

Soundscaping Diaspora and the Affective Politics of Listening

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The global proliferation of podcasts and other kinds of audio-blogging has been particularly useful for facilitating transnational conversations in diasporas. By the same token, there has been a surge within the last decade in podcasting on a range of subjects in Persian in Iran and its global diaspora. These podcasts cover topics that run the gamut from journalism and oral histories of modern Iran, informal chats about cultural taboos and celebrity fandom communities, to intersectional feminist conversations about gender, space, discrimination, and sexual and ethnic minorities in contemporary Iran.¹

This essay focuses on how, in the context of the global Iranian diaspora, podcasts break open histories of sound and listening media within modern Iranian political history. By listening closely to Radiochehrazi, one of the earliest projects podcasted in Persian, this

¹See, for instance, Radio Marz (2018), Radio Nist (2019), Radio Tragedy (2020), and Radio Nesyan (2022).

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essay aims to provide a historical overview of older audio media in Iran to contextualize the use of podcasts as new media in diasporas. One of the pioneer sound projects in the Iranian diaspora, Radiochehrazi used the podcast platform as an artistic undertaking linking sonic performance to the cultural histories of sonic media in Iran. Over the course of one year, from March 2013 to February 2014, the anonymous group podcasting Radiochehrazi published twenty-one short episodes on SoundCloud from Briarcliff Manor in New York. Most of the historical milestones of sonic media in modern Iranian history have used listening for control and resistance and have clear political intentions in deploying modern communication technologies to engage mass participation through performative and affective registers of listening. Sonic remix, performance, and affective listening in Radiochehrazi provide an example of Iranian diasporic cultural production in which sound remix becomes a proto-political practice that reanimates cultural and media histories yet counters the common political use of sound technologies. I use the term “diasporic imaginary” throughout this essay, aiming to capture the shifting and alternative imaginary that diasporic sites such as the soundscape in Radiochehrazi produce. Diasporic imaginaries trespass the here and now, connecting generations on the basis of the return to polyphonic and emerging narratives of the cultural past. This essay argues that, unlike most media examples, the diasporic imaginaries in sonic performance projects such as Radiochehrazi are politicized because of affect and through sound’s affective power to change us and be changed by us.²

Combining several theoretical frameworks including Brian Massumi’s notion of affect, this research examines the affective politics of listening in diaspora. Massumi understands affect to be a non-conscious bodily intensity that cannot be named but only felt. His *Politics of Affect* considers affect and politics as inseparable. In this formulation, change is the primary factor that makes affect immediately political. Furthermore, Michael Warner’s essay, *Publics and Counterpublics*, informs the performance studies vantage point in this essay’s analysis of sound and media. In addressing the complexities of diasporic cultural

²Brian Massumi, *Politics of Affect* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015).

productions, I consider such podcast series as counterpublics because most podcast producers in diaspora including Radiochehrazi's creators maintain an awareness of their projects' subordinate status. Warner contends that counterpublics are "spaces of circulation in which it is hoped that the poesis of scene making will be transformative, not replicative merely."³ Warner's notion of counterpublics shapes the theorization of sonic performance in this essay because by performing on the periphery of several dominant (national and transnational) publics, the collaboration and artistic work examined here extends beyond representations of ideological and political conflict. Performance of sound instead opens up spaces of circulation where scene making will be transformative—spaces that heavily depend on performance to bring about oppositional interpretations of diasporic identities and desires.⁴

Understanding sound as performance offers approaches to the body, the archive, and media that can be generatively challenged by listening in place of narrativity. For instance, the narrative context of this essay's case study, Radiochehrazi, is important to consider; however, the experience of listening to this project through sonic nuances of narrative interruptions and qualities such as repetitions and abrupt transitions provide complexities that are central to the reception of its unfolding narrative. Remixing layers of sound objects and qualities allows Radiochehrazi to depict diasporic identity fragmentation through the metaphor of madness. The artists use sound remix as a compositional strategy in order to expand the metaphor of madness from narrative composition to remixed forms reanimating Iranian cultural histories. Through a historical overview of listening in relationship to its media in post-Islamic Iran, I demonstrate how projects such as Radiochehrazi reperform the cultural-media relevance of listening, a cultural practice that commands an embodied, gendered, and performative subject, whose subject is always socially improvised, performed-with, and in-relation-to.⁵

³Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 88.

⁴Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*, 85.

⁵Nathaniel Stern, "The Implicit Body as Performance: Analyzing Interactive Art," *Leonardo* 44 (2011): 234.

In order to understand performances of sound, we also need to consider how we listen to these sounds and how that listening engages us in sensual and sensory affective processes. Even in its most inattentive forms, listening is never just listening. Deaf percussionist Evelyn Glennie extends our understanding of sonic experience: “Hearing is basically a specialized form of touch. Sound is simply vibrating air which the ear picks up and converts to electrical signals, which are then interpreted by the brain. The sense of hearing is not the only sense that can do this, touch can do this too.”⁶ Sound, therefore, is one of the few ways through which performances can literally (and metaphorically) touch the bodies and bounce in-between humans, animals, objects, environments, and technologies. Sound can touch us even further if we consider its cultural meanings, cues, and particular diasporic affinities that link sound to our listening bodies. The body is itself the “echo chamber,” responding to sound’s inner vibrations as well as outer attentiveness as philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy would phrase it.⁷

Sound is always embodied, affective, and deeply cultural, which explains why sound and music make up the largest portion of diaspora cultural productions. Listening always already entails reception and collectivity by inviting listeners to actively write with the sounds they hear, which are key aspects of diaspora cultures. Attentive listening to these series of podcasts also brings to the fore cultural histories that shape a diasporic engagement with sound remix in performance. Gender is central to an understanding of the political roles that listening media play in negotiating agency in everyday life in contemporary Iran. I contend that since the Islamic public uses the male/masculine voice to dominate the soundscape, so its counterpublics and practices are always already sexed/gendered.⁸ Radiochehrazai builds off the role

⁶Evelyn Glennie, “Hearing Essay,” January 1, 2015, www.evelyn.co.uk/hearing-essay/ (accessed July 25, 2020).

⁷Jean-Luc Nancy and Charlotte Mandell, *Listening* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007).

⁸The use of “sex/gender” together and pairing “sexed/gendered” across this essay are my way of insisting on the coextensive role of sex and gender in formation and expression of subjectivity. The intention is to refuse erasing transgender identity in my discussion of sonic media and production of cisheterosexual social publics in Iran and its global diaspora. To read more on the

auditory media play in establishing social hierarchies and negotiating agency in everyday life, and so through absence and drag performances of the female/feminine voice, their performance foreshadows the central position of sex/gender vis-à-vis the affective politics of sound in Iran and Iranian diasporas. Scholarship on listening in relationship to a variety of media in post-Islamic Iran informs my analysis of Radiochehrazi. I begin with a brief description of the recorded sonic project and further examine excerpts of this podcast to demonstrate some of the ways in which this archive of sonic files stored on a digital platform transgresses the sonic register by commanding an embodied, performative listening experience.

Radiochehrazi: Podcast as Performance

By creating a dark yet funny piece of radio drama, Radiochehrazi reflects on the oft-criticized ideology of the post-revolutionary generation formed around memories and experiences of modern Iranian political histories. For instance, on several occasions throughout the podcasts, the speakers mock the criticism that the Iranian diaspora receives for the safety of its remote online participation in the Green Movement of 2009. Radiochehrazi's performance disrupts linear temporality and narrativity and instead represents various temporalities that slide through one another. The dramatic narrative uses madness as a metaphor to depict the distorted experience of time and space in diasporas. The topics engaged range from pop culture and childhood nostalgia to issues like Islamic and secular feminisms, diaspora, chain murders of political activists in 1988-89, the student movement of 1999, and Iran and Arab-world conflicts.⁹ Their main focus, however, remains on the events around the Green Movement of 2009 and its well-known use of social media campaigns.¹⁰ To contextualize

use of "sex" and "gender" together see Viviane K. Namaste, "'Tragic Misreadings': Queer theory's Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity," in *Queer Studies: Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Anthology*, ed. Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason (New York, NY and London: NYU Press, 1996), 183–203 or see Amelia Jones, "Introduction" in *In Between Subjects: a Critical Genealogy of Queer Performance* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2021), 1-34.

⁹See appendix B for a sample transcript.

¹⁰See appendix C for sample transcript.

the histories of each political event that these podcasts address calls for and deserves the writing of an elaborate historiographical account which goes beyond the scope of this essay.

Experimenting with podcasts as a platform for radio drama offers diasporic artists a space free of the burden of commercial interests, the traditions of broadcasting, and persecution by state authorities or other controlling structures. Podcasting in the contemporary context of knowledge transmission could be considered as *fast-knowledge*. Listening to podcasts offers cheap and easy access to selective content we have an appetite for. As auditory soundscapes, podcasts rarely demand full attentive listening and can be listened to in the background as we go on with everyday life. They satisfy our constant craving for information and social connection. Similar to other social media platforms that litter everyday experience of the neoliberal subject, podcasts are used for many different purposes including public pedagogy and entertainment as well as dissemination of misinformation and political propagation in the post-truth era.

Radiochehrazi does not use podcasting to these ends or any of the main reasons podcasts are normally used for. They titled the project “Radio” despite having an online digital spectatorship/audience in mind. The longest episode is just under twelve minutes, and within the last seven years, each episode has had between eighty and 280 thousand listeners as of the day I write this essay.¹¹ The duo chose to be anonymous, and this series is their only public sonic project. Despite their anonymity, and considering the issues that the project brings up, the music and literature it remixes, and the references it makes to Iranian (trans) national icons and cultural stereotypes, it is possible to make assumptions about the creators’ age, education, class, and sex/gender. The performer-creators of the project were most likely born after Iran’s Islamic Revolution (1978-9) and have gone through the higher education system in Iran. Naming the project “Radio,” despite their awareness of

¹¹Radiochehrazi. SoundCloud audio, 2013 www.soundcloud.com/radiochehrazi-1 (accessed July 25, 2020).

media distinctions between radio and digital podcasts, indicates in itself a gravitation toward memory and history. More precisely, this sonic project aligns with recent experiments with new modes of storytelling and artistic expression. Theatre, performance, and dance artists and companies have started experimenting with social media platforms and smartphone applications to make artistic work. Radiochehrazi, too, uses remix and a set of non-normative auditory production techniques to create a radio drama, an audio-performance project on SoundCloud. The collective's main preoccupation is the artistic collaboration that grew out of a friendship formed on the basis of the creators' diasporic experience. I return to the acknowledgment that the single speaking voice extends in the epilogue, "I had to write to you that radio and other things are the outcomes of a much bigger thing [...] Friendship is at times insane, at times frustrating, quiet, with sunsets and a train of glasses."¹² Madness, anguish, and time are key themes that come up in this epilogue: "There is madness so is anguish. It seems as though we were born to anguish. We miss every single little thing so much [...] I cherish your madness and anguish." An introduction to hope arrives right at the end: "all things aside, who knows friendship gives birth to new things every day!"¹³

Thematically, hope arrives late, but arguably the creators have been attesting to it all throughout the series. This is manifest in how space is claimed on a mainstream digital platform to accomplish what Jasmin Zine, speaking about counterpublics as a hopeful generative space, calls "small acts of subversion."¹⁴ Podcasts offer a playground for the remixing of various acoustic objects, sounds, voices, noises, and silences. Podcasting helps the project by expanding space in a democratic way for a more discursive and confrontational encounter. Space is internal and mental for a noncontiguous countercommunity to forge through listening—as opposed to the more traditional contiguity of the nation. Anahid Kassabian argues that listening makes possible

¹²Radiochehrazi, 2013.

¹³See appendix A for a full translation of the episode.

¹⁴Jasmin Zine, "Honour and Identity: An Ethnographic Account of Muslim Girls in a Canadian Islamic School," *Topia: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies* 19 (2008): 56.

a “nonindividual subjectivity,” or “distributed subjectivities, [...] a field over which power is distributed unevenly and unpredictably, over which differences are not only possible but required, and across which information flows, leading to affective responses [...] Humans, institutions, machines, and molecules are all nodes in the network, nodes of different densities.”¹⁵ In this way, podcasting also utilizes a communication platform that has the capacity to link here to elsewhere in a utopian way—a communication that is responsive to demands of diasporic spatial and temporal dislocations. Using performance, audio, and textual analysis, I focus on excerpts from three episodes: “0,” “1,” “3,” and the epilogue, “20.”

The first episode, “0,” remixes a collage of different radio announcements and music tracks recorded by the well-known national radio stations and the Iranian diasporic music and broadcast industry. In an immersive listening experience, it is especially episode “0” that introduces a set of expectations for the listeners. Like every other episode, this track opens and closes with an identical alarming sound similar to what one can expect to hear on radio programs in Persian. The opening to all preceding episodes includes reciting the formal phrase “Bismillah al-rahman al-rahim (In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful).” This stresses the formal manner as if replicating the Iranian National Radio and Television program’s official format to create a pastiche of formal and informal elements. The two radio hosts emphasize that the project is podcasted in different episodes, each episode engaging with a special topic related to culture, art, politics, entertainment, or public discourse. The introduction pounds the listening ear with repetitions and intertextual references. The episode announces commercial breaks, featuring mock advertisements (for example, they present ads for a cellphone carrier company and for RADO watches) to mockingly bring to the fore broadcasting’s commercial and corporate models. These faux ads are followed by extending an invitation to the listeners to place their ads in Radiochehrazi. The phrase

¹⁵Anahid Kassabian, *Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 24-5.

“this episode is about” is routinely repeated, each time followed by a different topic (society and work, youth and unemployment, history of underground rock music in Iran, tourism and recreation, human rights, family medicine, food, and nutrition). These repetitions prompt a mental game that informs the expectations of the listening subject. By the end, the listener is assured that the episode never really gets started—a perfect allegory for the underwhelming promise of new beginnings in the cultural and political life of the diasporic subject.

Podcasts open up space for Radiochehrazi to create and remix various acoustic elements such as music, sound effects, and dialogue. For example, one scene presents an interview with a journalist covering an accident in Antalya. The journalist’s report from Antalya is remixed with traditional Turkish music in a parody of “on-spot reporting.” At other moments of the same episode, Iranian music, classical piano, and other sonic objects such as whispers, laughter, sighs, and chatter come in to augment the text. Radiochehrazi’s introduction is fragmented and ambitious, ensuring the listener of a hoax. Considering the working limits and scope of these podcasts, the joke is obvious: what they set out to accomplish, to cover all the proposed topics and to do everything possible in the world of radio broadcasting, is impossible. The hosts announce the line-up, a long and impossible list. The joke is most evident when they discuss a special program that utilizes user-generated content: they promise an episode in which listeners can send in photos to show on the radio, and the radio will feature scents in a special episode. Accomplishing the impossible encompasses engaging with sensual and perceptual modes that the podcast or radio as media simply cannot accommodate. The fun but jolting listening experience invites the listening subject to leave her expectations at the click of the play button.

Sounding Madness and Displacement

Episode “3” renders audible the project’s key strategy, hovering above the shared affective register with madness to decentre regimes of truth and to undo official history.¹⁶ In this episode, the creators start a fictional

¹⁶Petra Kuppers, Stephanie Heit, April Sizemore-Barber, VK Preston, Andy Hicky, and Andrew

drama with two male characters and one female character. Confined in the Chehrazi mental hospital, these mad companions collectively launch a radio station to escape the humdrum of their everyday institutionalized life. The project is named after Dr. Ibrahim Chehrazi who returned to Tehran in 1937 after completing his doctoral degree in medicine in Paris, France. As soon as he arrived home, Chehrazi assumed leadership in teaching at the University of Tehran's School of Medicine, directing the Centre for Neurology at Razi hospital, as well as consulting the State's Justice Department and the National Iranian Army. This was not atypical for someone like Chehrazi. He made enormous scholarly and professional contributions to his field by the time he died in early 2011, at the age of 102, in his second home in the United States. Among all his contributions, there is one specific project that inspires the podcasts of Radiochehrazi. Within the first three years of his return, Chehrazi established the very first institutional asylum in Iran in 1940. He is the first scholar to adopt and build a Western institutionalized system for the governance of psychotic patients in Iran.

The mental hospital, a place of confinement and isolation, serves as a metaphor for displacement. The dialogues suggest co-relations between the characters' madness and disorientation in finding one's place in a distinct reality from the one imagined before the diaspora. The narrative of madness highlights a conditional relationship to temporality and spatiality for the diasporic Iranian subject who keeps time using bi-cultural calendars and navigates space through multimodal embodiments. For first-generation diasporas, the lived experience of spaces of home—now far from material conditions that define home—exists in memories, photographs, and other virtual representations that are available in digital form and in online spaces. For instance, when grandparents videocall, we are transported into the background of their kitchens where we used to dine together back home. In this sense, the everyday embodiment in relation to space becomes multimodal as memories and sensations related to these lived spaces and objects that define them overlap in virtual view.

Wille, "Mad Methodologies and Community Performance: The Asylum Project at Bedlam," *Theatre Topics* 26 (2016): 221.

A featured edition on Nouruz (the celebration of spring equinox and the Iranian new year) in episode “3” adds dramatic narrative into the remix. The co-host, who soon will be performing the voice of the protagonist, announces: “this episode is about Spring, Jamshid, and Delbar.”¹⁷ Melancholic music plays. Time and space change as the program switches into a radio play. The protagonist (his name is Habib) starts off by a simple description of how his day started. What follow are dialogues between the two main characters and Delbar as they encounter each other in the hallway of the hospital. The conversations introduce us to the characters’ clashing outlooks on life. Jamshid believes in beauty and life’s simple pleasures. He convincingly insists that “the world of the insane is the most beautiful.”¹⁸ During this scene, the listener is repeatedly reminded of Jamshid’s optimism about a possible happy simple life. Every time he joyfully digs his fist into Samanou, a Norouz’s delicacy, we hear from him or other characters about Jamshid’s jolly act. Jamshid’s positive outlook is in constant contrast to the protagonist’s whiney attitude that hinders his ability to receive love from Delbar, his crush. He continuously complains about the unfair accidents of life, hopelessness, lack of love—and, of course, he is skeptical of Jamshid’s empty optimism. As the protagonist tries to leave Jamshid to get fresh air and smoke a cigarette, he cross passes with Delbar in the hallway. Delbar is concerned with his pessimistic mood. His encounter with Delbar tells us that in fact Delbar loves him back, and that the main problem is the protagonist’s inability to see reality beyond his pessimism. As the protagonist is about to pass Delbar, he hears a voice from the hospital’s office calling his name. The office pages a patient’s name when they have visitors. Having a visitor promises hope, a long-awaited interaction with the world outside. However, the scene abruptly ends before we get to hear from or about the visitor. Instead, we hear a newly admitted patient asking the protagonist: “Since your neck is so long, which way is the Spring?”¹⁹ This uncanny question shows us how the metaphor of madness unsettles

¹⁷Radiochehrazi, 2013.

¹⁸Radiochehrazi, 2013.

¹⁹Radiochehrazi, 2013.

language and the obsession with meaning and making sense, as it situates the character and Spring in a world with alternative dimensions and temporal relations. Madness both reflects an anguished diasporic experience and creates opportunities for new affective experiences. The voice performing the protagonist switches back to the co-host and closes the episode on a happy note about Spring and the new year. Left with the same alarming music track that comes at the end of all the series' episodes, we are reminded of other episodes of Radiochehrazi and other things that happen in this world.²⁰

Radiochehrazi uses the metaphor of madness in composing the narrative, but more importantly it reflects on madness in their formal use of remixed sounds to reanimate cultural pasts. In addition to this narrative, the project's remix techniques entail a performative multi-modal experience as sonic performance. The artists seemingly build the allegory of madness on existing Iranian cultural traditions and literatures. For instance, madness and mysticism coalesce as key themes in Persian classical poetry (tenth to fourteenth centuries AD). In the poems of Nizami, Sa'adi, Rumi, and Hafez, the mad characters (almost always male identified) are reoccurring figures, who depending on their poet's historical context and body of work, symbolize states of happiness, love, lust, freedom, poetic genius, knowledge, or self-indulgence. The best example of the cultural specificity of madness can be studied in the verse of the twelfth-century Persian poet Nizami. Often compared to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, Nizami Ganjavi's *Laylá va Majnūn* has become the iconic love story of the Middle East.²¹ The male lover's affection for Laylá materializes in his madness and causes disturbance to the social economy of transactional marriages. Madness is also a regenerative site for poetic composition, while Majnun (whose name literally translates into crazed, insane, or mad in Arabic) is often portrayed through allegorical representations that place him among animal worlds in the wilderness depicted in desert life. Majnun as such embodies "a locus of transgressions," as Prashant

²⁰See Appendix D for a complete translation of the scene.

²¹Nezami Ganjavi, *Layli and Majnun*, trans. Dick Davis (Washington, DC: Mage, 2020).

Keshavmurthy puts it.²² Majnun's madness, wildness, and unruly love is a threat to the political, social, and economic order and therefore the source for his abjection, ostracism, and ultimately displacement.

A Brief Cultural Background for Public Sounds

The sonic remix in Radiochehrazi stresses sound's media-specific attributes that shape a diasporic engagement with audio. This reference to sonic media in particular reminds the listeners of the critical role sonic platforms such as minaret, rooftops, radio, and cassette tapes have historically played in the construction of national publics and counterpublics throughout modern Iranian history. An effective way to trace this history of what I term "media-determined listening" in post-Islamic Iran is to look at older theological media. I use the term "media-determined" in referring to older media such as minarets, rooftops, megaphones, voice recorders, and electronic amplifiers, because, as soon as they project, sound permeates into social and public spaces. Listeners are not given any choice. These media control the omnipresent distribution of theological and other politically controlled forms of sound in public life. Thus, it is the medium that first and foremost determines social listening.²³ All these older projection platforms for instance have been and continue to be used for disseminating the Azan (call for prayer in Islamic cultures). I refer to analog media as "older media," not as to suggest that these media are no longer used, but to distinguish them from new/digital media, as they continue to define everyday orientations to time and space via sound in the Islamic public space. Using examples of theological media neither suggests that the public soundscape is only theological, but shows how the masculine projection of theological sounds has been used to mute other vocal registers that frequent the public sphere.

²²Prashant Keshavmurthy, "Nizāmī Ganjavī's Leylī u Majnūn as a Negative Genealogy of Lyric" (lecture, Department of South Asian Studies & the South Asia Centre, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, February 5, 2021).

²³Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

Thinking about the relevance of older auditory media helps to understand podcasts and other new sonic communication technologies and also to assert the important role that listening media play in organizing everyday experience for the Iranian diasporic subject. An alternative approach to this historiography is to focus on the relationship between listening and its counterpolitics in Iran. The use of cassette tapes in the 1970s is an example of aural media's impact on organizing political action in the years preceding the Iranian Revolution. In his *Iran Writings*, for instance, Michel Foucault cites cassettes and radio broadcasts among the modern media that Islamists in Iran innovatively deployed as means of resistance to Pahlavi's regime. Mixing traditional religious discourse with modern communication technology was at the crux of engineering the Iranian Revolution. Foucault's writings on Iran mark his transition from his musings on "technologies of domination" to his thoughts on what he refers to as "the technologies of the self, as the foundation for a new form of spirituality and resistance to power."²⁴ While Foucault's main interest rests on the integration of modern technologies in the construction of resistant revolutionary movements, the pursuit of spiritual resistance through practices of embodied listening is inseparable from what he names "technologies of the self." One study that attends to the inextricable relationship between media and embodiment is Charles Hirschkind's book, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. To study the rhetorical styles of sermons, and the practice of listening to cassette sermons, Hirschkind immerses himself in interacting with a khatib and other local people in Cairo, Egypt. He argues that cassettes as media are not simply a means of disseminating ideas, implanting religious ideologies, or spreading propaganda. Instead, he argues that they are media with considerable affective influence on the emotions, moods, receptivity and awareness of their audience. Hirschkind follows the history of the circulation of these cassettes and attendant listening practices in Egypt, linking them to the pre-1979 Islamic revolutionary political activist movements in Iran as the starting point for the mass

²⁴Janet Afary, Janet and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 4.

distribution and use of cassettes for Islamic and political argumentation and deliberation. The book's proposition is that listening to cassette sermons creates an Islamic counterpublic that debates and argues the complexities of devout, pious, and ethical traditions as they confront increasingly secular perspectives in everyday life in Egypt. Hirschkind pays close attention to listening and critically examines the dissemination of cultural knowledge through embodiment, emphasizing the importance of cassettes as media within the postmodern context where mass media is of great significance.²⁵

Cassette tapes are also discussed in Negar Mottahedeh's book, *#iranelection: Hashtag Solidarity and the Transformation of Online Life*, in which the author similarly refers to the historical and political significance of Ayatollah Khomeini's recorded voice during the 1979 revolution. Mottahedeh gives an account of the more recent protests following Iran's "fraudulent" 2009 presidential election and the Green Revolution's use of #iranelection as the first long-trending international hashtag. The distribution of cassette tapes and the listening practices they conditioned in the 1970s offer a precedent-setting media technological model for trending hashtags today.²⁶ Ayatollah Khomeini recorded his sermons and views about a utopian Islamic republic on these tapes during his exile in Iraq and France. Then he sent his recorded voice to Iran where copies were made and distributed amongst different political parties. The cassette tapes, along with other "small media,"²⁷ helped him prepare for his insurgency against Pahlavi's regime. In *Small Media Big Revolution: Communication, Culture and the Iranian Revolution*, Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi remind us that "the complex interplay and cultural resonances of traditional and modern, religious and secular, oral and

²⁵Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

²⁶Negar Mottahedeh, *#iranelection: Hashtag Solidarity and the Transformation of Online Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015).

²⁷Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi and Ali Mohammadi, *Small Media Big Revolution: Communication, Culture and the Iranian Revolution* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 119.

printed, was what worked so well, not simply that small media were put to audacious new uses. Two main forms of ‘small media’ were used in the Iranian movement: first, cassette tapes, which acted like an electronic pulpit (*minbar*), and second, photocopied statements, known as *i’lāmīah*.²⁸ The cassette tapes and their medium-specific structure supported the performative and affective aspects of listening and auditory media. Ayatollah Khomeini’s voice arguably exhorted various political parties and reinforced Iranian people’s mass participation in the revolution.

Listening to cassette tapes entailed gathering in secret spaces and private residences and forming counterpublics to resist mainstream everyday public soundscapes including mainstream radio broadcasts, the Azan, and Friday congregational prayer.²⁹ In the present day, listening to podcasts for Iranian diasporic subjects produces similar counterpublics that are conditioned by the histories of listening as a cultural and political practice in Iran. These counterpublics take form against the main (trans)national broadcast programs outside Iran, such as those catering to the diasporic music, entertainment, and news industries in Los Angeles, Toronto, and London,³⁰ as well as the mainstream media in the host locale. Listening to podcast projects such as Radiochehrazi as a counterpractice is also conditioned by such projects’ means of production. We may call them indie collectives, who protect their creative processes against the compromises of governmental, institutional, and corporate interests. This is also evident in the last episode of Radiochehrazi, when one of the creators gives a tribute speech to his collaborator, offering the listener the only chance of a structured interview with the creators. This poetic epilogue³¹ reveals valuable details about the inspirations for the project, the nature of their collaboration, and the reasons why they stopped recording.

²⁸Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, *Small Media Big Revolution*, 119.

²⁹Every Friday, each city in Iran hosts a public prayer at a centralized square or mosque where a religious leader delivers a sermon followed by the prayer.

³⁰Radio Farda, Voice of America, Manoto channel, BBC Persian, etc.

³¹See Appendix A for a translation of the epilogue’s transcript.

The Gendered Nature of Listening and its Media

In engaging these media histories and highlighting their role in developing practices of control and resistance, Radiochehrazai also foregrounds the significance of sex/gender in understanding media histories and socio-cultural dimensions of listening. The connections between sex/gender, practices of listening, and various media offer valuable insights into how the everyday is organized and controlled in the Islamic public space and how counterlistening practices are formed in turn. Just as theological sounds amplify in the auditory sphere, most structures of control are enforced according to sex/gender, giving public platforms to the male voice while silencing all other voices. It is impossible to study a project such as Radiochehrazai as an attempt to create a generative space for subversive acts without considering the role of sex/gender in the subversive politics of sound. Just like their sounds, I argue that aural media are sexed/gendered. Minarets, for instance, assume a male sex, not only through their figurative resemblance to an erect phallus, but also by always explicitly projecting a male voice. Historically built to provide a visual focal point as well as sonic cues, the minaret controls the everyday orientation of the subject in public space/time. This archetype of Islamic architecture is the perfect example of what Harold Innis would phrase as a “time-biased medium.”³² Through longevity and speech, which Innis considered a time-biased medium,³³ the minaret encourages the extension of an Islamic public within a limited geographical zone but throughout centuries. Minarets facilitate a communication that cannot be transported across longer distances. However, as an architectural piece it communicates power and control via enduring over long periods of time. In doing so, the minaret assumes a male sex, and explicitly discharges masculine and theological frequencies into the public sphere.

The minaret is one example amongst many other sonic platforms that are concerned with the development of social hierarchies, in which

³²Harold Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 35.

³³Innis, *The Bias of Communication*, 35.

the female/feminine voice along other non-male/masculine voices (an exception would be the feminine voices of young boys, who occasionally work as *muezzin*) are always pushed into the private realm. Excavating the female voice from the margins of the history of listening media and their counterpolitics in Iran also brings to the fore how Radiochehrazai stresses the role that sex/gender plays in formations of diasporic media and their counterpractices. Cassette tapes, for instance, were first used to expand Ayatollah Khomeini's message beyond exile and into the privacy of Iranian households in the years preceding the revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini's sermons were addressed from the diaspora to an arguably male general public inside the national borders of Iran. As the leader of his *fiqh*,³⁴ Ayatollah Khomeini's first confrontation with the Pahlavi regime was through the oppositional stand he took against women's suffrage in 1963. It is only after the revolution that Ayatollah Khomeini recognized the crucial impact that the Iranian women's movement had on mobilizing the revolution and saw the potential in women's participation in the life of the Islamic Republic. Nevertheless, his later views on women's issues remained problematic. He was rightfully criticized and mocked for his motto when he finally arrived at a realization of his recognition for women: "From the woman's skirt, the man goes to the ascension," which was to endorse women solely for their reproductive and child-rearing responsibilities which offered men and the Islamic state their means for social and biological reproduction. Gender disparities in Ayatollah Khomeini's views—in the way he wrote women's rights in the constitution law of his newly formed state and his denial, dismissal, and mistreatment of female as well as non-confirming bodies—were partly to blame for the criticism that Foucault received for his fascination with Ayatollah Khomeini and his support for his writings on the revolution in Iran.³⁵

Shortly after the 1978–79 revolution, however, the same cassette tapes that facilitated the Islamic Revolution transformed into the main

³⁴Islamic jurisprudence.

³⁵Afary and Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution*, 5–6.

communication media for distribution of what was banned by the Islamic State, and more specifically the female voice in Iran. The newly formed government pushed waves of Iranian immigrants and refugees to Europe and the US. As these diasporic communities formed in different regions, Los Angeles situated itself as the main site for the Iranian diasporic pop and rock music industry. A contested diasporic counterpublic Tehrangeles³⁶ evoked fantasies of escape to the American dream, while for some it represented “low culture” and the persistence of anti-intellectual aspects of prerevolutionary entertainment industries. The most efficient and democratic way to import and circulate diasporic soundscapes of Tehrangeles’ pop music inside the country was through cassette tapes. During the 1980s and the early 90s, cassette tapes played an extremely potent role in defining public and private space via projecting the female voice. To this day, cassette tapes are an iconic communication medium in Iran of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s—marked by the seduction of a forbidden female voice and associated fantasies of escape, freedom, and diaspora. The female voice continues to redefine the public space through either its absence or interventionist presence, and most importantly through resisting embedded patriarchal structures that control the everyday public soundscape in Iran.

Another example links the early use of cassette tapes in Iran to women’s movements during the 1970s. In her recent book, *Whisper Tapes: Kate Millett in Iran*, Negar Mottahedeh listens to more than ninety hours of recorded tape along with papers written by feminist activist Kate Millet, who traveled to Tehran less than a month after the revolution to join Iranian women in a celebration of International Women’s Day on March 7, 1979. Without any working knowledge of Persian, Millet and their partner used a tape recorder during this visit.³⁷ The recordings are an important archival source for studying the continuation of the women’s movement in pre- and post-revolutionary Iran. By listening to women’s voices and other recorded sounds, Mottahedeh fills in some

³⁶Farzaneh Hemmasi, *Tehrangeles Dreaming: Intimacy and Imagination in Southern California’s Iranian Pop Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

³⁷Denise Gomez, “Not Even Past,” December 9, 2019, <https://notevenpast.org/whisper-tapes-2019/> (accessed July 25, 2020).

of the gaps in *Going to Iran*, the manuscript that Millet published after attending women's demonstrations in Tehran. *Whisper Tapes* uses these audio sources located at the Duke University archives to recover the lost history of the women's protests that followed quickly on the heels of Ayatollah Khomeini's ascent to power as the leader of the Iranian Revolution.³⁸ Cassette tapes as earlier sonic media thus facilitate diasporic communication because they make possible sound distribution across long distances. Thereby, they provide great examples of sonic media that can expand our understanding of podcasts as new sonic communication platforms in the Iranian diasporas.

Through these links to female voice, the women's movement, feminist and other counterdiscourse and practices they have facilitated, cassette tapes also offer a stark contrast to the sexed/gendered nature of minarets. To return to Innis's notions pertaining to the bias of communication, cassette tapes are "space-biased" media;³⁹ they are built to be easily transported over long distances but as material they do not last for long. This transportable quality explains cassette tapes' diasporic usage as earlier examples of sonic media. A similar transformation and repurposing takes place with the rooftops as sound platforms. Once offering performative venues for political dissent during the years preceding the Islamic Revolution of 1978-9 and the Green Movement of 2009,⁴⁰ urban rooftops, much like cassette tapes through their counterpositionings, have transformed into the main platforms for mega concerts as well as indie underground music, such as deep-house in contemporary urban Iran. These histories of transformation also prove that as much as media have always contributed to enforcing structures of control and dominance, they have facilitated tools and techniques of resistance. They render visible the impossible task of identifying resisting and subversive media without considering sex/gender. I contend that if the Islamic public dominates the soundscape through

³⁸Negar Mottahedeh, *Whisper Tapes: Kate Millett in Iran* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

³⁹Innis, *The Bias of Communication*.

⁴⁰Roshanak Kheshti, "On the Threshold of the Political: The Sonic Performativity of Rooftop Chanting in Iran," *Radical History Review* 121 (2015): 51-70.

the male voice, then its counterpublics and practices are always already sexed/gendered. Thinking about media such as minarets, rooftops, radio, and cassette tapes as sexed/gendered helps to assert the important role that listening media play in negotiating agency in everyday life and provides a historical context for the practice of listening and its sexed/gendered relevance in Islamic cultures. The history of this relationship helps to identify a media technological dynamic for analyzing new listening media like podcasts as media that facilitate counterpublics. Podcasts as free online platforms perfectly replace subversive media such as cassette tapes, through which the female/feminine voice can counter the main public soundscapes.

Radiochehrazī's choice of podcasts recognizes the relevance of sex/gender in regard to media, as it grapples with the dynamics between counterpublics and the affective politics of listening. The project's concern with sex/gender vis-à-vis medium is evident not only in their choice of medium, but also in the content they remix. Listening closely to episode "1," which they title "Zan (Woman)," reveals that the artists are well aware that podcasts can create a subversive space to tackle gender disparities enforced by the structures of control and (trans)national institutions. On March 11, 2013, Radiochehrazī published this short track. The full three minutes and twenty-seven seconds are dedicated to mocking the treatment of women's rights issues including Ayatollah Khomeini's motto and the (re)presentation of Iranian Islamic and secular feminisms in national and transnational broadcasting and social media. The episode is a movement through forced passages. It begins with a speaker who takes centre stage. He recites poetry rhyming with "Zan," and playing with the nominal similarity between the noun and the verb "Zan" that can mean: to strike, to hit, to play a musical instrument, to do, or to perform. The poetry slam soon jump cuts to listing names of female public figures. The speaker jokingly announces "the best women of our time include: Shadi Sadr, Shirin Neshat, Shirin Ebadi, Anoosheh Ansari [...] and Obama's wife."⁴¹ Listening to how the list continues foregrounds the etymology of feminine names

⁴¹Radiochehrazī, 2013.

in Persian: sweet, happy, and grandiose. These soft feminine qualities prepare us for the surprise juxtaposition at the end of the line. Listing Michelle Obama not only stresses Obama's hyped-up popularity in the diaspora and more generally amongst Iranians, but more importantly ending the list of the Iranian female public figures with "Obama's wife" comments on the culture of sexism that often names a woman through her affiliations to a male figure such as a husband, father, brother, or son.⁴²

The transition between the two passages at the beginning of episode "1" exemplifies the sudden interruptions and jump cuts that echo a sense of confusion. This confusion further materializes halfway through the episode, when one of the speakers takes the spotlight and breaks into a deliberately poor performance of Ziba Shirazi's song, "I'm a woman." He sings in drag, screaming "I am a woman, I am a strong woman, I am like a flower petal, I am softer than a flower, I am a woman. Yes I am a woman!" The poor performance of the song along with the stereotype of the female pop singer scrutinizes the limitations that pop music industries, of Los Angeles and London especially, impose on female singers. The track is a sonic confrontation, moving quickly through too many voices that bring places, temporalities, histories, and memories into the sonic foreground.

Returning to episode "3," the track adds a dramatic narrative into the remix and introduces the metaphor of madness to the listeners. The dialogues also offer additional insights into Radiochehrazi's engagement with sex/gender in the content they remix. The main dramatic passage is performed through two male vocal actors. The main event is the encounter between two friends Jamshid and the protagonist, Habib, in the Chehrazi hospital's hallway. We hear about Habib's feelings as he is falling for a female patient, Delbar. The listener gets to listen in to the conversation between the protagonist and Delbar. Delbar's character represents gender and the treatment of her sex/gender in the world of the Iranian liberals. She repeatedly and powerfully breaks stereotypes

⁴²See Appendix E for more samples.

projected onto a contemporary young Iranian woman. On the one hand she embodies a beautiful conforming woman who wears “makeup and skirts,” and on the other hand she is opinionated, with a complex personality that negotiates her place between tradition and modernity in a patriarchal society.⁴³ The modern Iranian liberal man is portrayed amongst a generation that has not yet come to terms with his relationships with women. Delbar, just like the female pop singer, is performed in drag by a male speaker. Performance in cross-gender emphasizes the absence of a female voice, and further brings to the fore the confusion of the Iranian liberal man in regard to sexual/gender politics (see Appendix E for more examples).

Conclusion

Listening closely to these selections from Radiocherazi brings to the fore the artists’ thematic engagement with diasporic and displaced identities. But this essays also listens closely to identify how the medium of the podcast breaks open histories of listening in relation to sex/gender highlighting media’s role in facilitating counterpractices and tools and techniques of subversion. I argue that Radiochehrazi uses sonic remix to also activate the shared affective register between displacement and madness. As one of the burdens of controlling structures and making possible diasporic communications that are political, not based on shared ideologies, but based on the affective exchanges they offer. By using podcasts, the artists form developments in new online platforms such as Clubhouse as well as a range of live streaming media, engendering an urgent need for scholarship on Iran and its global diaspora to consider how media facilitate counterpublics and offer crucial sites of everyday performance of Iranian transnational and diasporic identities. Sonic media particularly make possible counterlistening environments that have the potential to transcend the limited possibilities of mainstream, quotidian, and public soundscapes in Iran and its global diaspora. The prominent role media and technologies hold in connecting the global Iranian diasporas in our contemporary

⁴³See Appendix F for examples.

moment calls for a media history approach to further examining media and their critical role in the construction of national publics and counterpublics throughout modern Iranian history. This essay only begins to inquire into media history scholarship, and, by adding to the emerging field of Iranian diaspora studies, in considering new media as historical subjects.

Appendices

The Persian transcriptions of Radiochehrazai episodes and their close translations in English have been provided by the author in this appendix only to assist the reader by making the sonic archive of the essay more accessible in the context of the discussion. The literary quality of English translations has not been the focus and regardless the text in translation fails to capture the intertextuality, humor, and sonic qualities within the original transcriptions.

A. Epilogue, or Episode 20, February 10, 2014

مجری: دیر زمان بود که می خواستم به هزار بهانه برای تو بنویسم
کیفیت‌هایی هست که من ندارم و دلم می‌خواست می‌داشتم
اما راهش انگار پیدا نمی‌شود
شاید هم راست راستی دلم نمی‌خواهد
یکی اینکه مدام از یادم میرود یاد افراد بی‌اومر چقدر قدرشناس مهربانیاشان هستم
بده کاری انقدر سنگین شد که ناچار باید بیرون میزد من هم گرفتار می‌شوم
اگر بنا به گفت و گو باشد
دیر شده اما چیزی کم نشده
اصل کار هم گمانم همان است
باید به تو می‌نوشتم که همه روزها و شبها را یادم هست
تیمار بی‌انتهای تورا که نبادا تنهایی عارض شود
مبادا ابرهای غصه ببارند
مبادا دبه روغنم خالی باشد
مبادا کبد و ریه و جوارح ام از کار بیفتد
بی‌خانمانی و سردرگمی و کلافگی و پارک و جلسه هم آره یادم هاست
مهمتر از اینها جنون و بی‌قراری بی‌انتهای را هم یادم هاست

مثل دو نفر رهگذر غریبه که یک عصر بارانی توی پیاده رو به هم می‌رسند
و می‌گویند پخشه اسب
چه دیوانه وار بودیم
هیئات
مثل همان باران
کاش نگه داشته بودی میکروفونه فکسنی سر طلایی را
رادیوچهرازی هم از میان همین روز و شبها پیداش شد
مثل هزار چیزه دیگه که پیدا شد و کسی نمی‌داند
حالا دیگه رفته اما یادم هاست چقدر شلتاغه مرا تاب آوردی با اینکه اینهمه دوستش
داشتی
رادیو رو می‌گویم
منتظر بودی
چون من بد حال بودم
چرا؟ هر چی
ولی منتظر ماندی
هر گربه ای که رقصاندم گفتم قبول
از همه بدترش همان که گفتم
فکرش را که می‌کنم می‌بینم واقعا آن نفر دیگه چه گناهی کرده که باید بیاید میان
نمایش لوتی وانتری تو
ولی آن نفر دیگه منتظر ماند
چون دوستان منتظر می‌مانند و طاقتشان به این راحتی طاق نمیشود
دوستان از بلند شدن دوستانشان بلند می‌شوند
چشمشان می‌خندد آن طور که تو بودی
همینطورها زنده ماند رادیوچهرازی
و گرنه
تا حال صد بار رفته بود لای دستان سایرین
یادم هست می‌خواستم کسی نداند
گفتم قبول
عشق و بوس و لوپ کشیدنش سهم من شد
کسی هم زیاد دست گیرش نشد که اینها همه کار توست

اما باک نیست من که یادم هاست
اصلا هم انگار همان هاست
حالا فارق از این آدمها که رفتند میانه فایل های کامپوتری صدایشان مانده و جایشان
خالیست
باید به تو می نوشتم که رادیو و سایر چیزها حاصل یک چیز بزرگتر است
ومن ان چیز بزرگتر را شبانه روز یادم هاست
دوستی گاهی جنون آمیز است
گاهی خلسه ناک و گاهی ساکت و غروب و قطار لیوانها
گاهی از میانش چیزهای اینطوری پیدا می شود
گاهی هم سرش را توی لاک خودش می برد
اما دوستی مثل هیچ چیز نیست
دلمان تنگ شده برای آسایشگاه بی شک
باید رهانشان می کردیم بروند جاهای خوب
اما دوستی مثل کوه سره جایش هست و مدام توی دیگش چیزهای نامنتظرانه
می جوشد
جنون هست البته دلتنگی هم هست اصلا انگار ما با دل تنگ زاده ایم
دلمان برای هر چیزه کوچک چقدر تنگ است
باید برای تو مینوشتم قدر دان حامی دوستی جنون و دلتنگی هستم
آدمی به فرد می میرد
تنها به جمع است که زنده است و معنا دارد
و من جمع را یادم هاست قدرش را می دانم
گیرم سال تا سال دهانم به گفتنش باز نشود
اینطور انگار آدم راز هستی را می داند
خیالش تخت است لااقل
تازه اینها به کنار کسی چه می داند دوستی هرروز چیزهای تازه می زاید
از طرف خودم و تو سلام روزگار نو
خداحافظ رادیو چهارزی
۱۹ بهمن ۱۳۹۲

The co-host: I wanted to write to you, I have thousands of excuses
There are qualities that I lack but I wanted to have

There's no way though
Or perhaps I don't really want to
For one, I always forget to remind people how much I'm grateful
for their kindness
My debt has become so heavy that he had to give it up
I'd be too preoccupied
Only if it were up to words
It's late but nothing is lost
That's the main thing I guess
I had to write to you that I remember all the days and nights
Your endless worries
Lest loneliness comes
Lest clouds of sorrow rain
Lest my oil jar goes empty
Lest liver, lungs, and organs fail
Homelessness, confusion, crankiness, park, and meetings
I remember them all
Most of all I remember the never-ending madness and restlessness
Like two strange passersby crossing each other on a sidewalk on
a rainy evening
And they arbitrary say "Horse play"
How mad we were
Alas! like the same rain
I wish you kept the useless golden microphone
Radiochehrazi was found in the midst of these days and nights
Like the thousands other things that came about and no one knows
about
Now it's gone
But I remember how you tolerated my whiny complaints
Despite how much you loved it
I'm talking about the radio
You waited
Because I was a mess
Why? Whatever!
But you waited

Any show I'd put up, you went along
The worst thing
What you said
When I think about it I see
Really what did the other person did wrong to deserve to be in the
middle of my clown show?
But that other person waited
Because friends wait and don't give up enduring easily
Friends go high with their friends going up
Their eyes smile
Just like the way you were
This was how Radiochehrazi lived
Otherwise
It would have fallen into the wrong hands time after time
I remember that I wanted no one to know
And you said ok
All the love, kisses, and recognition came my way
No one noticed that this was all your work
Never mind though I do remember
And it seems that's what matters
Now despite these people that disappeared amidst the digital files
Their voices live and they will be missed
I had to write to you
That radio and other things are the outcomes of a much bigger
thing
And day and night I remember that other big thing
Friendship is at times insane
At times frustrating, quite, with sunsets and train of glasses
Sometimes things like this end up happening
And sometimes it crawls its head inside its shell
Friendship is like nothing else though
No doubt I miss the asylum
But we had to let them go good places
Friendship, like a mountain, stays firm on its base
And constantly boils new things in its pot

There is madness so is anguish
It seems as though we were born to anguish
We miss every single little thing so much
I had to write to you that I cherish your madness and anguish
Human dies an individual
It is only in group that she lives and means something
And I remember the group and I am grateful for it
Despite not opening my mouth to say it
This way it seems that one knows the secret to existence
She is carefree at least
All things aside, who knows friendship gives birth to new things
every day!

From me and you
Hello to new times

Goodbye Radiochehrazai
February 8, 2014

B. Episode 7, April 20, 2013

مجری: اخه پلیس امریکا خیلی وارده
ماشالا قد و هیکل چشا نافذ بعضیاشون زن ان
رادیو چهارزی، اپیزود هفت

The co-host: The American police know what they are doing; they are on top of everything. I promised myself that if one day I see an American police I would kiss them. Tall and nice build, sharp eyes. Some of them are women or they have girlfriends. Anyways, after the bombing of Poston, the authorities of Poston came and assured us not to worry because they got the suspects. Of course, American people are very relaxed, they don't get anxious, but this case was knife to the bone. Until yesterday morning, when they showed the footage of two guys with hats and backpacks from Chechen and Police said, 'Pull over! Back! Back!' Here we realized that they are from Chechen, not Iran. We were relieved and went outside with the kids to smoke a few.

C. Episode 4, March 31, 2013

مجری: ایران بر یک دسته است: متوسط. متوسط یعنی وقتی آدم لباس موسیقی می پوشد و همه فیلم ها را نقد می کند و سیگار یا گیاهخوار می کشد. یکی از ویژگی های متوسط، اجتماعی و مجازی است. در این جا آدم با بقیه ی متوسط ها حرف های اسمارت می زند و بیش تر افکارش درباره ی عصر ارتباطات، دهکده ی جهانی، کلیک، دهکده ی المپیک، بیک، [...] می باشد. متوسط خیلی مظلوم و دوست داشتنی ست؛ چون در کارهای خیلی خوبی شرکت می کند و تحصیلات دارد. اما بعضی این ها رُ تحت فشار قرار می دن و اینا ناراحت هستن. در سال های اخیر بیش تر آدم ها متوسط هستند، چون یه حالت خوبی توش هست... کلید واژه های متوسط عبارت از کف مطالبات و کیوسک و بی عملی ست. جاهای متوسط عبارت از کافه هفتاد و هشت، کافه هشتاد و هفت، هشت صد و هشتاد و هفت، هفتاد و هشت، هشتاد و هفت و دم نوش گاوزبان و گل های رضائیه است. فعالیت های متوسط عبارت از خستگی و مهمانی های تعداد متوسط و گیز گیزی و نقد فیلمی است. گرفتاری متوسط عبارت از مطبوعات آزاد و سیزن لاس است... است. بهترین بازیکن فوتبال کریم باقری است، چرا که همیشه وسط توپ می زده است. بهترین بازیکن متوسط استیلی است. توصیه های متوسط: وسط را گرفته کن، از همه بهتره. در گذشته یک جا متوسط دیگه عصبانی شد و نزدیک بود با استفاده از ابزارهای اجتماعی از قبیل فیس بوک رژیم رُ استاد کنه... یکی از مهم ترین چیزها در متوسط زیرزمینی یا همان موسیقی است. آهان راستی متوسط خیلی شهریه... زیرزمینی بیش تر یه حالت اعتراض توش نهفته است؛ نسبت به بقیه و چون بقیه احم و تخم می کنند و متوسط هم خیلی مدیر و عمل گرا و با عقل است، به زیرزمین می رود که حریف را کلافه کند... الان هفتاد میلیارد نفر از نخبگان در خارج و لندن هستند و از اون جا نهضت متوسط رُ با همون اجتماعی و مجازی و چیزهای زیرزمینی چیز می کنند، از راه های دور و نزدیک.

The co-host: Iran is one category. Middle. Middle means when the person wears music clothes and criticizes all the films and smokes cigarettes, or is vegetarian. One of the features of the middle is being social and virtual. In this place, the person talks with other middles about smart things and most of their thoughts are about the age of communication, the global village, click, Olympic village and Bic. The middle is nice and attractive. Because they get involved in things with positive causes and they are highly educated. But some people put

pressure on the middle and so the middle is annoyed. In recent years, most people are middles; because it's cool... the key words middle uses are: 'minimum expectations,' 'kiosk,' and 'passivity.' The places for the middle are Café Seventy-Eight, Eighty-Seven, Eight Hundred and Eighty-Seven, Eighty-Seven and herbal tea. The middle's activities are fatigue and small parties for film criticism. . . . The middle's problems are free press, and the season of *Lost*... The middle's favorite soccer player is Karim Bagheri because he always passes the ball in the middle and the best middle soccer player is Estili. The middle's advice: take the middle, it is the best. In the past, the middle got mad and it started with social tools like Facebook to teach the regime a lesson... one of the most important things for the middle is underground or music. By the way, the middle is very cosmopolitan... the underground is for protest against the others because they frown and the middle is intelligent and skillful, so he goes underground to hank the enemy... Right now seven milliard intellectuals are abroad and in London and they run the middle movement with that social, virtual, and underground thing. From far and near...

D. Episode 3, March 23, 2013

مجری: بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم، برنامه های ما الان نوروزی میشه. این برنامه بهار، جمشید، دلبر.

موسیقی غمناک در زیرمتن همواره به گوش می رسد.

حبیب: سر صبحی دوباره پا شدیم اومدیم خسته باشیم، جمشید پرید وسط گفت ببین چه قدر سمنو داری. ببین زندگی هنوز خوشگلیاشو داره.

گفتیم جمشید الحق که دیوونه ای. بیا بشین یه دقیقه خسته باش جای این جلافتا سر صبحی. دستشو تا مچ کرد تو کاسه گفت یعنی می خواهم بهت بگم دنیای دیوونه ها از همه قشنگه. بذار دهننت. هرچی نداره صفا داره

پا شدیم تا این فضای خستگی ما را مبتذل نکرده زدیم بیرون یه سیگار ناشتا بگیرونیم، له بشیم، حالمون جا بیاد. کبریت نکشیده جمشید پرید وسط گفت نیگاه امسال عدس سبز کردیم جای گندم. پارسال برف زیاد نشست سر درختی ها همه رفتن زیر

سرما. گفتیم جمشید پس تو کی خسته می شی سگ مذهب. صدای قهقهه. کسی کلمه دیوونه را زمزه می کند. گفت مگه چته باز؟ گفتیم بابا پامون سرصبحی مستقل از خودمون خورده به در سیاه شده، انصافانه است؟ چشممون به در خشک شده کسی نیومده ملاقات. آهنگ بهار دلکش با صدای شجریان به گوش می رسد.

حبیب: بهار دلکش رسیده دل به جا نباشد، انصافانه است؟ دلبر یه اینقدر به فکر ما نباشد، گردنمون کوتاه شده، انصافانه است؟ باز خسته نیستی، هی عدس عدس؟ جمشید گفت یعنی می خواهم بهت بگم زندگی هنوز خوشگلیاش رو داره. پاشو یه دوش بگیر بریز همه رو تو یه چاهک بره پی کارش. جاش ماهی دودی بیار لقمه کنیم شب عیدی. گفتیم جمشید الحق که دیوونه ای. تا اومدیم بریم زیر دوش دلبر پرید وسط گفت اوی مگه کوری دیوونه؟ صدای قهقهه. کسی کلمه دیوونه را زمزه می کند.

حبیب: گفتیم احترامت واجب، خاطر خواهی هم سر جای خودش، طرف زنونه اون سر راهروست. گفت چرا دوره دهننت سمنو مالیده؟ گفتیم اگه مالیده چرا گردنمون کوتاست؟ باز چرا رفته برگشته نیستی؟ خاصه در بهار؟ اشاره به شعر مرگ نازلی اثر شاملو دارد.

حبیب: گفت کوری دیگه. کور نبودی سوال نمی کردی. اونور کن روت رو سرم بازه. تو دلم رخت می شورن. اومدیم بریم تو درگاهی حموم پامون دوباره گرفت به در. هیچ کی نبود ببینه مرد کوه درده. خواستیم بکشیم به مذهب جد و آبادش چند تا آب نکشیده بندیدم شنیدیم مدیریت صدا می زنه ملاقاتی. ملاقاتی ملاقاتی داری چند بار تکرار می شود. صدا یا شنیده می شود.

حبیب: پوشیده نپوشیده زدیم تو راهرو. دلبر پرید وسط گفت یعنی می خواهم بهت بگم کوری دیوونه. جمشید بهش گفت اذیتش نکن. خوب میشه. مرخص میشه. نیگاه گردنش رو شده یه متر. راهرو رو می رفتیم رو به حیاط یکی از تازه واردها سیگار به دست اومد گفت آقا ما خسته ایم شما که گردنت بلند می تونی بگی بهار کدوم وره؟ جمشید از پشت سر گفت یعنی می خواهم بهت بگم هنوز خوشگلیاش رو داره. تو دلمون گفتیم جمشید کله پدرت از بس دیوونه ای. آهنگ غمگین به گوش می رسد.

مجری: بهار عیدی داد. عیدی مبارک!

The co-host: Besme Allah e Rahmane Rahim (in the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful). Our program now takes the spirit of Nouruz. This episode: Spring, Jamshid, Delbar.

Habib: Early in the morning, I got up to feel tired. Jamshid jumped in the middle and said

Jamshid: Look how much Samanu (a sweet paste made with germinated wheat (young wheatgrass), which is prepared especially for Nouruz: Samanou) we have! Look at life! It still has its beauties!

Protagonist: I said, Jamshid! indeed you're insane. Come sit down for a moment and be tired, instead of all these shenanigans, this early in the morning. He pushed his fist into the bowl (of Samanu) and said:

Jamshid: I mean to say that the world of the insane is the most beautiful. Put Samanu in your mouth. It might be lacking everything but it is jolly.

Protagonist: I got up. So before exhaustion destroys me went outside to smoke a morning cigarette to feel better. I was about to strike the match when Jamshid jumped in again and said:

Jamshid: Look this year we grew lentils instead of wheat. Last year it snowed a lot on top of the trees. They all went under the coldness.

Protagonist: I said, Jamshid! When would you get tired at last, dog?
We hear laughter. Someone whispers the word 'insane.'

Protagonist: He said

Jamshid: What's wrong with you?

Protagonist: I said dude, my foot has hit the door on its own and it hurts, is it fair? My eyes dried up looking at the door, waiting for visitors, no one showed.

A classical music score plays. This is mixed in with an Iranian Avaz, Bahare Delkash

(Orphic Spring).

Protagonist: The orphic spring (*Bahareh Delkash*, the title of Shajarian's *Avaz*) is here, but we're not in the mood for it. Is it fair? Delbar is not thinking of us, our neck has shorten. Is it fair? Still, aren't you tired lentil lentil? Jamshid said

Jamshid: I mean to tell you that life still got its beauties. Get up and take a shower. Pour everything down the little sinkhole. Let it go. Bring some smoked fish to make sandwiches for the new year's eve!

Protagonist: I said, Jamshid indeed you are insane! As soon as I stepped into the shower, I saw Delbar jumped in the conversation and said

Delbar: Are you blind crazy?

We hear laughter. Someone whispers the word 'insane.'

Protagonist: I said you got some respect. I have feelings for you, alright! But the ladies room is on the other side. She asked.

Delbar: Why is there Samanu all around your mouth and face?

Protagonist: I said if it's around my face, why is my neck so short then? Why did you go and come back? you are not here yet? Especially in the spring? She said.

Delbar: Because you're blind. If you weren't blind, you wouldn't keep asking questions. Look away, I don't have a scarf they're washing clothes in my heart.

Protagonist: I came to go pass the door, again my foot hit the door. There was nothing too see. Man is the mountain of pain. I was about to swear filthy word to his ancestors, when I heard the management announcing in the speakers you have visitors, visitors (*echoes*) you got visitors.

We hear footsteps.

Protagonist: Half-dressed, I started to walk when Delbar jumped in again.

Delbar: I mean to tell you, you are a crazy blind.

Protagonist: Jamshid told her,

Jamshid: Don't hurt him. He's gonna get well. He's gonna get released. Look at his neck it is a metre long.

Protagonist: I was on my way to the yard when one of the newcomers with a smoke in his hand came to me and said, man I wanted to ask since your neck is long which way is Spring? Jamshid said from the back.

Jamshid: I mean to tell you, it's still got its beauties.

Protagonist: I said to myself, Jamshid you crazy bastard!

The melancholic song returns for a few seconds.

The co-host closes the episode: "spring gave us so many gifts, happy spring and happy new year!" The episode ends with the same closing track.

E. Episode 1, March 11, 2013

مجری: بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم، بنا بر استقبال شما از برنامه های ما برنامه های ما برنامه های ما اکنون شروع میشه. این برنامه زن.

قسمتی از صدای زنی از شخصیت عمومی در ایران به گوش می رسد که می گوید: در دوره های مختلف. صدای ناگهان و بلندی صدای زن را قطع می کند.

مجری: زن در زندگی همه ما نقش خوب دارد. مثلاً از جمله در زندگی ویگن. قطعه ای از آهنگ زن ابرونی تکه اثر ویگن شنیده می شود.

مجری: یا در زندگی ویگن. قطعه ای از آهنگ زن زیبا اثر دیگری از ویگن به گوش می رسد.

مجری: یا کمتر زن شانه. یعنی بیشتر کارها رو مرد باید انجام بده. امروز بهترین زنها عبارت اند از شادی صدر، شیرین نشاط، شادی و نشاط شیرین احیا خاطره و پروانه،

پروین و اردلان شادی و اردلان مهرنگی پوپک راد شیرین عبادی انوشه انصاری و زن اوپاما.

صدای زنی از شخصیت عمومی دوباره به گوش می رسد و دوباره با صدای ناگهان و بلندی قطع می شود.

مجری: بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم.

خواننده ای زن که به نظر می رسد یکی از مجریان مرد با صدای زنانه این نقش را بازی می کند شروع به آواز می کند (اشاره به آهنگ من زنم اثر زیبا شیرازی دارد):

خواننده: من زنم. من یک زنم. من یک زن قوی هستم. من زنم. من زنم مثل برگ گل از گل من که از گل بهترم من زنم. من زنم. آره من زنم. مصاحبه ای بین خواننده زن و مجری.

مجری: میشه زن برای ما رو در یک جمله توصیف کنید؟

خواننده: بله البته ولی میدونید که من در واقع زن نیستم. من یک دختر هستم. من یک دختر کم، دخترک باکره. باکره ای که گلپهای لاله میریزه ازش. من زنم. مصاحبه به پایان می رسد.

مجری: زن از دو جنبه حائز اهمیت است. یک حقونه زن در این زمینه یک لطیفه از آقای محمود شهریاری اینجا نقد می کنیم. چرا حقوق زن رو... صدای خنده حرف مجری را قطع می کند.

مجری: چرا حقوق زن رو نمیدن...

صدای خنده دوباره حرف مجری را قطع می کند.

مجری: به نام خدا. سلام. جنبه دوم همون مسئله زن در اسلام یا در فرهنگ شیعه است و اشارات مکرر به این مساله رو می شود در سطوح مختلف متون و رهنمودهای اسلامی مشاهده کرد. صدای در نقش کسی دیگر.

سیره نظری، سیره نبوی یا همون پیامبر. سیره اهل بیت. سیره همه امام ها به غیر از امام یازدهم چون در اونجا زن تو انگور زهر ریخت که اون سیره ی خوب نیست. زنی زنی زدن نیزنی خوشش آمد. این خوب نیست نه؟

زن عبارت است از کسی که صورتش از مرد قشنگ تر و بدنش استادتر است. دامن می پوشد و به خودش صنایع دستی می بندد.

زن‌ها تا قبل از ۳۰ سالگی تحت عناوینی مانند: خواهر، دوسته دختر، دانشجوووور، عکاس و غیره فعالیت می‌کنند. اما بعد از سی سالگی زن نامیده می‌شوند و چون دامن می‌پوشند، از دامن اونها مرد به معراج می‌رود. معراج اسم خیابانی در آریا شهر می‌باشد. زن‌ها گاهی انسان را خیلی اذیت می‌کنند که از عوارض بارز آن دل‌درده، اسپهاله استاروفوکی، ویسکی، سیگار و بگو بخند بیش از حد می‌باشد. در مجموع زن‌ها خیلی خوب هستند و ما مدام دوست داریم درباره آنها حرف بزنیم. همانطور که عبدالله خواننده زیر زمینی گفت: زن زنم زن همدموم زن مونسوم زن. فردا هوای تهران ۱۴ درجه بالا صفر و هوای شیراز ۲۷ درجه بالای صفر خواهد بود. اینجا هم هوا بهتره درخت‌ها از صبح در حال موز دادن هستند. کبوتر کره کرده کاش بودی و میدیدی.
رادیو چهارزی، اپیزود اول

The co-host: The second episode in the series opens with the same formal music track and reciting the phrase *Besme Allah*, the hosts announce the official lunch of the program proceeding the listeners' overwhelming reception of the first podcast. They soon introduce the topic of discussion: "This show is about Woman." A few sentences of a speech cut from an interview with a feminist public figure on Iranian national TV is mixed in, she explains "Woman throughout different historical eras," soon one of the hosts interrupts the speakers' female voice. His male voice takes over: "woman has a significant role in all of our lives for instance in Vigen's life." A song by Vigen, the Los Angeles Based Iranian pop singer, plays. Vigen's music is typical of the Iranian diasporic pop songs of the 1980s and 90s produced in LA, most of which pursue a balance between objectifying and praising woman, and more importantly Iranian women. The emerging music scene of the Iranian diasporic in Los Angeles reflects gender politics and negotiations of what it means to be an Iranian woman. This reflection is in direct response to the newly formed Islamic government who takes the female body as an instrument to enforce the states' religious and political control and domination over public life. The episode plays with the nominal

similarity between the word “Zan,” which is the noun referring to “female gender or woman” in Farsi and have multiple meanings a verb. Depending on the sentence, the verb can mean “to strike, to play a music instrument, to do or to perform.” The co-hosts recite poetry rhyming and versioning with the verb *zan*. The poetry slam is jumped cut into speaking a list of well-known Iranian female public figures, “the best women of our time include: Shadi Sadr, Shirin Neshat, Shirin Ebadi, Anoosheh Ansari, and Obama’s wife.” The list of the names plays with the words meanings in Farsi, most of which have positive feminine connotations such as Shirin: sweet, or Neshat and Shadi meaning happiness. Sadr meaning grandiose. The list is interrupted by jumping back the same female voice cut from the Iranian TV program. Her voice is again cut by a crashing sound. This is flashed back to the formal opening, followed by one of the hosts breaking into an intentionally poor performance in a gender-cross role about the experience of being a woman “I am a woman, I am a strong woman, I am like a flower petal, I am softer than a flower, I am a woman. Yes I am a woman!” The song evolves into an interview with the other co-hosts. He asks the character of the female singer “in one sentence describe woman for us.” The female singer says “Of course, but you should know I am in fact not a woman, I am a virgin girl, I am a girl, I am a little girl, I am a virgin girl who sheds tulips flowers.” The interview ends with the female singer screaming “I am a woman.” The interviewer mansplains “woman is worthwhile from two aspects,” point out to an inappropriate joke made by a celebrity TV host, Mahmood Shahriari, on the Iranian National Television made “ why don’t they give women their rights?” This conversation continues to explaining the second aspect, “the role of women in Islam and prophet’s teachings,” hinting to the negative representation of women in the religious narrative, when the eleventh imam was poisoned and killed by his wife. The episode returns to the word-play with the nominal similarity of the noun Zan and the verbs. The co-host continues his mansplaining by defining woman:

'Woman' is someone who has a more beautiful face and body. She wears a skirt and craft jewelry. Before thirty years, women are referred to as sister, girlfriend, student, photographer, and etc. But after thirty, they're called woman and because they wear skirts, from the skirt the men ascend. Ascension is the name of a street in Aria City. Women sometimes irritate too much, which has side effects such as stomach ache, diarrhea, whiskey, cigar, and too much chatter and flirt. In general, women are very good, and we love to constantly talk about them. As Abdollah the underground singer said 'Woman! My woman! My companion! My friend my! Woman!' Tomorrow the weather in Tehran is fourteen degrees and weather in Shiraz will be twenty-seven degrees. Here too, the weather's been nice. Since this morning the trees are fruiting bananas and the birds have munchies. I wish you were here and could've seen!

The episode fades out playing the same ending track to each episode.

F. Episode 5, April 7, 2013

اومد یواش گفت لاک می زنی؟ گفتم چشت درآد. گفت قرمزہ؟ دلبر:

گفتم درآد

گفت دلبر

زن اگہ قلایہ باشہ از مردم بدترہ ہا

خیلی کاردی شدم خوابوندم زیر گوشش. دوما دمو فرفری بو خاک می داد. بورودخونہ

می داد. دستشو دراز کرد توش گوشوارہ بود. برق می زد. رنگ فیروزہ بود. رنگ

رودخونہ بود

رادیوچہرازی، اپیزود پنج

Delbar: He came close and asked: nail polish?

I said, fuck off.

He said is it red?

I said fuck off.

He said, Delbar! A fake woman is worse than a man.

I got pissed off. I slapped him under his ear.

The Curly Haired Groom smelled like dust, he smelled like river.
He opened his hand: there was a pair of earrings. They shone. They
were blue. They were the colour of the river.