban on public settings.

Nevertheless, all music fields remain less accessible for female musicians who need to be fighting at two fronts, both against the legislation and sexism in the society. Certainly, the legislation affects male musicians as well, and what comes to gendered music laws, men are often lamenting them also. Once talking about the issue in his studio, licensed song producer and song writer Reza (45) sighted the laws difficulted his work as well:

In Iran we have lost 60 percent of our singers when women cannot sing. Everywhere else women sing more than men. Male voices require female voices. There are lot of talented musicians in Iran but they cannot do a thing. That's our story.

All in all, these specific social and political conditions have made Tehran's underground music scene appear as a fragmented and disunited space. Much like other musicians, rocker/DJ Payam

agreed that in Tehran everyone was constantly disagreeing about everything: “In Iran we are all self-learned. We get all the information by ourselves from online, and then everyone goes their ways and thinks differently about everything.”

But if there is one thing Tehrani musicians agree about, that is Pink Floyd. Nahid Siamdoust (2017, 218) even goes that far to call Pink Floyd as “arguably the single most worshipped Western band in postrevolutionary Iran,” and the reasons behind this overwhelming fandom are manifold. Before the internet, the black market of records and albums was limited, and music often passed through friends. This is how certain albums went around from friends to another until eventually they had circulated throughout the whole city. But Siamdoust also adds that the surrealistic and rebellious lyrics resonate with Iranian youth. (*Ibid.*)

“Another Brick in the Wall” is arguably one of most popular songs from Pink Floyd. In the lyrics Roger Waters captured isolation from the society by talking about his peers being total bricks towards him as he was trying to be different. Here brick works as a symbol of events and people that create isolation. I guess it is easy to see why the storyline would resonate with some of the musicians I have talked about in this subchapter.

In this subchapter I aimed to give an overview of some of the things going south as musicians are trying to build their music careers. Now it’s time to head physically towards south Tehran where musicians are out of their homes taking over public city spaces. Their sense of belonging seems to contrast significantly with the musicians I talked about above.

4.2. Going to south

*Tonight we’re together but tomorrow not so
Because in social standing we’re different from head to toe*

“*To masti*” (“You’re drunk”) by Hichkas, translation by Siamdoust 2017, 210.

The weekend was about to start, and I was heading to the Bahram Cultural Center in the southern part of Tehran with Armin, rapper from “the ghetto.” At an open-air hang out space we met his friends, a mixed crew of similarly south Tehrani guys in their early twenties. Their friends kept joining and leaving our company as the night went on.

The center itself is a historically interesting location in Tehran’s urban structure and before continuing deserves a closer look. It was inaugurated 1992 on a former slaughterhouse by Ghломahosseïn Karbachi, mayor of Tehran at the time. It immediately became the most advanced cultural complex in the country hosting film series, varying range of classes from music to sports (Ehsani, Kaveh 1999), and concerts, including country’s first European concerts featuring Austrian and French musicians (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2006).

The complex was part of a more ambitious urban plan after the Iraqi war that aimed to bring the deserted, grey, and segregated public areas back to life under the somewhat descriptive slogan “Our City, Our House” (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2006). As part of the city plan, the municipality created 138 similar cultural facilities, 27 sports centers, and vast areas of parks and playgrounds around the city, half of them situated in south Tehran.

What was particularly noble with the novel venues was how they were intended to tackle geographical segregation of the city and connect the previously marginalized and poor south with the affluent north. These facilities have been accessible to everyone regardless of social class, gender, or religious background, and most visitors have been under 30 and female, many of them coming from less affluent and traditional families (Bayat 2013, 164).

Ethnomusicologist Wendy DeBano (2006, 444) saw that “(t)he increased presence of music and music classes, many taught exclusively by and for women, at *farhangsara* (cultural centers) throughout Tehran can also be viewed as a positive reflection on the state of musical affairs in Iran.” According to Kaveh Ehsani (1999) the impact of these centers has been profound in propagating middle-class norms and values among Tehrani youth.

This was also the first time north Tehranis had a reason to visit the avoided southern part of city. By investing to south Tehran and transportation infrastructure, the municipality intended to bridge the over half a century old socioeconomic gap between the north and south (Bayat 2013, 164) and by doing so, disturb the north's hegemony as the cultural heart of the city.

As far as the stereotypes concerning south Tehran go, this intention hasn't been completely successful though. But even if for many north Tehranis south Tehran remains a no-go zone perceived as uneducated and backward, the rappers I got to know from south Tehran were far from that image. Most of them were university students from different fields, from sociology to geography and engineering, and they were often rather poignant in their social critique.

As the night went on at the Bahman cultural center, beatbox sessions were the order of the night as many of Armin's friends were somehow involved in the rap scene. Armin and three of his friends had found each other in high school (*dabirestan*) at the age of 15 and started to rap together. Their rhymes were conscious, but they would rap about "anything, you know, about love... about not love." They had recorded in a studio they built in a friend's place but later separated their ways after some arguments with that friend. This was around 2005, "the best time for rap," as they recalled and as many would agree.

After they lost the studio space they hadn't rapped together anymore. Armin had just recorded a rap album, but the rest of the quartet told me they had gotten tired of rap. Shahin (24) had moved towards heavy metal instead:

Nowadays Iranian rock is much better than rap. After the Green Movement rap became popular and now majority of rappers are singing about parties, drugs, and love. There's much less rockers and especially metalheads. That's why metal is much more interesting these days.

For Shahin it didn't seem to matter if he rapped or played rock. The main thing was to "keep it real" and thus stay credible among his peers. South Tehrani musicians I met were often doing this by emphasizing their backgrounds. Socioeconomic hardships and family problems validated their credibility as their personal lives testified they knew what they were talking

about. These talks also often referred to certain parts of the city. Some neighbourhoods thus provided more credible ground for authentic rap or conscious music.

Nevertheless, not all the teens at Bahman cultural center were from south Tehran but instead they had come from different neighborhoods around the city to spend time in the common hangout. Another theme Tehrani rappers were often emphasizing was their connection to the streets. Narratives about restrictions they faced while moving in urban locations were recurrent in the discussions I had. One of the common characters was police whose presence was sensed distressing although as individuals they were never seen too smart nor fit.

Vahid (25), who was doing graffiti in Ekbatan neighbourhood, west Tehran, presented me his draft book: “If you get caught, you’ll get fined and maybe even end up in jail. So, when police come, you run.” With the bellies police had they would never catch you.

Those days there were few graffiti spots in Tehran but in general rap had been evolving on its own. As most rappers from affluent backgrounds make music from their homes and studios, they aren’t necessarily very attached to the simultaneously evolving hip-hop culture of graffiti, breakdancing, and cyphers happening largely at the streets.

Thus, although it wouldn’t be very suited to describe north and south Tehran worlds apart, socioeconomic background affects to a great extent in how musicians experience public sphere and move in it. Nights at north Tehran are often spent indoors, mainly homes, whereas in the less affluent and more traditional neighbourhoods, teens are more likely to meet their friends outdoors at parks, alleys, and other open-air spaces. Thus, it could be argued the urban development plans have been particularly favourable for the lower parts of the city and for the lower classes of its habitants. In a sense you could almost think they have facilitated the whole development of street-rap in Tehran.

Baker (2006) sees hip-hop as an urban practice which provides a new way to engage with the city and move on urban spaces. It is a tool to imagine the city in new ways. Street politics

associated with a wider hip-hop culture have come to challenge the state-regulated use and, importantly, the access to public spaces. This goes to show that spaces are performative, and constantly remade and given new meanings as musicians move in them.

A week later, I met Shahin again with two of his rock musician friends, Pouria (21) and Ali (21), at a hidden gallery close to my home. The exhibition floor was covered with white paper and newspaper shattered into pieces. The artist explained the artwork reflected how life gets shattered into pieces along the way and along the way we construct it again, but always changed. It was a theme from ancient Persian poetry which could be interpreted in two ways as a part of that art piece, both as personal identity construction but also, with the old newspapers laying on the floor, it seemed to reflect Iran's tumultuous history.

We left the exhibition and continued to a café close to Haft-e Tir where their friend was working a night shift. Although it was a weekend night all over again, we were having coffee or maybe tea – I cannot remember clearly – but I do remember we didn't have alcohol. In fact, they told me they hardly ever drink or go to parties – both of which have being one of the most discussed pastimes among Iranian youth in a large body of Iranian youth studies and English-language journalist accounts in the past decades.

Armin had emphasized the same point earlier: "Here in Iran it's all about social class. Parties are for those who have a lot of money. The lower classes don't party that much." Neither did they participate in the infamous car cruises which have been widely documented in Iranian youth studies. A bunch of authors have been marvelling at Iranian youth cruising along long boulevards at weekend nights and from the privacy of their cars taking the advantage for exchanging phone numbers with the opposite sex at other cars cruising by.

While sipping our coffees, or teas, I asked them what they thought about these car cruises. Pouria's look was self-explanatory. I had asked a stupid question: "Only the rich go. Well, to do that you need to have a car. And we don't." It might be good to add that not everyone with a car in Tehran would go either. But it wasn't that a car ownership would be a dealbreaker for him to get friends with someone:

It's not like I couldn't be friends with someone who has money, owns a car, maybe even a house, or anything like that. But imagine how it is to live when you constantly have to worry about where you're gonna get money to buy food that day. Someone who comes from a richer family doesn't need to think about this stuff. They have different kind of problems. But I need to think about money, how I'm gonna live tomorrow.

Money wasn't the only thing separating them. Middle- and upper-class families often share somewhat liberal values and the parents are consuming the forbidden media and music as well. In fact Robertson (2012, 94-95) has even argued that "(m)others play integral role in the unofficial rock music scene: ones who facilitate music lessons, cook meals for their children's band mates and allow rehearsals and gatherings to take place without complaining."

Things were quite different for Pouria who had been playing rock for many years: "First my family didn't approve my music at all. They told me it's haram and that I'm a Satanic worshipper. Now they've slightly changed their attitudes towards what I do." He told me his family background was very religious:

There are women in my family who have married in some villages and they wear chador without any objection because their husbands' families have told them to do so. In Iran women are told to stay in the kitchen. I used to be religious also because my family always told me that's how it's supposed to be. But then I realized that it's not, and now I'm an atheist. People need to think themselves.

Nooshin (2011, 103) has observed how rappers often emphasized the previous hardships in their lives to increase their credibility as voices of the street. She refers to Elling's description of the symbolic power of ghetto as a self-identification point for the global hip-hop community (*Ibid.*). Such self-identification, obviously, works in favour for musicians who come from less privileged backgrounds and troubled families, and this global hip-hop discourse that privileges "ghetto life" seemed to be self-empowering narrative for conscious south Tehrani musicians I met, no matter the genre, as in common stereotypes they would usually come off as poor, conservative, and backward.

Illustratively, Masserat Amir-Ebrahimi (2006) has described that while north Tehran is policed by the state (police), south Tehran is supervised by conservative community. And there we were back at the sociological green line all over again.

As we were walking back to Enghelab square that night everyone had already evaded the streets. Even though Shahin, Pouria, and Ali had all abandoned rap to play rock and metal music, they were rapping some Farsi rap classics out and loud as we were approaching along that deserted street which symbolically separated the two sides of the city. Both of the sides were sleeping; neither police nor families were there to police our moves.

In the same way as life gets shattered along the way and recreated from million pieces, urban spaces are also recreated every moment we occupy them. Maybe musicians don't always change those urban spaces as they pass through but when they root their feet on the ground and walk the same paths again and again, eventually they will also change the environment.

At least in the night dusty foot philosophers walk the streets differently. For that moment the streets were ours.

5. Verse II: Telling local philosophies of global significance

*With rap you can win a war
With rap you can make culture
With rap you can show dreams
With rap, with words, you can change the world*

“Sarkoob” (“Suppression”) by Yas, translation by author

I was about to meet songwriter Parviz a friend of mine thought could give me a different insight to the topic of my thesis. As a licensed musician Parviz had made a professional career out of music, particularly working with theater and releasing his own music. One day I got a call from my friend telling me we would have to make the interview by the next day because Parviz was going away.

When I met him the next day at a licensed studio a bit away from the city fuss, I aimed to start the conversation lightly: “So, where are you going tomorrow?” “Prison,” he nodded like no big deal.

He had written some controversial lyrics and another text about religion which quite didn’t please the government, but having served earlier for some months he wasn’t a stranger to prison though. Even so, I couldn’t hide my surprise he would spend his last day in freedom talking to a stranger he had never met in his life. That didn’t seem to bother him much either: “This is something you should know about Iran,” he only commented, and we moved on to talk about music.

“Iranian culture is all about emotion.” He took some paper and draw three circles: “Culture, religion, and art equals modernity. In Iran there’s no modernity.” I wasn’t convinced about his argument as I thought there was not just one kind of modernity:

Yes, but in your thesis you need to acknowledge that Iranian culture is weak. And why is it weak? Because the music is weak. And why is that? Firstly, because of religion, and secondly, because of the government. Thirdly, because the philosophy of the song writers is weak.

In the meanwhile Parviz was drawing a mind-map of his presentation, then paused for a second apologetically, "I'm sorry, I'm used to do these," and explained he had studied philosophy in the US. He then went on with his analysis: "There's no underground music really in Iran, not like in the West. What is called underground music here is just music about sex, drugs, and that sort of things."

I asked him what he thought about the music that was released around the Green Movement years:

Yeah, that was a great moment. But then it ended. I don't know why. Back then it was all about emotions, a momentarily sensation; people went to the streets, women took off their veils. The emotions went up, and soon got down.

For him, underground music had its moment, but it failed to take advantage of its opportunity. Only musicians who had moved abroad, such as Shajarian, have been raising their voices: "Here underground doesn't have any meaning. It attracts people because it's underground but it's just music people listen to in their cars without thinking about the words."

I was quite convinced this is how most people listen to music all around the world but he insisted:

Yes, there is commercial music in the West, but here no-one puts any philosophical thought in their music. Music needs to be created from some bigger philosophical thought. It's not enough musicians have once made a critical song and that's it.

For him, music needed to have a goal:

Music always needs to have a purpose, of course, because it creates the culture. When the music is weak the culture is gonna be weak, as it is here. But that's what the government wants; it requires the culture to be weak.

In other words, by repressing music the government was repressing the whole culture. “Music is powerful. It’s everywhere in the society. Just look at how movies and arts have advanced here the last years, and music hasn’t.”

Even though his songs had permits they were often critical, and the criticism was hidden in multilayered meanings and textures. Licenced or not, in many ways his views regarding purposeful music didn’t differ much from many underground musicians I got to know in Tehran. Conscious musicians, in particular, would often emphasize music needed to have some bigger goals and these goals were often expressed in terms of cultural and social change.

Being part of the cultural change was also one of the main reasons why rapper Omid had stayed in Iran:

Here they want people to stay quiet. But I think that when you acknowledge a problem, you gotta speak out, you cannot stay silent. If you acknowledge a problem and stay quiet you become a culprit yourself.

His comment reminded me of Salome MC’s rhyming, “don’t be silent, because if you do, your turn will come.” Along with numerous other rappers Salome got arrested in 2009 and after her release she left the country. But even though some of her lyrics have been openly critical the fact of often being classified as a political rapper makes her uneasy:

I am not political. I do not like politics. I prefer to live on top of a mountain alone than being involved in politics in any way. (...) I always get a little bit icky when I hear the word political, even though I know I have songs that strongly give that message. To me they are just personal. Everything I do is personal. (Samiezadeh-Yazd 2013.)

In a sense music is always personal but it is also one of the most effective instruments to reach out and strike a chord with audiences both on a subjective and collective level. I wanted to wrap up my thesis on a positive note, and thus this final chapter is dedicated to these transformative aspects of music.

I will present how musicians are talking about music as a tool for change, firstly, in their personal lives, secondly, broader in the whole culture, and lastly, on a global level. For them, broader cultural and global change is possible through music, because, at the end, what is more powerful than telling local philosophies of global significance.

And in case you are wondering what ever happened to Parviz, I am pleased to tell this time he was released already in the following week.

5.1. Making self

“I listen to music all day long, in the mornings and in the nights. Not a day passes by without music. We live for music,” 20-years old IT-student and metalhead Sepehr told me as I was meeting him in a café where he was working downtown close to Haft-e Tir.

Although rock and heavy metal have been previously considered as mainly middle and upper class scenes (e.g. Nooshin 2008, 2011; Robertson 2012) I met with quite a few musicians from lower social classes who had more recently gotten interested in playing rock and metal music. One of them was south Tehrani Sepehr who explained me Farsi rap was ruined. Just like so many other musicians I have talked about in this thesis, he thought rap had become too mainstream and lyrically shallow those days.

Around the time I lived in Tehran he was putting a band together with his friends. He was playing guitar, and back then, he and his band mates were acquiring instruments and other equipment, such as microphones, as they were planning to build a studio at their friend’s home where he lived with his parents. “It’s better this way,” he explained, “the studios outside are too expensive for us.” As he clarified, musicians and artists in Iran generally don’t have lot of money.

He had just used all his savings to buy a violin for his brother who wanted to join their band. In fact, he used nearly all his earnings from the café to music. Although he had to work more to play music, he didn't want to do anything else. It was the biggest passion in his life.

Compared to earlier years when rock and metal were characteristically a north Tehrani thing, the whole time I was in Tehran I sensed there was a profound cultural change happening in the south that was unbalancing the previous social class divisions.

While we were chatting in a café three of his friends showed up and told us there was a concert happening close by that night. And so, we were off.

The concert was held at an unofficial artistic center where people from different art fields were organizing workshops, concerts, and other events from time to time. It was a small and intimate place, and completely packed that night. I am notoriously bad at estimating crowd numbers, but I am sure there was more than hundred people. All the seats were taken and at the time we got in it was almost difficult to find a spot to stand.

It was a mixed audience and, corresponding to my observations in the few other concerts I went in Tehran, the atmosphere felt very familiar as if everyone already knew the band members beforehand. As the advertisement could have only happened from mouth-to-mouth, I wouldn't be surprised if they did.

The band had been together for five years and some of its members had been actively involved in the Tehran's rock scene since its birth. The band was playing slow blues rock but with a characteristic Tehran sound juxtaposing traditional Persian instruments with contemporary guitar, bass, keyboard, and drums.

Their music had a melancholic yet beautiful tone, and while listening to the band I felt simultaneously happy, sad, and nostalgic towards something I never had. Music is one of the few things that can create such emotion.

Part of music's power arises precisely from that everybody experiences it on a very subjective level. But although music is always personal it is also something that we share. In all the concerts I went in Tehran the audiences sat still and payed immaculate attention to the band. Concert-goers were actually watching the performances and listening to music.

Most importantly, concerts are spaces of coming together. They are one of the most intense spaces where musicians communicate with the listeners. As the band's vocalist commented me after the concert: "I believe that at the end we are one: we are all the same. Through my music I am in contact with others."

And that night the band touched us collectively in that shared moment and space. After the band wrapped up their play, the audience burst into cheerful and loud applause, and while people were still cheering and clapping, Sepehr, who had been standing next to me throughout the performance, pointed towards the small stage and said convincingly: "Next year we are going to be there."

Musicologist Simon Frith (1996, 109) asserted that music doesn't reflect people but produces them and creates a musical experience. For him the aesthetics of music was a matter of how music made us experience ourselves in a different way. He saw identity as mobile, "a becoming not a being," and it was this process of self coming into being that created our musical experience: "Music gives us a real experience of what the ideal could be" (*Ibid.*, 123).

Sepehr's strong passion about music goes to exemplify how music offers ground where emotions, affections, and dreaming can happen freely and new imagined worlds get to be played out. Frith (1996,111) formulated, "[m]aking music isn't a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them."

Frith has later received criticism for asserting that music doesn't reflect anything, and rightly so. Music also reflects realities, although in a fictional form. Putting that critique aside, his understanding of music as forming and transforming our personal selfhood and collective identities is still very valid. Music can be fantasy and escapism to ideal worlds, but it can also fundamentally transform lives, both for the musicians and the listeners.

Building on that idea, music scholar Tia DeNora (2000) describes music as a technology of self; it is a resource for constructing and maintaining mood, memory, and identity. She argues that, "music has transformative powers, it 'does' things, changes things, makes things happen" (*Ibid.*, 48).

Music as a life-changer was a narrative I would repeatedly hear when I talked with conscious musicians from south Tehran. Hood rapper Armin came from religious family which is why his rapping craft had caused some conflicts between them, mostly with his father. He used to be religious as well: "But then I realized. Actually, it all started from rap. I started to listen to rap and I realized rappers are speaking the truth. I trusted them more than the mullahs."

Rocker Pouria's story sounded very similar. At first, his religious family condemned his rock hobby as Satanism and didn't approve it at all. He used to be religious also but had stopped believing in religion years ago. In fact, his personal awakening had started from music, particularly rock: "Music has changed my life enormously! I started to listen to rock ten years ago, you know, Pink Floyd, Jim Morrison, Deep Purple, and so on, and I realized they were rebels. They tried to be free."

Now he was making music because it was his biggest passion. After passion, he told, came social reasons which had been indistinguishably moulded by his personal background:

With my music I want to wake up people because here people obey too much without thinking. Some priest says a thing and people just blindly obey. We always tell a story in our songs. These stories aim to get people to listen, to think, to stop. So that they wouldn't walk around deaf.

Sepehr's comment feels like a perfect introduction to my next question: How do musicians take part in the wider cultural transformations through their music.

5.2. Making culture

*Count the women who have changed history
Why should we give up our honour?
We have problems but we are still happy
Why do I have to scare of walking on a dark street?*

"*Be name zan*" ("In the Name of Women") by Farinaz, translation by author

With lyrics often tackling urban realities, spatial segregation, and demographic inequalities, conscious Tehrani rap embodies "firmly rooted spatial awareness" (Baker 2006, 217). Although throughout this thesis I have aimed to show that music's meaning is not just in the text and lyrics, I wanted to dedicate this section for a brief lyrical overview, as due to informant privacy I haven't really talked about music that much so far.

One of the prolific social commentaries has been south Tehrani Ali Sorena who often raps about south Tehran. His rap track "*Majnoon-e shar*" ("Insanity of the city", translation by author) is an illustrative example of how the urban spatial formations have been plaid out in rap music.

The song starts with a stark visualisation of antonyms: right-left, hot-cold, happiness-bitterness, wind-snow. From the introduction you know he is rhyming about a world of contrasts and the opposite realities people are living in.

The track continues: "*Tell him to come lower / Low, low, lower / Tell him to come lower / Lower than the lower town.*" By this he invites listeners to come even lower than the lowest point of the city. He is referring to both the geographical location of the city, even more south than the southernmost part of Tehran, and the socio-economic realities in this area, the lowest classes of the society. From the lowest point of the city he rhymes:

*I wished to see the morning light
Without memories of the fight of the night
I bet your voice and voice of mine
Your lips and lips of mine
Your nights and nights of mine
Are apart like day and night*

The track finishes with the same antonyms as it starts, Ali Sorena wrapping up the song: “These talks have no importance to me.” The ultimate message of the song is to criticize the antagonist discourses people create in the society. People talk this and that about south Tehran and the poor communities living there but have they ever visited the places themselves and do they know these people they are talking about.

Social inequalities and problems have been powerfully illustrated also in the pioneering tracks by prolific first-generation rapper Yas. No doubt, he has been one of the leading social commentaries since the early days of Farsi rap. In his song “*Az chi begam*” (“What should I say”, translator unknown), dedicated to students who were wounded in a school fire in Doroodzan, he makes a reference to Tehran’s geographical segregation as well:

*What can I say about the kids from the lower town
Who have enough food for just a month
Whose only reason to sleep is to dream about tomorrow
Whose only amusement is hanging out at Beheshte Zahra (graveyard)*

Nooshin (2011, 100) expressed that Farsi rap lyrics tell about “an alternative reality that is taboo or hidden from view.” The alternative reality rappers are revealing is a reality of domestic violence, runaway girls, alcoholism, drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, poverty, depression, and suicide. As a young teacher Afsoon once commented me: “Underground music has become people’s way of expressing themselves when they cannot do it elsewhere. It tells about our lives and about the situation in this country.”

I was talking about music's transformative power one day with licensed songwriter and gardener Farhad, who agreed that music can change people's lives: "That's why they control it. Music is everywhere. Think about watching a film without sound, you immediately get bored. Even when we speak, the sounds we make is music. We are all musicians in that sense."

Among many others, Farhad reminisced early years of Farsi rap with nostalgia as the golden era of underground music. Before the 2010s' the rhymes might have even touched political issues which hasn't been so much the case after the government crackdown 2009. Arrests of various first-generation rappers set the tone for future rappers; political and religious topics weren't tolerated.

One of the arrested rappers was Bahram whose outspoken songs have often dealt with social problems among the youth, such as alcoholism and drug abuse, poverty, and depression. For instance, his song "*Namei be rais jomhoor*" ("Letter to a president", translation by author), presumably named after Tupac's song, starts by Ahmadinejad's electoral speech from 2005 in which he promised to concentrate on improving the economy instead of monitoring people's clothes. In his speech Ahmadinejad had critiqued hardliners' moral policies by asking whether people's clothing "really is our problem." After he got elected all his promises soon turned out to be lies:

*Our pain wasn't cured, doctor of the country
You only attacked us harder with your hostility
My mind is awake, but I wish it was asleep
So, I wouldn't have to give up my dream*

Bahram's outspoken letter to president pays a special attention to growing social problems among the youth:

*I've suffered enough from seeing geniuses drifting to alcohol
I never thought to see millions of young people escaping from religion
Or committing offences to go to jail for a place to sleep
Breath this asphalt that smells like blood
Pay attention, a teen is dying on a street corner*

The increasing number of female rappers hasn't gone unnoticed either. One of the arrested musicians was Salome MC who has often avoided rapping about gender issues and about being (an Iranian) woman. In a song “*Sabz shodim dar in khak*” (“Grown Green on This Land”, translation from the music video) she criticizes both the Iranian government and the international geopolitics:

We weren't afraid of Bush, let alone all the propagandas you keep pulling

To trick our honorable nation...

We are not the people of Saddam, or the victims of Taliban

Go ahead with the sanctions as long as you want

We will build this home by ourselves, from Caspian Sea to Persian Gulf

That is how a Persian will do

The hook is addressed to the divided nation:

This wound is bleeding / Come brother give me your hand, don't let this pain grow

If we don't treat this, it will turn black / I and you are sisters and brothers

If we don't get united / Don't let our home burn

This fight will not be over / We are always a family, they are strangers

Such references of Iranians as a family are recurrent in her songs. In this track the family is described wounded because of divisions and disagreements between people. The healing can only happen if people get united.

There are many female rappers who have been rapping about gender discrimination as well, such as Ghogha, Justina, and Sonita Alizadeh. As Keir (2010) has noted the feminist rap in Iran rarely talks about sexuality as in the West but rather about gender equality. For instance, Ghogha compared Iranian ideal womanhood to a male-dependent doll in her song “*Aroosak kooki*” (“Wind-up Doll”, translation by Keir 2000):

One can live like a doll / Living for years among the abusiveness of men

With its tough strain. / Yell: I'm a very lucky woman.

Scream this! / I'm just here to tell you who I am.

I am the voice of 1,000 abused women. / I don't want to live like a wind-up doll

At the same token as music production is gendered it can also challenge the normative gender roles and offer platforms to express new formulations of gender and sexualities (e.g. Whiteley 2000). Whereas music production cultures often hold misogynist and sexist attitudes, technologic developments have facilitated individual music production which, at the end, might be favourable for female musicians in Iran.

Nooshin (2011) even argued that women can become protagonists of Farsi rap in the following years, and although this is not quite the case yet, rapper Justina has put her faith in the emerging third-generation rappers and believed that women will be taking more visible role in the future (Siamdoust 2017, 243).

One thing is certain though; underground music genres have provided platforms for heterogenous groups of young musicians and in many ways democratized channels for different voices to be heard. As Nooshin (2009) has argued music has a central role in transforming societies in its power to imagine new visions and explore embracing simultaneously both local and global. In the last part I wanted to study how musicians are demanding global change by reaching out to global music communities.

5.3. Reaching out to the world

“I’ve always had a goal,” rapper Omid nodded. “First you always need to have a goal, and only after that think about money and fame.” As already mentioned earlier, as a prominent first-generation rapper Omid had received them both and, in a sense, represented a perfect success story so central in global hip-hop narratives.

For example, when you got to Iran you came because of some reason, you had a goal. Or when I go out the street, I go to buy bread for example. You cannot step outside the door without having some destination.

I often lost my direction but I didn’t reveal that to Omid. I was curious to know how his goals had changed on the course of his active rap years:

My life has been really difficult. And it still is. But around ten years ago I started to look for meaningful ways to live my life. I never thought I'd become famous. And now everybody knows me. I guess, back in the days my goals were more personal than today. I was looking for a meaningful path for my life.

More than anything, those days he didn't want to reach out to listeners only in Iran but throughout the world. While visiting the US, he had shown some music videos filmed in Tehran, and American viewers had been surprised to see what a modern city Tehran was: "They had thought Iran is just plain desert where people ride with camels and are poor."

US reality show of upscale American Iranians *Shahs of Sunset* was to blame for another stereotype Omid had often ran into during his visit. This widely mocked show represents Iranians as superficial and narcissistic party-monsters:

In the US and elsewhere abroad, Iran means currently either religious fanaticism or parties and shallowness. But we have so much more: great art, movies, movie studios, music, technology, companies, development... Of course, they don't see this side of Iran abroad, but only the side they show in the media and news.

One of his main goals today was to tell about Iran to the outside world and correct these distorted perceptions. His goals hadn't been accomplished yet but he was hopeful they would be someday:

I'm an optimistic person and I trust in the future. I believe things will change for good. If there are good changes in Iran people don't have to suffer anymore. It would be a big change worldwide if one day our government could sit together at the same table with other leaders of the world.

Global acceptance was a central goal widely shared within Tehrani rap scene. Farsihiphop's admin wrote me that one of the objectives of their website was precisely to make "Iranian Hip hop Movement as International Movement":

Since the beginning our goal has been that this movement would be followed worldwide and today we can see big achievements in this sense, e.g. cooperation between Yas and TechN9 or Hichkas and others (that is Reveal, Quf, addition by author) with Kool G Rap. The site gets visitors from abroad which is why since the beginning we have also worked in international language (English) and now after 3-4 years we can see this was a good move and has succeeded also in Iran.

Once again, dusty foot philosophy comes to mind. Tehrani rappers tell local philosophies of global significance. Anthropologists Samy Alim (2009) might call such move as “glocal distinctiveness” which characterises the whole hip-hop nation as its members aim to distinguish themselves locally from other youth styles and genres while simultaneously connecting to global community.

In *Hip-hop Tehran* Nooshin (2011, 92) discusses how musical migrations travel through current global processes and what kind of forms these take on local levels: “(I)t is clear that previously accepted ideas about the intimate connection between music and place – in the sense of specific kinds of music ‘belonging’ to particular places and peoples – have become disrupted.”

As Omid said in the beginning of this thesis we need to listen and talk, and music is one of the most powerful ways to interact both with the immediate localities and wider audiences worldwide. Samy Alim (2009, 122) maintains that translocalizing process of hip-hop “allows youth to ‘feel the streets’ (metaphorically, to understand a particular consciousness) of once distant localities.” Thus, through music we can learn from other places and from each other if we know how to listen.

And now that Farsi rap has taken over Tehran streets and large part of Iranian cities, the new direction is clear. It is reaching international audiences.

6. Outro

One night at the end of my first stay in Tehran I went to see a friend playing in a rock concert at a university downtown. The concert was organized as a part of a co-lecture by psychology and arts departments with a well-meaning intention to talk about interlinkages of psychology, depression, and music.

Running behind the schedule the event finally started with the band's half an hour or so performance. As in any public auditorium, Khomeini's pictures at the top corners of the stage were looking down on us sitting in the audience while the lead vocalist was running around the stage energetically from band member to another waving his guitar. The performance was energetic and uplifting even though the public moving codes were followed and no rhythmical moving or dancing was happening neither at the stage or the audience. The audience was living the moment and the band members were having fun. Much like the band's fusion rock music in general they had a humorous and sarcastic touch in their play.

After the first part of the performance the vocal singer announced they would continue after some talks. A few hours passed by speakers after speakers stepping up the stage, many of them professors, eloquently acknowledging the importance of music for mental health. Few traditional instrument musicians also gave short performances between what seemed liked never-ending lecture talks. Little by little I started to become convinced that by wearing us out the event organizers tactically aimed to demonstrate connection between music and depression. Apparently I wasn't the only one feeling that way as at the end of the night, right after the event curator had once again popped up to the stage to introduce yet another guest speaker, a frustrated male voice from the audience shouted: "Let us just listen to the music already!"

By the night was over, I was convinced most of the audience was there only for the band. I guess it was a smart move from the organizers to put them in the last.

One thing I learned in Tehran is that you need to have patience. Taking a bus during rush hour will optimistically advance your journey 100 metres an hour and you might have to listen to a university lecture for hours before you get to hear the band. Similarly, socio-political changes also take their time. The gradual relaxation of the music production rules shows that things are moving, slowly but still.

In this study I have aimed to show that the ongoing democratization of music production is gradually going beyond rap music as well, and there exists increasingly more rock and metal musicians from lower classes and religious and conservative families. Thus, the demographics of Tehran's underground music scene are changing rapidly.

I have emphasized that Tehran's underground music scene is a heterogeneous space consisting of musicians from different socioeconomic backgrounds and genres having diverse and contradictory aspirations, music aesthetics, and styles. I have argued against the recurrent perceptions of underground music scene as inherently subversive and emancipatory space and urged the need for a more intersectional approach which allows to analyse how different musicians don't have an equal access to these allegedly "emancipatory" spaces nor equal opportunities to make a professional career out of music. Furthermore, I have argued that this highly politicized understanding might do more harm than good for underground musicians who are considered defiant against their own aspirations.

I have emphasized that Iranian youth is connected to global music industry aesthetics as much as the youth in the West, and Farsi rap's mainstreaming cannot be analysed separately from these transnational music flows.

I have argued that the spatial surroundings of rap and rock scenes look very different. While rock and metal musicians mainly rehearse and record indoor studios and gather at each others' homes, rappers have more visibly taken over public spaces by gathering and battling at parks, remoted alleys, and car lots.

Simultaneously, socioeconomic background affects to a great extent in how musicians experience public sphere and move in it. I have aimed to show how Tehran's urban planning projects that intended to tackle geographical segregation might have favored musicians from lower-class backgrounds for whom the created public spaces have been playing a crucial role in the forming of new music communities.

Followingly, I suggested that global hip-hop discourse that privileges "ghetto life" and hardships in life can be self-empowering narrative for rappers from lower-class families, mainly from south Tehran who have been historically perceived as poor, traditional, conservative, and backward.

I claimed that debates over authenticity are instrumental for musician who are striving for social acceptance, street cred, and respect, and by participating in these discussions Tehrani musicians are thus establishing their position and clout in the underground music scene and among their peers.

I aimed to show that there are many debates over authenticity and that its definitions are constantly modified and dependent on their social context and time. I observed that in the current debates among conscious musicians, musicians are often condemned as sell-outs if they, one, try to appeal to masses and aren't socially conscious, two, are getting permits and lose artistic freedom, and three, leave Iran and lose credibility as critical voices of society.

I aimed to show that whereas both rap and rock music have been extensively localized, metal music remains less "Iranianized" genre which is interesting as it is simultaneously often perceived as the most alternative genre in today's Iran. Followingly, I argued that the alternative status the underground music genres have or don't have in people's minds is intrinsically linked to the actual cultural policies by the state and a mix of different aesthetical evaluations rising both from the local realities and subjective experiences as well as the global music industry.

I intended to show how conscious rappers are pushing for wider cultural and global change by telling local philosophies of global significance. I have argued that music is a powerful tool for constructing self-identity and pushing for social and cultural change, and that through their lyrics and narratives conscious musicians are aiming to tell about their realities and correct false images both of themselves on a local level, and of Iran and Iranians on a global scale.

Music is powerful and many of the musicians in this study exemplify that point. South Tehran has marched to the musical sphere and it is making noise. With music we can take part in deep sociocultural transformations which affect our understanding of urban surroundings, selfhood, and others around us. But music alone doesn't imply anything. It is up to dusty footed philosophers who make – and listen to – music, as it should be.

6.1. The final fade-out

As I have been going through my cryptic diary notes I ran into a Hafez's prophecy poem I got on my early days in Tehran at my Farsi class. The teacher had translated and interpreted my prophecy: "It will happen slowly but eventually it will happen."

Indeed, it took me some time to finish this thesis but eventually it happened. I am forever grateful for everyone who have helped me with this project, the academic staff bearing with me all these years, and most of all my friends and musicians I met in Tehran who welcomed me with open arms and invested their time and efforts to this project.

Iran's music field is also changing slowly, but as the history shows the postrevolutionary governments have gradually changed their tunes towards music which leaves hope that the anticipated changes would happen one day.

One of the recurrent wishes Tehrani musicians make is a global kind: a more truthful or at least less demonizing image and comprehension of Iranians in the transnational media and popular culture. This wish is lucidly expressed in Bia2rap's admin's call for international community, and with his words I am wishing you all the best:

Everyone who is making Farsi hip-hop has a goal to let the world to know the voices of Iranian people, their thoughts, and young people's way of life. For years everyone has thought only bad things about Iran and Iranians, and we want the world to know that it's not like that. We are just like the rest of the young people. We live in difficult conditions and face restrictions that complicate our lives. We want Farsi rap to become global so that our voices will reach all parts of the world. So that everyone will understand that we are just like everybody else.

Songs

Yas – “*Sefareshi*”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6SZ_wVEk2Z4

Salome MC ft. SplytSecond – “*Bahaye rahayi*”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIsBkMnwPVs>

Bahram – “*Inja irane*”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ilkn-KG2ldo>

Hichkas – “*Ekhtelaf*”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqemXVtZg4w>

Hichkas – “*Ye mosht sarbaz*”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4qw3qTV4608>

Bahram – “*Boresh*”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQDKv5d8HDI>

Hichkas ft. Eblis & Enzo – “*Too masti*”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrBT73SfFMg>

Yas – “*Lal*”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6jAAxW7uWbM>

Yas – “*Sarkoob*”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQwnQos09-I>

Farinaz – “*Be name zan*”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AMrArwtPSKk>

Ali Sorena – "*Majnon-e shahr*"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dON1tJIy4Sk>

Yas – "*Az chi begam*"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juMJjb0Zs3Q>

Bahram – "*Namei be rais jomhoor*"

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uoc88x_B53A

Salome MC – "*Sabz shodim dar in khak*"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KSdox68-Z-8>

Ghogha – "*Aroosak kooki*"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qoGSKNz9tyQ>

Bibliography

Abu-Lughod, Lila 2013. Orientalism and Middle East feminist studies. In C. McCann and S. Kim (Eds.) *Feminist theory reader: Local and global perspectives*, 218-226. New York: Routledge.

Alim, Samy 2009. Translocal Style Communities: Hip Hop Youth as Cultural Theorists of Style, Language, and Globalization. *Pragmatics* 19(1), 103-127.

Amir-Ebrahimi, Masserat 2006. Conquering Enclosed Public Spaces in Tehran. *Cities* 23(6), 455-461.

Arendt, Hannah 1958 (1951). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Meridian Books Edition.

Baker, Geoff 2006. La Habana que no conoces: Cuban rap and the social construction of urban space. *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 15(2), 215–246.

Bayat, Asef 2013 (2010). *Life as Politics. How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

———. 2010. Tehran: Paradox city. *New Left Review*, No. 66, 99-122.

Bey, Hakim 1991. *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*. Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia.

Clarke, Eric F. 2013. Music, space and subjectivity. In Georgina Born (Ed.) *Transformations of Public and Private Experience*, 90-110. Cambridge University Press.

Clifford, James 1983. Ethnographic authority. *Representations*, No. 2, 118-146.

Csordas, Thomas J. 1990. Embodiment as a paradigm for anthropology. *Ethos*, 18(1), 5–47.

Dean, Jodi 2000. *Cultural Studies and Political Theory*. Cornell University Press.

DeBano, Wendy S. 2006. Enveloping music in gender, nation, and Islam: Women's music festivals in post-revolutionary Iran. *Iranian Studies*, 38(3), 441-462.

DeNora, Tia 2000. *Music in Everyday Life*. Cambridge University Press.

Ehsani, Kaveh 1999. Municipal Matters: The Urbanization of Consciousness and Political Change in Tehran. *Middle East Report*, No. 212, 22-27.

Einwohner, Rachel L. and Jocelyn A. Hollander 2004. Conceptualizing Resistance. *Sociological Forum*, 19(4), 533-554.

Fatemi, Sasan, Vahid Ghasemi and Reza Samim 2012. A Sociological Analysis of the Space of Popular Music Production in Iran. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(3), 483-492.

Fatemi, Sasan and Jennifer Breyley 2016. *Iranian Music and Popular Entertainment: From Motrebi to Losanjelesi and Beyond*. London and New York: Routledge.

Forman, Murray 2004. "Represent": Race, Space, and Place in Rap Music. In Forman, Murray and Mark Anthony Neal (Eds.) *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, 201-222. New York: Routledge.

———. **2013.** Kill the static: Temporality and change in the hip-hop mainstream (and its "other"). In A. Bennett, S. Baker, and J. Taylor (Eds.) *Redefining mainstream popular music*, 61-74. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Frith, Simon 2011 (1996). Music and Identity. In Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds.) *Questions of Cultural Identity*, 108-127. London: SAGE Publications.

Geertz, Clifford 1973. *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York: Basic Books.

Gergen, Kenneth J. 1991. *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*. New York: Basic Books.

Golpushnezhad, Elham and M. Shahabi 2016. Rap music and youth cultures in Iran: Serious or light? In Feixa, Leccardi, and Nilan (Eds.) *Youth, Space and Time: Agoras and Chronotopes in the Global City*, 213–236. Leiden: Brill.

Golpushnezhad, Elham 2018. Untold Stories of DIY/Underground Iranian Rap Culture: The Legitimization of Iranian Hip-Hop and the Loss of Radical Potential. *Cultural Sociology*, 12 (2), 260-275.

Hebdige, Dick 1979. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen.

Jenks, Chris 2004. *Subculture: The Fragmentation of the Social*. London: SAGE Publications.

Kadivar, Mohsen 2003. An Introduction to the Public and Private Debate in Islam. *Social Research*, 70(3), 659-680.

Keir, Clayton 2010. Tupac and the Ayatollahs. *Middle East Institute*, July 2, 2010 <<https://www.mei.edu/publications/tupac-and-ayatollahs>> (accessed 10/30/2020).

Khosravi, Masoud and Mohammad Mehdi Mowlaei 2013 (1391). Nazariebazi baray musiqie zirzamani Iran. *Falsname Tahghighat-e Farhang*, 5(3), 27/10/1391 (01/16/2013), 43-73.

Khosravi, Shahram 2011. *Young and Defiant in Tehran*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

———. **2012.** Rostam and Sohrab in the Street: Iranian Struggles over Modernity. In Dahl, Gudrun and Örjan Bartholdson, Paolo Favero, Shahram Khosravi (Eds.), *Modernities on Move*, 66-80. Stockholm University.

Klassen, Aaron 2015. The Phenomenology of Authenticity Work: Merleau-Ponty and the ‘Dissonant Sound’ of The Clash. In Poyntz, S. R., and Kennelly, J. (Eds.) *Phenomenology of youth cultures and globalization: Lifeworlds and surplus meaning in changing times*. Taylor & Francis Group.

Kondo, Dorinne K. 1986. Dissolution and Reconstitution of Self: Implications for Anthropological Epistemology. *Cultural Anthropology*, 1(1), 74-88.

Korpe, Marie 2005. *All That is Banned is Desired: Conference on Freedom of Expression in Music*. Beirut October 2005. Denmark: Freemuse.

Krims, Adam 2000. *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 2002. Rap, Race, the “Local”, and Urban Geography in Amsterdam. In R. Young (Ed.), *Music, Popular Culture, Identities*, 165-179. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Lefebvre, Henri 1991. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.

LeVine, Mark 2008. *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam*. Crown Publishing Group.

Low, Setha 2011. Claiming Space for an Engaged Anthropology: Spatial Inequality and Social Exclusion. *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 113(3), 389–407.

Mahdavi, Pardis 2008. *Passionate Uprisings: Iran's Sexual Revolution*. CA: Stanford University Press.

McClary, Susan 1991. *Feminine Endings - Music, Gender and Sexuality*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Mitchell, Tony and Alastair Pennycook 2009. Hip Hop as Dusty Foot Philosophy. Engaging Locality. In: H. Samy Alim & Awad Ibrahim & Alastair Pennycook (eds) *Global linguistic flows: Hip Hop Cultures, Youth Identities, and the Politics of Language*, 25-42. New York: Routledge.

Mowlaei, Mohammed Mehdi 2008. Tabaghehbandi-e Mafahim-e Musiqi-e “Rap”-e Farsi. *Haft Sang*, Issue: Underground music 12/11/1386 (02/01/2008).

Nader, Alireza 2013. A Rough Year for Iran. *Tehran Bureau*, 1/2/2013. <<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2013/01/2013-a-rough-year-for-iran.html>> (accessed 11/09/2020).

Niknafs, Nasim 2016. In a box: a narrative of a/n (under)grounded Iranian musician. *Music Education Research*, Vol. 18(4), 351-363. Routledge.

———. 2018. Tehran’s Epistemic Heterotopia: Resisting Music Education. *Philosophy of Music Education Review*, Vol. 26(2), 155-175.

Nooshin, Laudan 2003. Improvisation as 'Other': Creativity, Knowledge and Power: The Case of Iranian Classical Music. *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, Vol. 128(2), 242-296.

———. **2005a.** Subversion and Countersubversion: Power, control and meaning in the new Iranian pop music. In: Randall, Annie (ed.). *Music, Power and Politics*, 231-272. New York and London: Routledge.

———. **2005b.** Underground, Overground: Rock Music and Youth Discourses in Iran. *Iranian Studies* (Special Issue: Music and Society in Iran), 38(3), 463-94.

———. **2008.** *The Language of Rock: Iranian Youth, Popular Music, and National Identity.* In: M. Semati (Ed.), *Media, culture and society in Iran*, 69-93. Oxford: Psychology Press.

———. **2009.** Chapter 10 ‘Tomorrow is ours’: Re-imagining nation, performing youth in the new Iranian pop music. In Laudan Nooshin and Keith Howard (Eds.). *Music and the play of power in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia*, 245-268. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

———. **2011.** Hip-hop Tehran: Migrating styles, musical meanings, marginalised voices. In: Toynebee, J, Dueck, B (Eds.) *Migrating Music*, 92–112. Abingdon: Routledge.

———. **2017.** Whose liberation? Iranian popular music and the fetishization of resistance. *The International Journal of Media and Culture*, Vol. 15(3), 163-191.

Olszewska, Zuzanna 2013. Classy kids and down-at-heel intellectuals: Status aspiration and blind spots in the contemporary ethnography of Iran. *Iranian Studies*, 46(6), 841–862.

Peterson, Richard A. 2005. “In Search of Authenticity.” *Journal of Management Studies*, 42, 1083–1098.

Phillipov, Michelle 2006. Haunted by the Spirit of ’77: Punk Studies and the Persistence of Politics. *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 20(3), 383-393.

Rastovac, Heather 2009. Contending with Censorship: The Underground Music Scene in Urban Iran. *Intersections*, 10(2), 59-82.

Rehn, Alf and Sköld, David 2007. Makin’ It, by Keeping It Real: Street Talk, Rap Music, and the Forgotten Entrepreneurship From “the Hood”. *Group & Organization Management*, 32(1), 50-78.

Reshad, Karan 2006. KS Interview with Salome, Persian rapper. *Kolah Studio* (first published in Brainstorm #4), 08/06/2006. <<http://www.kolahstudio.com/underground/?p=192>> (accessed 11/08/2020).

Robertson, Bronwen 2012. *Reverberations of Dissent. Identity and Expression in Iran's Illegal Music Scene.* London & New York: Continuum.

———. 2013. I am an original Iranian man. In A. Sreberny and M. Torfeh (Eds.), *Cultural revolution in Iran: Contemporary popular culture in the Islamic Republic*, 133-149. London, UK: I.B.Tauris.

Samiezadeh-Yazd, Safa 2013. “Everything I Do is Personal”: Iran’s First Female Rapper Salome MC Opens Up, Part 1. *Aslan Media*, 05/27/2013 <<http://www.aslanmedia.com/mideast-music/35-music-artist-profile/21309-everything-i-do-is-personal-iran-s-first-female-rapper-salome-mc-opens-up-part>> (accessed 06/16/2013).

Shami, Seteney. 2009. *Publics, Politics and Participation: Locating the Public Sphere in the Middle East and North Africa*. New York: Social Science Research Council.

Siamdoust, Nahid 2017. *Soundtrack of the Revolution: The Politics of Music in Iran*. Stanford University Press.

———. 2018. A revolution of culture: How music and culture have been shaped by politics in Iran. *IPPR Progressive Review*, 26(2), 197-203.

Steward, Theresa Parvin 2013. “*I am the brave hero and this land is mine*”: *Popular music and youth identity in post-revolutionary Iran* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK.

Stokes, Martin (ed.) 1994. *Ethnicity, identity and music: the musical construction of place*. Providence, RI: Berg.

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

Street, John 2012. *Music and Politics*. Cambridge, UK; Malden, USA: Polity Press.

Varzi, Roxanne 2006. *Warring Souls: Youth, media, and martyrdom in post-revolution Iran*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Whiteley, Sheila 2000. *Women and Popular Music: Sexuality, Identity, and Subjectivity*. New York and London: Routledge.

Wolpé, Sholeh 2012. *The Forbidden: Poems from Iran and its Exiles*. Michigan: MSU Press.

Youssefzadeh, Ameneh 2000. The Situation of Music in Iran since the Revolution: The Role of Official Organizations. *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 9(2), 35-61.

———. **2004.** Singing in a theocracy: Female musicians in Iran. In Marie Korpe (Ed.), *Shoot the singer!: music censorship today*, 129-134. London/New York: Zed Books.

Zahir, Sanam 2008. *The music of the children of revolution: The state of music and emergence of the underground music in the Islamic Republic of Iran with an analysis of its lyrical content.* Near Eastern Studies, The University of Arizona.

Zolghadr, Tirdad 2002. Tehran: Fragmented and Feminized. *Bad Jens, Iranian Feminist Newsletter*, No. 6, <<http://www.badjens.com/newissue/i2.htm>> (accessed 11/10/2020).