

BBC Persian Radio: A Public Sphere of Communication, *Communitas*, and Communion

Pouneh Saeedi

....*sound, sound, only sound,*
the sound of the transparent wish
of water to flow,
the sound of the falling starlight
on the earth's feminine crust
the sound of closure of the seed's meaning
and the extension of love's shared mind
sound, sound, sound,
it is only sound that remains

—Forugh Farrokhzad, “It is Only Sound That Remains”¹

Radio scholar Susan J. Douglas has bemoaned the transformation of “listening in” to “sitting in” when it comes to radio listening habits, valorizing “radio” over “television,” in that she sees in the former an

¹The above stanza has been translated by the author from “Tanhā šidāst kih mī'mānad,” in Forugh Farrokhzad, *Majmū'ah-i ash 'ār-i Furūgh Farrukhzād* (Intisharat-i Navid: Saarbrücken, 1989), 439.

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avenue for the burgeoning of one's imagination in ways that the latter falls short of offering. Despite distancing herself from Marshall McLuhan, particularly within the context of the latter's famous dictum of "the medium is the message," Douglas's view is nevertheless similar to the Canadian media maestro's, for in radio Douglas sees an emphasis on orality in a manner that touches the "innards" of the listener, bringing about a productive engagement with the self not to be seen in any other medium.² Television, on the other hand, has its own appeal in presenting a "mosaic mesh" and an "all-inclusive *nowness*."³ As will come to the fore in this article, the addition as of 2015, of a televised aspect to the Persian-language radio programs in the series of programs collectively labelled as *Chishm andāz bāmdādī Radio BBC* (CABR BBC), has granted audiences additional affordances (most importantly, a sense of live and immediate connectedness with the radio announcers and the audience) in ways that have enhanced the formation of an "imagined community" à la Benedict Anderson. While investigating some of the aspects of radio and television (more so the former than the latter), the article will get into how the BBC Persian Service (BBCPS) has served as an "electronic hearth" around which speakers of Persian have huddled, albeit virtually, from far and wide in a bid to form a hub that will keep them close to "home" (the term is used both in its figurative and literal senses as it applies to Iranians within the country as well as non-Iranian speakers of Persian, in whose case, "home" could be interpreted more so in linguistic and cultural rather than cartographic terms).⁴ As shall be seen, certain concepts including

²See Marshall McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message," in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (London and New York: Routledge, 1964), 7–23.

³McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 336–68.

⁴Note that at the root of these three terms is *communis* (meaning "common" or "shared"). While "communion" (which, according to the *OED*, while signifying "mutual participation," has religious meanings as well, including "The fellowship or mutual relationship between members of one church, or between bodies which recognize each other fully as branches of the universal Christian Church; membership of a church"), "*communitas*," though based on the *OED*, means "community; a body of people acting collectively;" in cultural anthropology, it signifies "A strong sense of solidarity and bonding that develops among people experiencing a ritual, a rite of passage, or other transitional states together," and its use within the context presented here is

that of “imagined communities,” associated with Benedict Anderson, “the public sphere” (*Öffentlichkeit*), as elaborated by Juergen Habermas, and James W. Carey’s “ritual view of communication,” will be invoked to further showcase the role BBCPS has played in giving rise to a sense of community and/or *communitas*—depending on whether or not the circumstances faced by the collective qualify as being labelled “liminal” or not—if not communion, and thereby in providing a sense of “home” to Iranians irrespective of geography. It goes without saying that the mediated environment that comes to the fore through BBCPS has been punctuated, if not dominated, by the cataclysmic events that have swept across the world—primarily, though, in Iran—at different junctures.⁵ This paper seeks to explore certain sociocultural impacts that emerge in the wake of the Iranian community’s engagement with the BBCPS. What media scholar Joshua Meyrowitz refers to as “effect loops,” which at its core, signifies the impacts human behavior have on media and vice versa could be an apropos *point de départ* for a paper that somewhat ambitiously seeks to unpack the threads that go into the fabric of an imagined “community” that embodies aspects of *communitas*—a communion and communication (from a ritualistic perspective as shall be explained below) all in one.⁶

As has been hinted at in the introduction, the reason underpinning the extensive sociocultural ramifications of a radio channel ought to be

no exaggeration in view of the host of cataclysmic, indeed at times “liminal” events, that the Iranian community has been facing while seeking answers and objective information on BBCPS.

⁵The following article that deals with BBCPS’s coverage of the Islamic Revolution of 1979, which also allows for a further appreciation of the role it enacted in the years leading up to the revolution, presents valuable details in this respect: Massoumeh Torfeh and Annabelle Sreberny, “The BBC Persian Service and the Islamic Revolution of 1979,” *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 3 (2010): 216–41.

⁶In his groundbreaking work, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), Meyrowitz highlights how new media, as indicated in the title, have transformed our social situations in ways that are no longer contingent on geography. He brings up “effect loops” within a context which highlights those complexities of analyzing media in terms of cause and effects: “The analysis of ‘effect loops’ suggests that while such adjustments are often perceived as spontaneous causes of social change, they themselves may be *effects* of changes in media and situations.” Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place*, 127.

sought in the affordances and properties of the medium itself. Therefore, taking a closer look at certain features of both radio and television as well as a synergy of the two that comes to the fore in the example of CABRBBC will help shed light on the far-reaching impact that such a medium can have in and of itself. While radio, as noted by McLuhan, is a “hot” medium, television is a “cool” medium, meaning that the former requires a lower level of energy on the part of the user and the latter a higher level, which can be evidenced in how some of us are able to interact with radio as we go about our daily chores, but will need to sit down and watch a television program to interact with it.⁷ Over the years, I have found the dichotomy presented by McLuhan to require more contextualization than I had initially assumed, for, in one sense, and on many an occasion, I myself have put my proverbial “all” in terms of my interactions with radio programs and I am no exception.⁸ For that matter, and despite being focused on the example of BBCPS here, my engagements with radio programs are not limited to those aired on CABRBBC, but go on to encompass Harriet Gilbert’s *World Book Club*, the BBC’s *The Inquiry program*, *Trending*, *Forum*, etc., as well as Deutschlandfunk’s *Büchermarkt* and Radio France International’s top-of-the-hour news bulletins and *En sol majeur*, among many others, which, for the most part, have called on me to put in much more energy than any medium labelled as “hot” would require.⁹ It is worth noting that while my engagement with English- and Persian-language programs has been on a more cerebral level, and this, on account of my own linguistic capacities in these languages, in the other examples stated above, I have found myself exerting a high level of energy when listening to radio programs other than English and Persian—and this in

⁷See McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 24–44.

⁸In his chapter, “Radio: The Tribal Drum,” McLuhan includes the following quote from a radio poll to further elucidate the potentially immense impact radio has had on its listeners: “I live right inside radio when I listen. I more easily lose myself in radio than in a book.” See McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 325.

⁹The inherent characteristics of radio, as has been noted by a variety of scholars, give rise to a media environment that calls for a form of sharing of the self that does not transpire across other forms of mass media; hence, it is no surprise that the author would choose to share her personal predilections within the context of radio programs.

a bid to fully grasp the content. That having been said, my engagement with BBCPS, particularly CABRBBC, has been on a different level as I have found myself to have been engaged on a more “visceral level,” not in the extinct mode that comes to the fore through Herbert Morrison’s famous utterance of “Oh the humanity!” but rather in an Althusserian sense, which bids me to feel myself summoned to respond to the news stories as a civic duty.¹⁰ In being “hailed” to bring forth aspects of my personhood as a subject that touch on my ideology of nationhood, à la Althusser, I imagine myself a member of a vast nation that communes on radio wavelengths emanated through the broadcasting of BBCPS and, of late, more so through the Internet during live broadcasts.¹¹ As it is imagination that bids us to see ourselves more as belonging to a particular nation than a mere denizen of the world, it is important to take a deeper look at “imagination” and the concomitant concept of “imagined communities” within the context of this article.¹²

It is no wonder that media scholars have found the world that radio gives rise to, in its heavy reliance on “imagination,” akin to a so-called “ethereal world.”¹³ For one thing, Susan Douglas has an entire chapter titled “The Ethereal World,” wherein she posits that “the fact that radio waves are invisible, emanate from the ‘sky,’ carry disembodied voices, and can send signals deep into the cosmos links us to a much larger,

¹⁰The reference goes back to 1937 when Herbert Morrison, touched to the core by the bursting into flames of the Hindenburg—the largest aircraft that had embarked on its maiden voyage—in his reporting of the event, and choked by emotion, famously utters the following phrase: “Oh the humanity!”

¹¹See Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 127-86.

¹²The term “imagination” can etymologically be traced back to the Latin verb “*imaginari*” (“conceive,” “to picture to oneself”) and the Latin noun “*imago*” (“an image,” “a likeness”). It goes without saying that conjuring up an “image” in one’s mind requires a specific state of mind and enlists cerebral faculties that call on us to touch the deeper layers of the self.

¹³While Susan J. Douglas has a chapter titled “The Ethereal World” in her monumental work, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination: From Amos ‘n’ Andy and Edward R. Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern* (New York; Toronto: Random House, 1999), 40–54, as noted by John Durham Peters, the term “ether” in reference to radio is associated with the pioneer of American television and radio, David Sarnoff (see *Speaking into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 207).

more mysterious order.”¹⁴ It is along similar lines that film and media studies professor John Durham Peters asserts that [radio]’s “ability to spirit intelligence through space” has “elicited immediate comparisons to telepathy, séances, and angelic visitations.”¹⁵ Moreover, and albeit quite subtly, he aligns the birthing of such an “ethereal world” with the concept of “privacy,” in the definition famously presented by Louis Brandeis and Samuel Warren as the “right to be let alone.”¹⁶ That the “right to be let alone” and “imagination” go hand in hand within this context requires little explanation; however, viewing the two in tandem, allows us to further appreciate how the experience of listening to radio, including BBCPS, can simultaneously be solitary and imaginative—as my own suggests. The experience that transpires in the privacy of the chambers of our minds is akin to what Benedict Anderson notes within the context of the “imagined communities” that arise in the course of our perusal of local newspapers:

The significance of this mass ceremony—Hegel observed that newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers—is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically clocked, imagined community can be envisioned? At the same time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in

¹⁴Douglas, *Listening In*, 41.

¹⁵Peters, *Speaking into the Air*, 206.

¹⁶Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis, “The Right to Privacy,” *Perhaps*, “*Harvard Law Review* 4, no. 5 (December 5, 1890): 193.”

everyday life.¹⁷

Interestingly, what is observed above, as noted by Douglas, takes place on a more involved level within the context of our experiences with radio:

For it wasn't just that this technology made imagined communities more tangible because people now listened to a common voice and a shared event at truly the exact moment as others around the region, or the country. Listeners themselves insisted that this technology enhance their ability to imagine their fellow citizens, as well as the ability to be transported to "national" events and to other parts of the country. [...] The sheer geographic scope that these new, simultaneous experiences now encompassed [...] outstripped anything the newspaper had been able to do in terms of nation building on a psychic, imaginative level.¹⁸

The need for the "image of communion" highlighted by Anderson within the context of reading newspapers, as picked up on by Douglas, becomes all the more pronounced—permeating, as it does, our inner selves—at times of crisis such as domestic turmoil and war.¹⁹

It is little wonder as to why the BBCPS, in commemorating its eightieth anniversary, not only enumerates a series of cataclysmic events that received special coverage over the years— including the Allied Forces' advances through the Rhine during World War II, the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the Shah's departure from Iran as well as the Iran-Iraq War (which it refers to as the "forgotten war," or in the original Persian, *jang-i faramush shudah*)—but also emphasizes how its emergence on December 29, 1940 came as a result of a competition with the Persian-language radio programs broadcast from Nazi Germany.²⁰

¹⁷Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York and London: Verso, 1983), 35-6.

¹⁸Douglas, *Listening In*, 24.

¹⁹See Douglas, *Listening In*, 6, and Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 23.

²⁰"BBC-yi Fārsī hashtād sālah shud," BBC Persian December 29, www.bbc.com/persian/iran-55480435

In *Big News*, a documentary produced by CBC Gem in 2021, Canadian news executive Sue Gardner highlights how the BBC came about with the aim of filling in a gap that was left in the wake of World War I, when people realized their need for a reliable source that could inform them of the latest news. What Gardner maintains here resonates with members of my generation as well. For instance, I recall how, in the dying days of the Iran-Iraq War, my parents and close relatives would huddle around a rickety radio set constituting the heart and hearth of a dilapidated room in the suburbs of Tehran, to listen to a static-ridden BBCPS which, notwithstanding its informative function, jarred against our ears. As such, more than television, it was radio that aligned itself with the epithet of “electronic hearth,” as family members would huddle around it to collect information on the latest political events. Radio not only broadcast events, but also embodied in and of itself an event. An event that allowed for the unfolding of a “public sphere” in the sense that Habermas has presented: that of the convergence of individuals and the exchange of ideas that have the potential of influencing politics.²¹

That times of war have tested the mettle of major radio stations’ personnel is showcased in the coverage of such monumental radio correspondents as Edward R. Murrow and William L. Shirer, reporting from the field, respectively, in London and Berlin during World War II. As noted by Bill Kovarik:

With Murrow in London and Shirer in Berlin, Americans by 1938 began hearing some of the disturbing developments first-hand. Murrow’s radio and television work would later be seen as legendary in broadcasting, while Shirer went on to write a ground-breaking history of the Third Reich and a memoir of his years covering Mahatma Gandhi in India.²²

²¹Julian McDougall, *Media Studies: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2012), 114. Also, note that embedded in the German term “Öffentlichkeit” used for “public sphere,” there is the term “öffen” (meaning “open”), which could hint at the opening up of the self that occurs, on varying levels, in the “public sphere.”

²²Bill Kovarik, *Revolutions in Communication: Media History from Gutenberg to the Digital Age* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 291.

Despite the Iranian audience's reliance on radio stations such as BBCPS and Voice of America (VOA) Farsi for further information during the Iran-Iraq War, BBCPS's coverage of war, as asserted by BBC producer, Shahriar Radpour, ran into problems on account of the absence of a correspondent on the ground which, unlike today, could not be compensated for through the deployment of mass media ensuring both speed and simultaneity.²³ However, as Radpour points out, the tough times brought about in the thick of the eight-year war, led a number of BBCPS producers to come up with the idea of broadcasting a program that would help cheer up war-weary Iranians. It was with that thought in mind that "*majallah shafahi*" (literally, "oral newsletter") sprang into existence, which, beyond covering the ongoing war in an objective tone, began to report on cultural matters with a touch of humour.

At a time when radio reigned supreme and "convergence culture" had not yet dominated the scene, the words that emanated from the radio were akin to an event.²⁴ In fact, as specified by Walter Ong, the utterance of a word in and of itself is an event.²⁵ It is little wonder then that the weight that the news carried when it was aired across FM radio was more ponderous than what we are witness to nowadays when the audience is more dependent on the visual. Ong goes on to highlight the "participatory" nature of the word in oral cultures: an aspect which has been replicated in the huddling around of the "electronic hearth" and the feeling we experience in belonging to a part of a collective much more extensive than the one we find in our immediate precincts. Anderson's concept of "imagined communities," as much as being initially invoked

²³Shahriar Radpour, "Jang-i Iran va 'Iraq: dar baksh-i Fārsī-yi BBC chih guzasht," *BBC News-Farsi*, 14 September 2010, https://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2010/09/100912_war30th_bbc_iran_war_iraq_radpour

²⁴Henry Jenkins, who is credited with the introduction of the concept of "convergence culture," defines "convergence" within the context of media studies, as follows: "the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who would go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they wanted." *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 2.

²⁵In fact, Walter Ong has highlighted how the Hebrew term "dabar" means both word and event. See *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 74.

within a context pertaining to the perusal of daily papers, manifests itself even more clearly within the aural/oral environment of radio broadcasts. As such, each Iranian listening to the broadcasts is summoned to identify as a member of an extensive collective interested in the fate of the nation regardless of geographical locus. In fact, BBCPS's very first announcer, Hasan Movvaghgar Balyouzi's first utterance on the then nascent Persian-language radio program called on Iranians from far and wide to listen in, all the while informing their friends of its existence.²⁶

That BBCPS, similar to many other vernacular radio programs, has come over time to showcase a media matrix in its various audio-visual aspects has had some intriguing sociological, if not psychological impacts in terms of its reception; for as a result of interactivity, many listeners are now prosumers rather than mere consumers of news. Mass self-communication is one of the many affordances which new media, including digital broadcasts, offer, and it is particularly relevant in an investigation of the media environment that arises in our interactions with BBCPS. An array of cognate terms, including "community," "communion," and "*communitas*" have found fertile grounds with the "comment" feature which has emerged since BBCPS's broadcast on social media platforms (such as Facebook and Telegram), thanks to the Internet. Thus, the audience ends up not only engaging with the news stories, but also with other members of the audience, not to mention the newscasters. From far and wide, Iranians across the globe forge (weak) ties with one another and the presenters themselves. Judging by the content of some of the comments left behind, it could be said that there seems, among some, to be a predisposition towards the formation of a para-social relationship with other members of the audience, if not with the presenters themselves. In my own personal observations, there are listeners/viewers whose primary purpose for connecting with the program seems to be the forging of weak ties with other members of the audience and/or the presenters rather than listening to the latest news. While, initially, I used to attribute superficial value

²⁶"BBC-yi Fārsī hashtād sālah shud"

to the interactions that take place in the course of chatting with other members of the audience and/or the presenters themselves, I have come to see such instances as attempts made in the direction of heightening the sense of an “imagined community” comprising fellow Iranians, which may or may not be simultaneously aimed at breaking out of the confines of solitude—an aspect that has become more pronounced during the pandemic. In fact, one perspective towards mass media beyond their value to transmit information comes to the fore in their value towards facilitating a communion through acts of ritual. James W. Carey, who is known as the theorist of the ritual view of communication, stipulates that

in a ritual definition, communication is linked to terms such as ‘sharing,’ ‘participation,’ ‘association,’ ‘fellowship’ and ‘the possession of a common faith’... A ritual view is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs.²⁷



The above image, captured in May 2022, is a screenshot of the live

²⁷James W. Carey, “A Cultural Approach to Communication,” in *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 18.

streaming of CABRBBC and showcases some of the points made here, including how speakers of Persian from across the world feel a bond (even when seemingly at odds over their ethnic backgrounds) on grounds of their shared linguistic, if not geographical, heritage. It is more so an example of the “ritual perspective of communication” in its enhancement of societal bonds amongst Persian speakers than the “transmission view” (although Afschin Eskandari’s comment hints at some data regarding the Talebans’ *modus operandi*). There are also times when members of the audience are greeting each other and the announcers, as well as when the announcers are responding to comments made by members of the audience live, in real time, through the like emojis or even by making a direct announcement on the program in a strategy that comes close, if not replicates, what Peter Warren Singer and Emerson T. Brooking have referred to as “planned authenticity,” by which they mean the direct engagement of a renowned figure (which happens to be Taylor Swift in their example) with their fan base.²⁸



The above is a screenshot of the livestreaming of CABRBBC taken in April 2022 which showcases a commentary made by one of the avid listeners, Afschin Eskandari, a resident of Germany, as to how—by withholding transactions with Russia in the field of gas and energy and further pressures exerted by other countries—one could see an end to

²⁸See Peter Warren Singer and Emerson T. Brooking, “Authenticity: The Power of Being Real,” in *Likewar: The Weaponization of Social Media* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), 165–9.

the raging war in Ukraine. There is also an example of a greeting, as well as the comment of a disgruntled listener/spectator, to the effusive greetings of one of the regular members of the audience.

As has been noted by Mitra Shahrani, “BBC Persian pursues strategies intended to attract audiences, keep them in a long-term relationship and win their trust;” hence, not only are its reports and programs “professionally produced,” but attempts are also made to provide the audience with “the easiest possible ways to access the different media services.”²⁹ It is perhaps along the same lines that BBCPS, which was being broadcast on TV as of 2008, decided as well to televise its own radio programs in line with a new mode of broadcasting, one that would not only attract a larger audience, but also allow for a higher level of participation. However, the highly mediated world we are living in along with our new lifestyle, which has rendered us ever more isolated (this is particularly true as of the onset of the pandemic), has made CABR BBC not only a source of information, but also a popular node of connection and communication among Iranians living in the diaspora. The term “broadcast” is quite appropriate within this context, for, as noted by Peters, in its use the finger is pointed at “agricultural use” and the “scattering of seeds,” also that “the free character of things broadcast naturally fit the radio signal’s tendency to stray.”³⁰

Among the forms of media literacies, in addition to media content and media grammar, Meyrowitz enumerates a third, “medium literacy,” which “develops from the perception of media as unique environments.”³¹ While the product presented here is in print and thus primarily invested in the enhancement of the sense of “sight,” it has attempted—in focusing on certain points in the trajectory of BBCPS which have come about in the wake of media-related transformations—to bring to the fore an image of “tactility,” which à la McLuhan, far from being confined

²⁹Mitra Shahrani, “BBC Persian: Filling the Media Void in the Persian-speaking World,” *Asian Politics & Policy* 6, no. 2 (2014): 337.

³⁰Peters, *Speaking into the Air*, 207.

³¹See Joshua Meyrowitz, “Multiple Media Literacies,” *Journal of Communication* 48 (1998): 19–108.

to touch, represents “an interplay of the senses.”³² The emergence of “tactility” in its McLuhanite definition of the term, coupled with the aural origins of BBCPS, which, as argued earlier, calls for a form of tribalism, has fostered the formation of “imagined communities”—namely, the “nation.” The very fact that the BBCPS is broadcast in Persian, a language whose scope is limited, does not allow for an *ad humanitatem* address, and as such, for the most part, interpellates the native speakers of Persian in the midst of the many vicissitudes that they have experienced with regard to their homeland, or “nation.”³³ Accordingly, many Iranians, regardless of their cartographic locus, heed the call and in so doing find themselves in the midst of a collective that, in feeling connected to “home” (in its literal sense), forms another “home” (in its figurative sense) on the basis of the “community”—a “*communitas*” that has emerged at threshold moments in its entanglements with critical questions that concern Iran on multiple levels that go beyond mere news to encompass cultural, linguistic, and sociological aspects that are mirrored in the mosaic of programs produced by BBCPS.

All things considered, in the interactions that take place by virtue of the existence of BBCPS, especially CABRBBC, members of the audience are able to not only imagine the nation in the “lair of their skulls” (to re-echo Anderson’s usage of the phrase), but to see actual members of their community appear simultaneously, engaged in a bonding akin to “communion,” which by definition calls for a belief in an entity greater than one’s self—in this case, the nation.

I wish to bring my observations to a close by clarifying that, despite my implied valorization of the resuscitation of a sense of tribalism and horizontal camaraderie that comes to the fore in the regular watching and/

³²McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 342.

³³See John Durham Peters, “Mass Media,” in *Critical Terms for Media Studies*, eds. W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010), 268. Peters makes use of the Latin phrase *ad humanitatem* to refer to addresses that are directed at everyone; however, given that Persian is not spoken on the scale of English, Spanish and many other tongues, messages encoded in this language will be cipherable to the relatively few who speak it.

or listening of certain radio programs such as CABRBBC, I am wary of the “narcotizing dysfunction” that may impact avid listeners, who, according to the definition of the concept, by virtue of “keep[ing] abreast of the world”—and more so in this case of Iran as well as Afghanistan, and to a certain extent Tajikistan, where Persian is spoken in a variety of accents—may falsely assume themselves to be engaging in a form of activism. As founders of the Columbia school of sociology, Paul Lazarsfeld and Thomas K. Merton, have famously elaborated, “the flood of information may serve to narcotize rather than to energize,”³⁴ which is to say that partaking in the aural acts of communion that manifest themselves in a variety of forms such as “commenting,” examples of which were mentioned above, or listening simultaneously with many other speakers of Persian to CABRBBC, may come to be mistaken by members of the audience for activism. Nonetheless, at the end of the day—as can be sensed by my choice of Forugh’s poetry at the beginning of the paper—I believe sound (in this case, voice) to be an all-powerful force that can lead to a micro-level *creatio mundi* and, as discussed above, bring into existence “imagined communities” which would not have existed otherwise; all in all, penetrating through our insular selves to connect to a much wider and more meaningful world outside.

Sadly, shortly before the publication of this issue, BBC Persian Radio went on air for the very last time on March 26, 2023, in a special program on which an array of its anchors past (e.g., Loftali Khonji) and present (e.g., Mina Joshaghani, Dariush Rajabian, and many others) had been invited with the purpose of recounting some memorable moments. In so doing, they unanimously invoked the sense of “intimacy” (*ṣamīmīyat*) that is specific to radio broadcasts. At the end of the day, in its closure, BBC Persian Radio will have many an avid listener longing for a bygone era in which an “imagined community”

³⁴Paul Lazarsfeld and Thomas K. Merton, “Mass Communication, Popular Taste and Organized Social Action,” in *Communication Theory: Volume I, General Approaches to Communication and the Processing of Communication on the Intra-Individual Level*, ed. Peter J. Schulz (London: Sage Publications, 2010), 311.

found itself communing and communicating in ways that will be impossible to replicate on any other mediated platform.