

THE DEVIL'S PRAYERS: METAL MUSIC IN IRAN

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of Utah
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Middle East Studies

Department of Languages and Literature

The University of Utah

May 2014

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The University of Utah Graduate School

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ABSTRACT

Metal music is a highly misunderstood style of music that is dismissed and demonized all over the world; even in the US and Europe where it originated it is still vilified and viewed as an unsophisticated style of music. In the Islamic Republic of Iran the same views are amplified to the extreme as a very foreign and Western style of music is growing in popularity.

I explored the history of metal music to show where this genre originated so a better understanding of this music could be attained. Through an understanding of the genre it is much easier to understand how this music has spread across the globe like a wild fire and people in third world and oppressed nations are being inspired and motivated to become musicians and stand up for themselves and their beliefs.

Iran is an excellent country to examine a growing metal music scene because of its status as an Islamic Republic. Music in general is a very controversial issue in Iran and metal music takes this controversy to another level because it is completely forbidden. This has not stopped many Iranians from attaining instruments and starting their own metal bands even though they are harassed and demonized by Iranian authorities.

I conducted qualitative research using solo and focus group interviews with eight Persian metal bands and many fans and friends of these bands that identify themselves as metalheads. I had very long and detailed discussions canvassing many aspects of their lives, how they live as outcasts within an Islamic society, their goals in life, and what they want people outside Iran to understand about them. I analyzed the data I collected using a critical ethnographic and grounded theory method which allowed me to experience their lives with them and create life-long friendships.

This thesis is the story of thousands of metalheads in Iran that are right now, as you read, playing metal music far underground where no one can hear them. As they play they are envisioning the uncertainty of their lives and the hope they have of a future where they can play in front of a crowd and feel the energy that music generates. Metal music fuels the fire that burns within their souls like gasoline and I hope that this thesis can help stoke that fire into a raging inferno.

Dedicated to my best friend, who must remain unnamed, without his influence this thesis would never have been written, and to all my metal brothers in Iran, you know who you are, this is for you.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my committee, Soheila Amirsoleimani, Chris Lippard, and Margaret Toscano for reading this thesis and helping me organize it. I would like to thank Roxane Farmanfarmaian for giving me a lot of great advice concerning the methodology of my thesis. I would like to thank Caren Frost for her help with the logistics of presenting my research project to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), without her help I would have never been able to travel to Armenia to conduct my research. I would like to thank Arash of TarantisT for allowing me to come to Los Angeles and film a video with him that helped me gain credibility with Iranian musicians. I would also like to thank my beautiful wife, Chereen, for all of her help in formatting this document with me. I don't know what I would have done without her help.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The culture of metal music is universal. There is no racial, linguistic, or cultural barrier that separates one metalhead (an avid metal music listener and/or musician) from another. This is why metal bands like Iron Maiden and Metallica, for example, can perform for crowds in excess of 100,000 people anywhere in the world. Through metal music people come together and cross boundaries that would normally stop them from communicating with someone they share nothing in common with. It is how a person like myself can travel halfway around the world to a country I have never been to, meet and interview people I have never met, and despite our language and cultural differences, be so comfortable with each other it was like we had known each other for many years.

Metal music is a very Western phenomenon, but over the past forty years metal music has branched out to countries all over the world. For example, there is a metal music scene in Vietnam with bands that cover a wide range of genres from power metal to death metal. There was even a metal festival in Hanoi, Vietnam called Hanoi Death Fest 2013. There is a metal scene in Nicaragua, Botswana, Lebanon, almost every country in the world has been penetrated by metal music but there is one country that has a very unique metal scene because of its status as an Islamic Republic, and that is Iran.¹

Iran is different from the other three Islamic Republic's in Mauritania, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Of these four countries none of them share the same idea about what an

¹ Go to www.metalarchives.com and search by country and you can find metal bands anywhere in the world.

Islamic Republic is. Afghanistan has a largely secular government that was installed after the Taliban was deposed in 2001. Pakistan and Mauritania share the idea that a path between a secular state and a theocratic state can be achieved, although their views on this path are wildly different. The clerics in Iran have established a fully theocratic state which adheres to the teachings of Ayatollah Khomeini and his vision of an Islamic state in Iran. Khomeini's beliefs are stated clearly in his book *Velayat-e Faqih (Governance of the Jurist)*,² as well as his vision for Iran.

After the Iranian revolution in 1979 all music was banned but the regime could not fully eliminate it and had to succumb to the people and tolerate certain genres of classical and regional music.³ All other forms of music were outlawed because of their alleged powers of seduction and corruption and most importantly, because they were Western.⁴

Metal music in Iran is illegal and metalheads live with the constant fear that they could be harassed by the regime, or even worse. There is no freedom of speech or freedom of the press in Iran, freedom is only allowed in the confines of Islam, any speech that is un-Islamic is not allowed. Article 500 of the Islamic Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran states that "Anyone who engages in any type of propaganda against the Islamic Republic of Iran or in support of opposition groups and associations, shall be sentenced to three months to one year of imprisonment."⁵ The word "propaganda" in this article is

² If you are interested in reading *Velayat-e faqih* the Iran Chamber society has translated it into English at http://www.iranchamber.com/history/rkhomeini/books/velayat_faqaeh.pdf

³ Ameheh Youssefzadeh. "The Status of Music in the Islamic Republic of Iran." *Fis-iran.org*. Foundation for Iranian Studies, n.d. Web. 12 Aug. 2013. <http://www.fis-iran.org/en/irannameh/volxix/iran-status-music>.

⁴ Freemuse. "World Premiere about Music Censorship in Iran." *Freemuse.org*. N.p., n.d. Web. 11 Aug. 2013. <http://freemuse.org/archives/679>.

⁵ Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. "Islamic Penal Code of the Islamic Republic of Iran - Book Five." *Iranhrdc.org*. Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, n.d. Web. 22 Sept. 2013. <http://iranhrdc.org/english/human-rights-documents/iranian-codes/1000000351-islamic-penal-code-of-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-book-five.html#1>.

very vague and is used to stifle any speech the Islamic Republic of Iran disagrees with. A perfect example of this took place in September 2011 when two newspapers, *Shahrvand-e Emrooz*, a weekly reformist news magazine, and a leading reformist daily, *Rouzegar*, were temporarily closed for publishing anti-regime propaganda.⁶

I grew up in the US listening to and playing metal music whenever and wherever I wanted. In the garage, in my car, at parties, my friends and I listened to metal all the time. We were free to express ourselves however we wanted and I used my experience growing up listening to metal as my critical position throughout my research. The thought that I could be persecuted by my government for this was not a thought that ever crossed my mind until I learned about the metal scene in Iran. I thought, “Metal is illegal in Iran? But why?” And, “How do people listen to metal there if it’s illegal?”

Even in the US there has always been an opposition to metal music because people view it as rebellious, evil, and “not really music,” but illegal? The thought of people being persecuted for metal music was problematic for me and I wanted to learn more about this dangerous social situation that a growing number of Iranians found themselves in. I wanted to know, “What is life like for a metalhead in Iran?”

Origins of Research

The origin of this research began when I met my best friend, Metalhead 1⁷, while in the US Navy, and listened to the many stories he would tell me of growing up in Iran and listening to metal music. We shared three years together in the US Navy and during that time I learned a lot about Iran, Iranian culture, and the metal scene there. He influenced

⁶ Freedom House. “Iran.” Freedomhouse.org. Freedom House, 2013. Web. 22Sept. 2013. <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2013/iran>.

⁷ My best friend wanted to remain anonymous for my research so I will refer to him throughout my paper as Metalhead 1. The reason I included a “1” is because in my analysis piece on government I kept all of my sources anonymous and will refer to them as Metalhead 2, Metalhead 3, etc...

my interest in Iran so much that when I left the Navy I went to school to learn the Persian language.

As I began my graduate studies I went through a rough period where I just could not decide what I wanted to research for a thesis. The frustrating aspect of this period, now that I look back, is that the answer had been sitting right under my nose, I just did not see it.

I had an epiphany one night when I was searching through Netflix and I came across this documentary called “Heavy Metal in Baghdad.”⁸ I was about half way through the film and this light bulb went on above my head and I yelled, “That’s it!” At the time I had no idea how I was going to conduct this research but I was determined to succeed.

I gave up on a couple different plans I created to research this topic because traveling to Iran was more difficult and potentially dangerous than I had initially imagined. When I sadly came to terms with the fact that I was going to have to conduct my research over the internet, an important opportunity presented itself. I discovered that an organization called Zhesht Events⁹ was promoting a Persian metal festival in Yerevan, Armenia on September 14, 2012. This was a huge development because it meant that I could actually meet Persian metal musicians and fans in person. Armenia was a country that I could easily travel to and conduct my research in.

Returning to the metal scene in Baghdad, Iraq for a moment, I wanted to share that the metal music scene in Iraq is in a much more dire position than the metal scene in Iran. This is mainly because of the chaotic and lawless society that is apparent there now. According to Freemuse, an organization that monitors the freedom of expression through music around the world, over 115 musicians have been killed in Iraq since the

⁸ This film is about a metal band in Baghdad, Iraq amidst the Iraq War in 2005 and the many struggles they faced because of the war, society, and religion.

⁹ You can view information about Zhesht Events here, www.zhesht.com.

US invasion in 2003.¹⁰ Shia and Sunni extremists have each attempted to impose their own religious restrictions on the people of Iraq and many musicians are in hiding or have fled the country.

Freemuse reported that the Iraq newspaper “The Observer” interviewed a musician that said:

The government is not giving us any protection. I witnessed two of my friends being killed for singing Western songs at weddings. The Shia extremists who killed them shouted that that was the price they had to pay for singing “the devil’s words”. We are packing and next Monday I should be far from Iraq, a country that one day inspired my songs but today is just a disgrace.¹¹

The metal scenes in Iran and Iraq are both dealing with oppression, but this oppression stems from very different sources because the political and social aspects of these countries are very different.

Looking at another country that borders Iran we see a totally different metal scene that is not plagued by any of the restrictions that Iranians deal with. The Armenian metal scene emerged after the fall of the Soviet Union and musicians in Armenia are free to express themselves using metal music. The metal scene in Armenia is very interesting because even though Armenia is a Republic that promotes democracy it also recognizes the Armenian Apostolic Church as the national church of Armenia, so Christianity is a very strong influence on Armenians. Some of the most popular metal bands in Armenia are devout Christians, like the band Blood Covenant, some even play black metal¹², like

¹⁰ Freemuse. “Religious Restrictions Cause Singers to Flee.” *Freemuse.org*. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Sept. 2013. <http://freemuse.org/archives/1240>.

¹¹ Freemuse. “Religious Restrictions Cause Singers to Flee.” *Freemuse.org*. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Sept. 2013. <http://freemuse.org/archives/1240>.

¹² Black metal originated with the band Venom and their album *Black Metal* in 1982. The album focused on anti-Christian and satanic themes. Many bands emerged within this new genre, especially in Scandinavia focusing on anti-Christian and misanthropic themes. Today black metal does not necessarily have to do with Satanism because many bands are adopting the musical style of black metal without the traditional themes.

Daeron.¹³ These are some examples of the diversity of metal music in Armenia.

Armenian metalheads have been very accepting of Iranian metalheads because Armenia is the only place Iranian metalheads can express themselves freely. I witnessed this firsthand and will discuss this relationship more when I discuss my fieldwork.

These examples of metal scenes in countries that surround Iran show that metal music is a very malleable culture and it can exist anywhere in the world, even under the most oppressive conditions. Metal music may have emerged in the West but it is by no means a Western style of music. It has seeped into cultures all over the world and each of those cultures has molded it to represent their own identity and claim it as their own.

Aims

The aims of my research are: first, to examine the literature about where metal music originated. It is important to have an adequate understanding of the genre so the passion of its practitioners and fans can be understood. Metal music has a rich history that has been explored by only a handful of scholars and its arrival in many nations around the world has yet to be explored. In addition, a fresh perspective can be used to view the metal scene in Iran and how metal culture influences the many talented musicians that are forced underground and silenced.

Second, to investigate metal bands in Iran and learn more about their music, lifestyle, and how structures and norms affect their agency. By investigating some of the social phenomena in Iran and uncovering the injustice that metal musicians experience, an awareness will be created that promotes change. To be involved with metal music in Iran is not just a casual, recreational experience as people in the West experience it. It can literally be a matter of life and death, and the danger that these Iranian metalheads

¹³ Go to <http://caucasusmetal.blogspot.com/> and there is information on metal bands from Caucasus countries Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

are in by standing up for who they are is very real. The courage of these Iranians is undeniable and they deserve to be heard.

Third, to analyze and interpret the data I receive from Iranian metalheads. Analyzing the data consists of identifying patterns, categories, and themes about these bands and their environment to explain two important theoretical concepts. First, structures¹⁴, and how certain social, economic, political, historical, and cultural norms and institutions operate inside Iran and affect metal musicians. Second, agency¹⁵, and how metal musicians interact with these structures and if structures determine all of the choices they make. The metal scene in Iran has only known oppression and if the regime were to vanish tomorrow the metal scene in Iran would instantly transform into something it has never known.

Interpreting the data consists of attaching meaning and significance to these patterns, categories, and themes. There is no “method” to interpreting data, interpretation occurs through knowledge, experience, and understanding of everything a researcher has learned. There are theoretical guides to interpretation and I will be taking a reflexive approach. This approach allows the researcher to openly reflect on his or her own beliefs and values and show intimate involvement with the research and its outcome.¹⁶

The goal of this research is a clearer picture of how metal musicians in Iran live their lives. The agency of metalheads in Iran is affected by structures and their resistance to

¹⁴ Structures are the recurrent patterned arrangements which influence or limit the choices and opportunities available. In the case of metal in Iran, structures refer to cultural norms, tradition, and ideology. See *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, pg. 448 by Chris Barker.

¹⁵ Agency is the capacity of an individual to act independently or the freedom to make your own decisions. See *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, pg. 448 by Chris Barker.

¹⁶ Helen Vandenberg and Wendy Hall. “Critical Ethnography: Extending Attention to Bias and Reinforcement of Dominant Power Relations.” *Nurse Researcher* 18.3 (2011): 27. Academic Search Premier. Web. 12 Sept. 2013.

conform to these structures reveals their identity, and passion for freedom and music. Metal for many of these Iranians is all they have, as Iran's economy is so bad they cannot find work. Many of them are highly educated and have no outlet for their frustration of not being able to pursue a career, except through their music. It is important that the metal scene in Iran flourishes because it is an ancillary form of protest against an oppressive regime whether the musicians see themselves as protesting or not.¹⁷ These musicians are passionate, caring, determined, individuals and they deserve a valid and reliable account of their accomplishments, as well as their struggles.

¹⁷ It is important to note that all the metal bands I interviewed that are currently living in Iran have no desire to become political as a band and cause trouble for themselves. Unfortunately no matter what their lyrical content or what they stand for they are politically involved just by playing metal music. It is a rather peculiar situation to be in because no matter how much a band proclaims not be political... they are.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature that I found most useful was the history of metal music and where it originated. The origin of metal music is important to understanding metal culture and how it interacts with other cultures, especially Iran. All of this literature gave me the insight needed to analyze and interpret the interviews I conducted with Iranian metal bands and create a picture of their lives inside Iran as well as give them some hope for the future.

Without the blues the music you hear today would be very different. Jazz, pop, contemporary, rock, and of course metal are all in existence because of the blues. In the late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century a blues musician could be heard anywhere in the South, in front of the local store, on a plantation, in a juke joint, or on a porch. People could watch a blues musician move a broken bottleneck up and down the fret board of a guitar and not give it much thought. It was part of the landscape during this time, but it impacted the United States in a way no one envisioned. Especially blues musicians themselves, who howled their frustrations, sorrow, and hopelessness to the skies, expecting nothing but the peacefulness of being lost in the music.

Today the blues can have many different meanings for people. For blacks it obviously carries memories of slavery and oppression, but also more positive aspects, like heritage and tradition. For non-blacks it can represent these things as well, although in a much different context; but more simply it is an inspiration that changed music forever. From my research I came to see the blues as intense personal feelings that

found expression through music after hundreds of years of oppression. The blues is the story of poor and humble men and women who became well-known in their communities, and for a few, the whole Southern region of the United States. These men and women were extremely talented musicians whose music was severely overlooked, ignored, and ultimately lost forever. Luckily for us, a few of them were given the opportunity to create recordings that will forever be treasured.

Robert Walser, author of *Running with the Devil* is adamant that more historians need to trace the birth of rock and metal music back to its African roots. Overlooking the blues can no longer be acceptable because without the passion of blues musicians, music like metal would not exist. Robert Palmer wrote in his book *Deep Blues*:

We need to understand what blues came from, where it grew, how it changed, what sorts of camouflage it had to adopt in order to preserve its identity. And we need to understand the people who made and listened to blues, not just as blacks or oppressed Americans or romantic archetypes or clever technicians or successful entertainers, but as particular people who made particular personal artistic choices in a particular place at a particular time.¹⁸

An interesting truth that must be pointed out when discussing the history of the blues is that it commonly begins at the point of white dominance. Walser confronts this truth by asking how Black Sabbath's fascination with the occult can be discussed, but Robert Johnson and his struggle with the Devil is forgotten.¹⁹ Also, how the guitar prowess of Jimmy Page and Eric Clapton can be discussed, but not the musicians they were imitating.²⁰ Walser said, "The debt of heavy metal to African-American music making

¹⁸ Robert Palmer. *Deep Blues*. 19.

¹⁹ Scholars have documented many different stories about the mysterious life of Robert Johnson by interviewing his living family and friends (some being legendary blues musicians themselves), but none of these stories can be proven or corroborate with each other, which leads to a lot of skepticism and plays into the mythical and mystical stories we hear about Robert Johnson's life. Walser is asking why stories by more current rock and metal musicians are accepted and not stories from old blues musicians.

²⁰ Robert Walser. *Running With the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Culture*. Hanover: University P, 1993. 8-9. Print.

has vanished from most accounts of the genre, just as black history has been suppressed in every other field.”²¹

The African music the blues emerged from arrived in the Southern United States with the first African slaves. There are over fifty countries in Africa and over 1,500 tribes and languages, so it is easy to see that these slaves brought with them knowledge of many different styles of song, dance, instruments, and traditions.²² During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries most slaves came from the Western coast of Africa, which the slave traders referred to as Senegambia.

This region stretched from modern day Senegal to Guinea, it was ruled by the Wolof Empire who had reigned over this region since 1360 but had been in a state of collapse since the sixteenth century. Trade with European nations had made the kings of the vassal states along the coast of Africa more powerful than the Wolof Emperor himself and war ensued between these vassal states. These Senegambian kings had been in the slave business before war erupted in the region, but now as the Emperor’s soldiers were being captured the Senegambian kings decided that instead of killing them, they could sell them to the Europeans. There were three benefits; they got rid of their enemies, they became rich, and the war could be maintained so more slaves could be captured. The slave trade became so lucrative that kidnapping even became a way of procuring slaves from Senegambia if slave traders could not get the amount of slaves they needed to fill their ships.

Musically, Senegambia was not known for drums and drumming as many other areas of Africa are well known for. Senegambia was a very arid region because it lay just to the Southwest of the Sahara Desert. It was also heavily influenced by the Arabs and

²¹ Robert Walser. *Running With the Devil*. 9.

²² Nations Online Project. “Languages of Africa.” *Nationsonline.org*. Nations Online, n.d. Web. http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/african_languages.htm.

Berbers who traveled through the Sahara trading in caravans, therefore the Senegambians had many stringed instruments. These instruments could be very primitive, like a gourd fiddle, or they could be very complex, like a guitar-like lute that could have anywhere from two to twenty strings.

Vocally, Senegambia was known for a style of group singing known as call and response. This style consists of a soloist who leads the singing and a chorus who echoes the singers' lyrics in different ways, while keeping in rhythm with the music. They also were known for clapping their hands when they sang because drums were not a part of their tradition.

Musicians in Senegambia were from a social caste known as griots. These men would sing about the wealthy and powerful and they would also memorize long epic genealogies so oral histories of their people could be retained.²³ These musicians were not looked down upon or seen as part of the lower class, they were admired, respected, and could attain a very good reputation and a lot of wealth. They were surrounded by a lot of superstition and despised by many because it was believed that their talent was bestowed upon them by the evil spirits that they consorted with.²⁴

During the seventeenth century the slave trade grew and began expanding south into present day Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Nigeria, and Cameroon. These nations compiled what was famously known as the Slave Coast.

On the Slave Coast music was very different. Here drumming was the most influential style of music and musicians could play a solo drum or be part of an orchestra of drums accompanied by rattles, bells, or anything that complimented the drums. The rhythms of the Slave Coast were more complex as the different drums being used would play different rhythms at the same time, known as poly-rhythm.

²³ Robert Palmer. *Deep Blues*. 26.

²⁴ Robert Palmer. *Deep Blues*. 27.

Vocally, the Slave Coast was more complex than Senegambia because they did not follow the call and response style of music. Musicians had a soloist but the soloist was not imitated. The soloist and the chorus would overlap each other and also come together in unison creating harmony, and they were very good at singing several melodies at one time.

In the West a pure and clean sound has always been what musicians have sought after, but in Africa musicians will do whatever they can to interrupt that pure sound. There are many examples of this; they will attach tin to the head of a drum or to the neck of a stringed instrument to generate a rattle or buzz, they may hum along to the melody of a flute, and while singing, guttural grunting, throaty growls, and falsetto shrieking are common.²⁵

This preference to interrupt the sound as much as possible goes against Western ideas of what music is. In the West music was developed by scientists and philosophers who searched for quantitative ways of organizing and playing music. Music students went to school to learn how to play music and study scores and tablature following different methodologies and scales, but in Africa music could not be written on paper, it was part of African culture and it was learned through imitation, tradition, and feeling. Ted Gioia, author of *Delta Blues*, describes the idea of music in the West and Africa perfectly, saying, "What in Africa remained a matter of feeling and doing, in the West, became an area for thinking and counting."²⁶

Thousands of slaves were transported across the Atlantic Ocean by slave traders and they were dying in large numbers. The malnourishment and disease slaves suffered on their captive journey was one aspect of their mistreatment, but the inability to move

²⁵ Robert Palmer. *Deep Blues*. 30.

²⁶ Ted Gioia. *Delta Blues: The Life and Times of the Mississippi Masters who Revolutionized American Music*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2009. 11. Print.

around was also a huge problem as slaves were stuffed like sardines into the holds of ships and not let out until they arrived in the US. The high mortality rates of slaves on the journey was causing slave traders to lose a lot of money so they began to encourage exercise and recreation. Slave traders knew music was a big part of the lives of these slaves so they encouraged slaves to play music and dance. The slave traders encouraged it so much that they began to punish slaves who would not dance or exercise and these practices are well documented from 1693 to 1859.²⁷

Slaves never forgot their culture and traditions when they arrived in the United States. They made drums and horns and continued creating the music that reminded them of their home until the middle of the eighteenth century when the United States banned the use of drums and horns by slaves. There was an important reason for this: slaves organized many rebellions using drums and horns to communicate and send codes. When these instruments were banned they resorted to a familiar form of singing while out in the fields known as call and response.

Africans used call and response when they participated in group work in Africa, and slave owners allowed them to sing in the fields in the United States because they saw that the slaves were more productive. Call and response was also known as hollering and there were many different techniques involved in this style of singing, one of the most important was “voice masking.”

Voice masking is a vocal technique that Africans used in village rituals. They wore masks which they believed would transform their identity into a spirit, legendary animal, or mythological creature. These rituals were used for different occasions, but most importantly they were ways of passing down tribal heritage since most tribes had no written language. When a person enveloped their new identity under the mask they also modified their voice. Africans mastered deep chest growls and false bass tones

²⁷ Ted Gioia. *Delta Blues*. 8.

produced in the back of the throat. These techniques were used a lot by slaves out in the fields because they sang throughout the day. Blind Willie Johnson, Charley Patton, Son House, and Rubin Lacy were pioneer Delta blues musicians who regularly used voice masking techniques.²⁸

After the American Civil War ended slaves became free men and the reconstruction of the US began. Some blacks set out on foot to discover what this new era had in store for them, traveling to towns and cities looking for work. Unfortunately many blacks were so poor that they remained working at the plantations they were previously slaves for money. Many of the blacks that explored the United States as free men were musicians and they traveled from plantation to plantation playing for crowds at local parties and get-togethers. They played on street corners or in front of stores for tips on Saturdays when a lot of people were in town. These musicians became known as songsters, musicianers, and musical physicianers and they had a large repertoire of different styles of music.²⁹ They would play country dance tunes, black and white songs from the minstrel stage, and spirituals.

Songsters, musicianers, and physicianers were very specific descriptions and were not a synonym for a musician. A songster was a black man who regularly sang or made songs, a musicianer was considered an expert in the banjo or fiddle, and a physicianer traveled from place to place and possessed a combination of these qualities.

Many of these musicians found work in minstrel shows which were very popular before the American Civil War and the most popular form of entertainment during the nineteenth century.³⁰ After the Civil War these shows became less popular, but they still

²⁸ Robert Palmer. *Deep Blues*. 35.

²⁹ Robert Palmer. *Deep Blues*. 41.

³⁰ Justin Driver. "The Mirth of a Nation." *New Republic* 224.24 (2001): 29. Academic Search Premier. Web. 18 Nov. 2013.

remained a viable form of entertainment into the early twentieth century. Minstrel shows were a combination of music, skits, dancing, and novelty acts that were initially performed by whites painted with blackface.

Before the Civil War these troupes would perform in a manner that defended slavery, portraying blacks as dim-witted and in need of the civilizing influence of white people; in addition, they used their platform to counter the abolitionist movement who was pursuing the emancipation of all slaves and an end to segregation. These troupes would travel around the US following the same circuit as circuses, bands, and other forms of entertainment, and they performed in the street, saloons, or theaters.

In the late 1840s blacks began performing in minstrel troupes of their own and painting their already dark skin black with coal. They claimed that they were giving audience members a more authentic version of the black experience, but unfortunately they just enforced the negative stereotypes people already had.³¹

As the twentieth century neared minstrel shows were decreasing rapidly in popularity and only about ten of the large companies that organized minstrel shows remained. Blacks had disassociated themselves with the minstrel shows, because as they adjusted to their freedom they saw the stereotype that minstrel shows portrayed and they found it insulting.

By the end of the nineteenth century call and response was not being performed by most of the black population. Blacks had been free for about forty years, and as the twentieth century approached slave songs were not relevant to free men nor were they relevant to young black men who had been born after the era of slavery. Many black musicians were influenced by white middle-class culture, and music from the era of slavery was seen as inferior by whites and blacks. Only the most sacred black folk

³¹ Ibid. 29.

music was acknowledged as being respectable and it ironically became more polished as whites began to take interest in it.³²

By the 1890s relations between whites and blacks had deteriorated greatly as the doctrine of white supremacy spread through the United States, especially the South. According to politicians in the South the black man's place was on the farm, and although on paper many blacks owned land, laws had been put in place that made it very difficult for a black man to leave his farm to pursue another profession. Expert in folklore and blues music, Bruce Bastin, in his book *Red River Blues* wrote, "Once tied to the land, black farm laborers were actually dependent upon their white neighbors."³³

Blacks became very frustrated with their predicament because many experienced the greatest event that ever happened to them, being set free, as a meaningless achievement. Instead of experiencing the free and productive life they envisioned they were marginalized and discriminated against.

Blacks in the Mississippi Delta region were some of the poorest people in the nation. Many of them could not read or write and they possessed nothing. Many were not considered by whites to be respectable enough to be a servant or hold a responsible position in the community. For some blacks, church and gospel music became an outlet for their frustrations, and for others, secular music, like the blues, was the outlet they needed.

The blues became a means of escape from problems to which there was no immediate answer.³⁴ It opened up a whole world that a man could insert himself into and create a story. The blues was a state of mind that a person could sing himself into,

³² Bruce Bastin. *Red River Blues: The Blues Tradition in the Southeast*. University of Illinois Press, 1986. 5. Print.

³³ Bruce Bastin. *Red River Blues*. 19.

³⁴ Bruce Bastin. *Red River Blues*. 23.

where he could sing about the small details of everyday life that subliminally captured the larger social situation. Through the lyrics of heartache, hardship, and rootlessness, a blues musician could capture the plight of a black man in the South.

The blues has always been viewed as a very depressing and pessimistic style of music, but buried inside these feelings are feelings of hope, honor, and happiness. It clearly sounds strange, and to get a better understanding Paul Oliver expands on the issue in *Blues Fell This Morning*.

The most astonishing aspect of the blues is that, though replete with a sense of defeat and downheartedness, they are not intrinsically pessimistic; their burden of woe and melancholy is dialectically redeemed through sheer force of sensuality, into an almost exultant affirmation of life, of love, of sex, or movement, of hope. No matter how repressive was the American environment, the Negro never lost faith in or doubted his deeply endemic capacity to live.³⁵

Two of the most important developments for the blues musician in the Delta during the 1890s were the expansion of the railroad and the post office's mail-order catalog. These expansions were important for one simple reason: it gave blacks access to acquiring their own musical instruments, namely the guitar. "From 1860 to 1910 railroad construction averaged over 4,000 miles per year. By 1900 there were almost 200,000 miles; in the following decade figures jumped 25%."³⁶ This massive railroad expansion allowed goods to be delivered to many places they could not previously be delivered to, and it allowed the post office to improve their system of delivery. "In 1871 the number of post offices had reached 30,000, and by 1901 they had reached their highest-ever peak of 76,945. The system of rural free delivery, officially suggested in 1891, became a reality in 1896. In 1897 rural free delivery served 83 routes and 22,272 families; by 1907 it served 37,728 routes and 3,750,000 families."³⁷

³⁵ Paul Oliver. *Blues Fell This Morning: Meaning in the Blues*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1990. xv. Print.

³⁶ Bruce Bastin. *Red River Blues*. 14.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 15.

In 1895 a company emerged that would revolutionize the mail-order catalog and become the most widely used form of postal service, the Sears Roebuck Company. Sears forcefully yanked the business of mail-order from Montgomery Ward who had been in the mail-order business since 1872.

They were allowed to send out their catalogs by train as second-class mail which allowed the catalogs to make it into rural areas where Montgomery Ward did not do business. Sears was very customer friendly; they insisted that the customer was always right and they told their customers that if they did not have an order form for something they wanted, to write it on a piece of paper and mail it and they will take care of it. Montgomery Ward on the other hand had very strict rules and very lengthy forms.³⁸

Sears was known for sending very personable letters to its customers to make them feel good about their purchase and prove to them that Sears had their interests in mind. They also promoted the use of money orders by telling their rural customers which banks were "Sears" friendly. Customers could send their money to these banks who would create a money order and send it to Sears. Customers could also give money to the postman who would take their money to the bank for them and create a money order and mail it to Sears. These developments allowed the rural person to participate in a lifestyle that had previously only been available to a townspeople.³⁹

Musical instruments were not included in the Sears catalog until 1893, but each year after the musical instrument section grew, and in 1897 it consisted of 60 pages. In 1897, guitars had a full page in the catalog, a year warranty, and a month free trial with prices ranging from \$3.25 - \$27.00. By 1905, the catalog had six pages of guitars from \$4.95 -

³⁸ Ibid. 16.

³⁹ Bruce Bastin. *Red River Blues*. 14.

\$21.00.⁴⁰ It is unlikely that many of the people buying these guitars were blacks from the South. They did not have money to spend on luxury items like a guitar. Most likely, white people purchased these guitars and realizing it was harder to play than Sears advertised, they gave up. The guitar was then put aside, and found its way into black hands where the aspiring guitarist was more skilled and had a greater desire to learn.

At the turn of the twentieth century guitars had become relatively affordable for many blacks who wanted to learn how to play. Whether they were purchased new from a mail-order catalog or used from a local pawn shop, the guitar was becoming popular. It was a new instrument and it represented urbaneness, social status, and modernity. It carried none of the baggage that the banjo possessed: slavery, minstrel music, or any other negative stereotypes associated with race.⁴¹ It did, however, come to be seen by God fearing blacks of the South as an instrument of the devil because it was used to play secular music (the blues), which was generally played where drinking, smoking, dancing, sex, and fighting took place.

For many God fearing blacks the guitar provoked and symbolized evil acts and as with many things in black culture in the South, the guitar held many bad superstitions and associations to the devil. In *Delta Blues*, Ted Gioia writes about B.B. King's (a famous blues and jazz musician) experiences with churches in the Delta in the early twentieth century and their views on the guitar:

B.B. King found that many Delta churches would cancel the performance of his gospel singing group when they learned that the vocalists relied on guitar accompaniment—the six-string instrument had been so tainted by its association with the blues that many ministers could not bear seeing it inside the House of God.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid. 17.

⁴¹ Adam Gussow. "Ain't No Burnin' Hell: Southern Religion and the Devil's Music." *Arkansas Review: A Journal of Delta Studies* 41.2 (2010): 88. Academic Search Premier. Web. 12 Jun. 2013.

⁴² Ted Gioia. *Delta Blues*. 165.

Alan Lomax, an ethnomusicologist who studied the blues and American folklore, wrote in *The Land Where the Blues Began* about the feelings the guitar held for many God fearing blacks in the South: “The guitar is butted against the hips . . . and handled in a masturbatory way. Meanwhile, the strings are choked down close to the sound hole, and plucked, stroked, frailed, as if female erotic parts were being played with, while the instrument itself emits orgiastic-like sounds.”⁴³ With preachers demonizing the guitar it is easy to understand why for many in the South, the guitar was feared and abhorred. Despite these feelings by the God fearing black folks in the South the guitar continued to revolutionize music as the blues sound continued to develop.

The blues developed common structures for playing, and became more popular. The most common form of blues came to be known as the twelve-bar blues. The twelve-bar blues was twelve bars of music accompanied by three lines of verse. The vocals were most commonly referred to as AAA or AAB which signified that a vocal phrase would be repeated three times or repeated twice and then answered. A good example, and one of the first published blues songs was W.C. Handy’s “St. Louis Blues.” Here you can see the first line being repeated twice and then answered by a third line:

I hate to see de ev’nin’ sun go down,
Hate to see de ev’nin’ sun go down,
‘Cause ma baby, he done lef dis town.⁴⁴

The “twelve-bar blues” was the most popular but it was not the only way to perform the blues. There were eight, eleven, and twelve-and-a-half bar blues as well. The blues was a style of music that allowed and encouraged improvisation and once a blues musician was inside the music psychologically there was an infinite amount of paths to

⁴³ Alan Lomax. *The Land Where the Blues Began*. New York: Pantheon, 1993. 361. Print.

⁴⁴ W.C. Handy. “St. Louis Blues.” Pace & Handy Music Co., 1914.

follow, which proved to be an effective barrier against its standardization.⁴⁵

The guitar aided the blues musician in weakening the European system of how music should be written and composed. Blues musicians loved to tune down their guitars from the standard tuning to a half step, a whole step, or even lower. This allowed the blues musician to tune his guitar to a chord such as E or A, and play a simple sequence by the barre alone, and it allowed a lot of freedom in rhythmic-patterns and finger-picking.⁴⁶

Using a knife to slide up and down the strings was a common technique and it resembled the cry of a human that was reminiscent to field hollers during the era of slavery. A broken bottle top could be put on the finger and used to slide up and down the strings as well. Most blues musicians used this technique sparingly, but some used it almost exclusively such as Blind Willie Johnson.

In the West musicians had relied on the heptatonic scale for centuries. This scale has seven notes and is where the major and minor scales come from. Blues musicians relied on the pentatonic scale which has five notes and two different versions; the hemitonic and the anhemitonic. The hemitonic scale, unlike the anhemitonic, takes advantage of semitones which are the smallest intervals in Western music. These semitones are dissonant sounds between notes and are unique to the ear of a person used to Western music, and heptatonic scales.

Hidden inside the pentatonic scale is the mysterious tritone that many people in the South considered the note of the devil. The tritone can consist of a flattened third, fifth, or seventh note, inside the pentatonic scale and has an eerie, ominous quality. These tunings made the blues unlike any music that had been heard in the United States, which opened it up to heavy criticism because of its unknown qualities. It was so different that

⁴⁵ Paul Oliver. *Blues Fell This Morning*. 3.

⁴⁶ Paul Oliver. *The Story of the Blues*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 1998. 29. Print.

even many black people did not accept it and found its tonal qualities to be very disturbing.

Nobody knows for sure where the blues surfaced for the first time but the consensus of many blues scholars is that the blues first began blossoming in the Delta region of the state of Mississippi. The Delta region was known for its cotton fields during the nineteenth century and was proclaimed to be the most fertile soil anywhere on the globe.⁴⁷ To the people that lived in the Delta this was an ugly paradox because the majority of them lived in poverty.

The Delta region begins in Vicksburg, Mississippi and stretches north to Memphis, Tennessee. Vicksburg and Natchez were the two main cities in the Delta region and whites outnumbered blacks two to one, but in the countryside the opposite held true as blacks outnumbered whites five to one.⁴⁸ White people lived in the cities conducting business, while blacks lived in the country as slaves picking cotton in the fields.

The cities, where most cultural influences on things such as music begin to emerge, were dominated by white people but the influence that blacks had in the cities and rural Mississippi, because of their sheer numbers, shaped the cultural tone of the whole region.⁴⁹

There are three important historical encounters that helped solidify the theory the blues origins are in the Delta region. In 1901, a man named Charles Peabody, of Harvard's Peabody Museum, was the first man to document blues music. Peabody had come to the Delta region to do an archaeological dig at some Indian mounds. He brought with him a black work crew to help him uncover the mounds and as they dug one

⁴⁷ Ted Gioia. *Delta Blues*. 2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 3.

black man would sing a lyric and the rest of the men would respond with their own lyric. These men would sing about women, the bible, the road, and other topics, as they dug and they would time their digging with the rhythm of their singing. Peabody took notes about the lyrics these men sang and some musical transcriptions of the guitar notes, but he was not a practiced musician so he found it difficult to transfer such a strange type of music to paper. Despite this, his descriptions of what he witnessed were published in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1903.⁵⁰

Gertrude “Ma” Rainey was a singer with the Rabbit Foot Minstrels who toured with a vaudeville tent show that travelled all over the US. In 1902, she was performing in a small town in southern Missouri and she heard a young girl singing a song about how her man had left her. She was so intrigued by the strange tune that she began to look for similar songs and began to incorporate them into her act. Her black audience loved the songs and she became extremely popular. She was one of the first blues artists to record her music and is extremely influential to many other blues artists. She is known as the “Mother of the Blues.”

W.C. Handy was a traveling musician with Mahara’s Colored Minstrels and he too traveled all over the United States playing music. In the early 1900s he was asked to come to Mississippi to lead a black band called the Knights of Pythias.

One night in 1903, Handy was waiting for a train in Tutwiler, Mississippi and as he dozed off there was a black man next to him that played, as Handy describes, “the weirdest music I had ever heard.”⁵¹ The man sang “Goin Where the Southern Cross the Dog” three times and answered each line with a knife that he pressed against his guitar to imitate his moaning voice. Handy went on to formalize the strange style of music he

⁵⁰ Robert Palmer. *Deep Blues*. 23-25.

⁵¹ Robert Palmer. *Deep Blues*. 45.

heard and become known as the “Father of the Blues.”⁵²

Mamie Smith, Bessie Smith, and “Ma” Rainey were some of the first blues musicians to record their songs. Mamie Smith’s “Crazy Blues” were recorded on August 10, 1920 and became very popular, proving the marketability of blues music. Soon after these women became popular men started to record. Blues musicians like Charley Patton, Son House, Willie Brown, and arguably the most famous blues musician in history, Robert Johnson, were heard throughout the United States.

Robert Johnson is a legend in music because of his amazing musical talent and his dark persona. The stories surrounding Robert Johnson are dark and tell of a lanky, good-looking man with sharp features who was a restless and troubled man who made deals with the devil. He had amazing potential as a musician, and like other musicians of their day, Jim Morrison and Kurt Cobain for example, he died before his time at the young age of twenty-six.

Muddy Waters, one of the most influential blues guitarists in history, was an accomplished guitarist during the same period as Johnson, but the two did not know each other even though they had the same mentor, Son House. Waters once said of Johnson:

He used to work the juke. I don’t know what sort of work he did. He always had a guitar with him whenever I saw him around. I never did talk to him much. He was the kind of guy that you wanted to listen to, get ideas from. . . But he didn’t seem to stay in any one place too long you know, kind of restless.⁵³

Johnson was born in Hazelhurst, Mississippi, on May 8, 1911. He had a very troubled childhood, his mother did not have much success with men and he had three different fathers growing up. He grew up living on different plantations and labor camps and

⁵² Giles Oakley. *The Devil’s Music: A History of the Blues*. New York: Da Capo, 1997. 9. Print.

⁵³ John Cowley. “Really the ‘Walking Blues’: Son House, Muddy Waters, Robert Johnson and the Development of a Traditional Blues.” *Popular Music* 1 (1981): 62. JSTOR. Web. 12 Jun. 2013.

eventually ended up in Robinsonville, Mississippi where he learned how to play the diddly-bow, or Jew harp, and progressed to the guitar. He became very interested in music and practiced relentlessly. He met a local musician named Willie Brown, and his friend Charley Patton, and he followed them to juke houses and studied their techniques.

Charley Patton was an entertainer, he could do things with a guitar that people like Chuck Berry, Jimi Hendrix, and Michael Angelo would do 50 to 100 years later, like playing behind your head, playing upside down, and throwing your guitar in the air. Charley is considered to be the father of the Delta blues and Robert Johnson was heavily influenced by him.⁵⁴

One day a man came to town by the name of Son House. House began playing with Brown and Patton, and Johnson was mesmerized. These men teased Johnson a lot when they drank, and chided him about his novice guitar skills. Johnson would pick up one of their guitars whenever he got the chance, even during breaks at the local juke. House said of Johnson:

Such another racket you never heard. It'd make the people mad, you know. They'd come out and say, "Why don't y'all go in there and get that guitar away from that boy! He's running people crazy with it." I'd come back in and I'd scold him about it. "Don't do that Robert. You drive the people nuts. You can't play nothing."⁵⁵

It is obvious that these men had no idea the influence they had on a young, impressionable man who wanted to be just like them.

Johnson was seventeen years old when he met Virginia Travis and they became married. She soon became pregnant and decided to move in with her family during her pregnancy. Johnson had a stable job at this time doing farm work and playing guitar on

⁵⁴ Charles Murray. *Talkin' Charley Patton*. Dir. Stephen Gammond. White Crow, 2009. Web.

⁵⁵ Ted Gioia. *Delta Blues*. 159.

the side to supplement his income.⁵⁶ He did not want to move in with Virginia's family and decided to travel around as a guitarist and make enough money to return and support his family. David "Honeyboy" Edwards, a fellow Delta blues musician of Johnson said that he loved playing with Johnson because he could make more money in one night than he could make in a week as a field hand doing hard labor.⁵⁷

Unfortunately, Virginia died during childbirth and when Johnson came to visit her he did not receive a warm welcome from Virginia's family who viewed Johnson as a man who was gone playing the devil's music while his wife perished in childbirth. They felt that his music had attributed to his wife's death and that Johnson had relations to the devil.

While Johnson had been traveling he improved his musical skills greatly. When he visited House, Brown, and Patton again they were in awe of how much he had improved. Stories began to circulate that Johnson had made a pact with the devil while he had been gone.

Blues scholars Elijah Wald, Barry Lee Pearson, and Bill McCulloch discredit the story of Johnson selling his soul to the Devil at a crossroads. They see the story as a blot on blues scholarship and think that a moratorium should be placed on the topic.⁵⁸ This is strange because Johnson writes about the devil many times in his lyrics. Here is an example of Johnson singing about the devil in "Me and the Devil Blues:"

Early this morning
 When you knocked upon my door
 Early this morning, oooo
 When you knocked upon my door
 And I said hello Satan

⁵⁶ Ibid. 168.

⁵⁷ Luther Brown. *Talkin' Charley Patton*. Dir. Stephen Gammond. White Crow, 2009. Web.

⁵⁸ Ted Gioia. *Delta Blues*. 161.

I believe it's time to go

Me and the Devil
 Was walkin' side by side
 Me and the Devil, woooo
 Was walking side by side
 And I'm going to beat my woman
 'Til I get satisfied

She said you don't see why
 That she would dog me 'round
 (Spoken:) Now baby you know you ain't doin' me right don'tcha
 She say you don't see why, whoooo
 That she would dog me 'round
 It must-a be that old evil spirit
 So deep down in the ground
 You may bury my body
 Down by the highway side
 (Spoken:) Baby, I don't care where you bury my body when I'm dead and gone
 You may bury my body, woooo
 Down by the highway side
 So my old evil spirit
 Can get a Greyhound bus and ride⁵⁹

Ideas of meeting the devil at a crossroads are rooted deep in African tradition. A crossroads represents a connection between the earthly realm and the divine and can be a very dangerous place, especially in the South for a black man at night. Some towns could even arrest an unknown black man wandering their streets at night. Johnson describes his experience in “Crossroad Blues” by singing how he fell down on his knees asking the Lord for mercy and yelling for help from his friend Willie Brown as he is sinking down.

David Evans, a blues scholar, recorded a story told by Reverend LeDell Johnson whose brother, Tommy Johnson, a Delta blues musician, told him many times. Ledell Johnson recalls his brother's story:

Now if Tom was living, he'd tell you. He said the reason he knowed so much, said he sold himself to the devil. I asked him how. He said, “If you want to learn how to play and learn how to make songs yourself, you take your guitar and you go to where a road crosses that way, where a crossroad is. Get there, be sure to

⁵⁹ Johnson, Robert. “Me and the Devil Blues.” *The Complete Recordings*. CD. Columbia. 1990.

get there just a little 'fore twelve o'clock that night so you'll know you'll be there. You have your guitar and be playing a piece sitting there by yourself. You have to go by yourself and be sitting there playing a piece. A big black man will walk up there and take your guitar, and he'll tune it. And then he'll play a piece and hand it back to you. That's the way I learned to play anything I want." And he could.⁶⁰

It is clear from Johnson's lyrics that he was fascinated with supernatural imagery and felt like the devil was on his trail. When he heard these stories about himself he encouraged them because he felt that they could be true, although some of Johnson's satanic references are macho posturing.⁶¹ These stories heightened his fame, they were an attention grabber and any attention a struggling musician can acquire is good attention. Johnson embraced his new identity because he knew he could not escape the label that had been placed on him. His wife's passing really affected him and the centuries of African superstitions that he was exposed to his whole life became real for him.

Johnson traveled all over the US during his early twenties trying to make a name for himself. He was the new generation of blues musicians. His mentors Charley Patton and Son House were about ten to twelve years older than him and mostly played for field hands in the Delta. Johnson had ambition and did not want to be on the plantation playing for field hands. He loved whiskey and he was always well groomed and wore a nice suit to impress the ladies. Johnny Shines, a blues musician that played with Johnson described Johnson as a seduction artist. Shines said:

He played songs of seduction like "Kind-hearted Woman" and "Come on in My Kitchen" to bring women under his spell. Instead of singing to the crowd he would pick out a specific woman and he would sing a song directly to her regardless of who she was with and then he would generally take her home that evening.⁶²

⁶⁰ Ted Gioia. *Delta Blues*. 161.

⁶¹ Robert Palmer. *Deep Blues*. 127.

⁶² Johnny Shines. *The Search for Robert Johnson*. Dir. Chris Hunt. Channel 4, 1991. Web.

He eventually decided he wanted to follow in Blind Lemon Jefferson and Charley Patton's footsteps and record some of his songs.

In 1936, he went to meet H.C. Spier, a local record store owner who would record demos and send them to record labels. Spier saw potential in the demos he recorded for Johnson and passed on his name to Ernie Oertle, who controlled the Southern region for the American Record Corporation (ARC).⁶³ Oertle saw potential in Johnson as well and a recording session was arranged in San Antonio, TX where he recorded sixteen songs. One of them, "Terraplane Blues" became a regional hit and brought Johnson a relative amount of fame in the region.

In 1937, Johnson traveled to Dallas, TX which was his final recording session. He recorded thirteen songs, and the first song he recorded on that Sunday morning was "Hellhound on My Trail." This is a very unsettling and eerie song and considered to be his most masterful performance. You can sense that the hellhound is genuinely on his trail.⁶⁴

In 1938, Johnson was in Greenwood, TX playing shows at a local juke at night. The best information that exists about what happened to Johnson in Greenwood comes from David "Honeyboy" Edwards who had been traveling with Johnson at the time when they were playing some shows together. Edwards tells us that Johnson had gotten involved with the wife of the man he was working for and that the man had found out that Johnson had been seeing his wife. The man did not lose his temper but remained friendly toward Johnson so he would not suspect anything. At midnight on August 13, 1938, Edwards recalls that he walked into the juke that Johnson had been playing at and found him in the corner hunched over and very sick. He helped Johnson to the back of the juke so he

⁶³ Ted Gioia. *Delta Blues*. 176.

⁶⁴ You can listen to "Hellhound on My Trail" here:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3UVgH9JqSnQ>.

could lie down, and later accompanied Johnson to where he was staying back in town. Johnson remained in bed for several days and Sonny Boy Williamson II, a legendary blues harmonica player, visited him the day he died and was his last visitor.⁶⁵

Robert Johnson may have died before his time but his music lives on today and heavily influences musicians from many genres of music. Eric Clapton, who is considered one of the best guitarists ever, and lead guitar player to one of the very first metal bands, Cream, said of Johnson, "I think that he is the greatest folk blues guitar player that ever lived... and the greatest singer, the greatest writer..."⁶⁶

His musicianship was legendary, he could play things on a guitar that many people could only dream of playing. His voice could hit notes that make the hair stand on the back of your neck and give you that eerie feeling. Keith Richards, legendary guitarist for the Rolling Stones, said of Johnson, "his songs and the subject matter... and the way they were treated... let alone the guitar playing which is like Bach... and the voice was so eerie and compelling... and you put that in a class by itself."⁶⁷ Even though Johnson's career in music was very short he would influence music around the world in a major way, especially metal music as the supernatural and satanic imagery inspired a new generation of legendary guitarists.

During the 1930s and 1940s technology influenced farming at a relentless pace as bigger and better farm machinery was being invented and used on farms all over the South. These machines could do ten times the work of one man and were the biggest factor in the extinction of the farm hand.

Blacks began leaving the South after being fired or liberated, depending on how you

⁶⁵ David Edwards. *The Search for Robert Johnson*. Dir. Chris Hunt. Channel 4, 1991. Web.

⁶⁶ Eric Clapton. *The Search for Robert Johnson*. Dir. Chris Hunt. Channel 4, 1991. Web.

⁶⁷ Keith Richards. *The Search for Robert Johnson*. Dir. Chris Hunt. Channel 4, 1991. Web.

view it, and traveling to bigger cities like Memphis and St. Louis looking for work, and they took the blues with them. From Memphis and St. Louis they traveled to Detroit and Chicago where the blues really began to transform into a modern style of music.

Technology influenced music a lot during these decades as blues musicians began to start playing electric guitars instead of the acoustics they played in the South. The Chicago blues as they came to be known, never really became mainstream in America. It lived on the fringes of what was popular in the US during the 1950s, never being able to compete with rock and roll. Fortunately, there was a blues revival that took place in 1960s but it was not in the US, it was in Britain.

The youth in Britain were struggling to find an identity in post-WWII Britain as life for them began to change. These youth were looking for something that would reflect their new changing environment and the Chicago blues was a huge influence. Dave Allen, in "Feelin' Bad This Morning: Why the British Blues" writes, "The unexpected popularity of British blues in the 1960's is often characterized as a direct consequence of some young people's rejection of what they perceived as the artifice of pop music at a time when they needed a more real mode of cultural expression."⁶⁸ This is awkward considering blues musicians sing about oppression, sadness, and hopelessness but the blues was also music used for entertainment and celebration. The demand for blues was so strong in Britain that blues musicians began traveling to Britain to perform concerts.

Leadbelly toured Britain in 1949 and Big Bill Broonzy played many concerts in Britain throughout the 1950s. Muddy Waters played in Britain in 1958 and 1960 and both of these shows produced live recordings that were released a couple years before the Rolling Stones emerged on the British blues scene and popularized blues through rock and roll. Muddy Waters said of the Rolling Stones, "Before them people didn't know

⁶⁸ Dave Allen. "Feelin' Bad This Morning: Why the British Blues." *Popular Music* 26.1 (2007): 145. JSTOR. Web. 18 Jun. 2013.

anything about me... I was making records that were called 'race records'... Then the Rolling Stones and all those other English bands came along playing this music, and now the kids are buying my records and listening to them."⁶⁹

The arrival of the Rolling Stones signified a shift in British culture in 1963. The Stones were covering songs by Muddy Waters, Jimmy Reed, Bo Diddley, Robert Wilkins, Mississippi Fred McDowell, and Robert Johnson. Keith Richards, guitar player for the Rolling Stones, said that they started as a white London imitation of South Side Chicago blues, which is ironic considering that within a few years they were recording a blues EP at the legendary Chess Studios in Chicago.⁷⁰

Two years after the emergence of the Rolling Stones bands were popping up all over Britain playing the blues and covering songs by Howlin Wolf, Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, and many others. The British blues boom led directly to a new style of music, heavy metal.

Heavy metal is a genre of music that emerged out of the destruction of the youth revolution of the 1960s. In 1968, Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated, as well as Martin Luther King. In 1970, a terrible shooting occurred at Kent State University that permanently scarred the government and the youth counterculture. The Beatles broke up, devastating youth around the world. Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, and Janis Joplin, all died of drug overdoses devastating youth around the world. The elimination of the military draft by the government in 1973 also ended an extremely important issue that youth rallied around.

The youth counterculture collapsed after these events and the 1960s era of love and peace turned to a 1970s era of evil and darkness. Earth tones and rainbows changed to black, soft woven fiber changed to leather, and those who preserved the community

⁶⁹ Dave Allen. "Feelin' Bad This Morning." 143.

⁷⁰ Dave Allen. "Feelin' Bad This Morning." 143.

came to be known as “deadheads” or “Jesus freaks.”⁷¹ The 1970s were the “me decade” and the youth had become, as Ian Christie writes in *Sound of the Beast*, “disillusioned with pacifist ideals. Idealism was out and the new pragmatism was in.”⁷²

Since its emergence, heavy metal has been ignored and chastised by academics, rock critics, politicians, and parents. Unfortunately, for these people heavy metal has been the most enduring genre of music in the last forty years. During the 1980s especially, it was the most influential genre of music in many countries including the US.

Ronald Byrnside’s theory of how a genre of music is constructed states that genres follow a three stage pattern which is formation, crystallization, and decay. During formation a new style of music emerges out of old styles. During crystallization this style is acknowledged and recognized but the boundaries are very transparent. Decay of course, is the decline of the genre into oblivion. Heavy metal has repelled the stage of decay, according to Byrnside, where the genre will generally become so familiar and predictable that artists and audiences lose interest.⁷³

It seems people either love heavy metal or hate it because according to a survey that Robert Walser references in *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* conducted by American demographics in 1989, researchers “found that ten million people in the US (like or strongly like) heavy metal and that nineteen million strongly dislike it.”⁷⁴ By looking at this survey it is clear that no matter which side you are on people have strong feelings about heavy metal.

Heavy metal has its own code that is used to determine if a band can be considered a

⁷¹ Deena Weinstein. *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology*. New York: Lexington, 1991. 18. Print.

⁷² Ian Christie. *Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal*. New York: Harper, 2003. 7. Print.

⁷³ Deena Weinstein. *Heavy Metal*. 7.

⁷⁴ Robert Walser. *Running With the Devil*. xi.

heavy metal band. This code has a very strong base that has been created over the years. Deena Weinstein points out in *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology* that this code “also marks off a periphery at which heavy metal blends with other genres of rock music or develops offshoots of itself that violate parts of its code or develop new codes.”⁷⁵

Weinstein writes that the code used in heavy metal consists of three categories which are sonic, visual, and verbal. The sonic requirements are that a band needs a certain sound according to composition, instrumentation, and performance. Visual requirements state that authenticity is a moral virtue, there is no respect for not being yourself. The verbal requirements have wrought much controversy because metal musicians sing about taboo topics and tell the blunt truth about reality as they see it.⁷⁶

The eruption of heavy metal took place sometime between 1969 and 1972, and much like the emergence of the blues no specific date can be determined. There were new sounds emerging in bands during this time and it was clearly the formative phase of a new genre of music. Bands like Blue Cheer, Cream, and Steppenwolf were the bands breaking boundaries, but there is debate as to who is the heavy metal band that codified the sound during this period. This debate is essentially between two bands, Black Sabbath and Led Zeppelin, although some will argue for others. Americans tend to vote for Led Zeppelin in this debate and Brits tend to vote for Black Sabbath. I am an American who believes that the Chicago blues influence on British bands in the 1960s sets the stage for the emergence of heavy metal.

I agree with Andrew Cope, author and professional musician, who wrote *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music*. Cope analyzes the musical code of Black Sabbath and shows how they took blues and rock music and morphed it into something totally new, whereas Led Zeppelin took these same styles and retained them in their

⁷⁵ Deena Weinstein. *Heavy Metal*. 6.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 7.

music. Cope disagrees with authors like Deena Weinstein and Robert Walser who claim that Led Zeppelin is a heavy metal band, and writes that more musicologists need to analyze heavy metal so a more concrete origin for heavy metal can be established.⁷⁷

Black Sabbath were musicians ahead of their time in the late 1960s even though the city they grew up in was buried under the rubble of WWII. Much like their blues forefathers they grew up in a very dark and depressing environment. They did not see a future for themselves and the lyrics and the tone of their music reflect that. Their strongest musical influence was the blues and at the time of their emergence onto the music scene they considered themselves a blues band.

Black Sabbath's origins take us to Birmingham, England where in the late 1960s the music scene was growing rapidly. Birmingham was a large industrial city during the 1960s and had been labeled as such since 1776 when the industrial steam engine was invented there. During the 1820s an extensive canal system was created, allowing easier access to fuel for industry and in 1837 the Grand Junction railway was created. A year later the London and Birmingham Railway were built and the population and industry of Birmingham grew rapidly.

During WWII Birmingham was one of the leading manufacturing cities of arms and planes, and because of this, the German Luftwaffe bombed it mercilessly. It was the third most bombed city in Britain during the war after London and Liverpool. Over 5,000 homes had been vaporized; 51,000 were declared uninhabitable; and over 100,000 more had been damaged.⁷⁸ These statistics were obtained by a government housing survey in 1946 and they also describe the conditions of the city in that year, which were very poor.

⁷⁷ Andrew Cope. *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music*. Farnham Surrey: Ashgate, 2010. 4. Print.

⁷⁸ Leigh Harrison. "Factory Music: How the Industrial Geography and Working-Class Environment of Post-War Birmingham Fostered the Birth of Heavy Metal." *Journal of Social History* 44.1 (2010): 146. JSTOR. Web. 12 Jun. 2013.

The housing survey states that there was a major problem with overcrowding and the density of the population was compounded by factories that were blended with residential areas. They also discovered that noise and smoke coming from the factories prevented light and air reaching the homes around them.⁷⁹ This survey shows how industry and destruction were influential subjects in the lives of youth that grew up in this city during the 1950s and 1960s.

By the late 1960s, which is roughly twenty years after the war, only 38,000 of the uninhabitable homes had been demolished. Terrance Butler, bassist for Black Sabbath recalls, "In the second World War, in Birmingham, that was where all the ammunition was made. That's why it got so heavily bombed. So there was a lot of bricks all over the place, bombed out buildings, all that kind of stuff."⁸⁰

Wages were higher in the 1960s for the working class than during the war. This allowed the youth in Birmingham to pursue more recreational activities, which for some meant buying instruments. Unfortunately life in the city was still dark, loud, polluted, and depressing, and many of the youth believed they were destined to work and die here just like their parents.

One way of escape from reality was music; teens formed bands and played at bars and clubs. British youth liked American popular music at the time but the youth in Birmingham could not identify with it. Peace, love, and harmony were not characteristics of life that youth in Birmingham associated with their lives. Ozzy Osbourne, the lead singer of Black Sabbath, recalls, "We lived in a dreary, polluted, dismal town and we were angry about it. For us the whole hippy thing was bullshit. The only flower you saw in Aston was on a gravestone. So we thought, let's scare the whole fucking planet with

⁷⁹ Leigh Harrison. "Factory Music." 147.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 149.

music.”⁸¹

Leigh Harrison writes in *Factory Music: How the Industrial Geography and Working-Class Environment of post-War Birmingham Fostered the Birth of Heavy Metal* that Ozzy Osbourne was born in 1948 and had a rough working class upbringing. Both of his parents worked in a factory and his dad was a drunk. He had five brothers and sisters and they all shared the same bed growing up and they each only had one pair of pants, one shirt, one jacket, and no underclothing.⁸² The other members of Black Sabbath grew up in the same neighborhood so their upbringings were similar.

Tony Iommi, the guitar player for Black Sabbath, worked in a factory, the Lucas car plant, when he was eighteen. One day he had a dangerous accident at work that influenced his style of guitar playing as well as the future of metal music. Iommi recalls:

I worked in a factory, doing welding and stuff... the person who cut the sheet metal wasn't in that day, so they put me on this sheet metal machine that chops and bends metal. I had never worked on it before. It came down... and cut the ends of my fingers off, it made me create a different style of playing. Which was great really, because it eventually became heavy metal.⁸³

Iommi also stated that growing up in Birmingham really affected his attitude and style of play: “Aston (Birmingham) was very rough, not a good area... it had just got run down. I hated living there. I hated it. I think that influenced our music, the area where we came from.”⁸⁴

Terrance “Geezer” Butler, bass player for Black Sabbath, was also their lyricist. It is obvious when reading lyrics to Black Sabbath songs that the environment he grew up

⁸¹ Andrew Cope. *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music*. Farnham Surrey: Ashgate, 2010. 30. Print.

⁸² Leigh Harrison. “Factory Music.” 148.

⁸³ Ibid. 150.

⁸⁴ *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*. Dir. Sam Dunn, and Scot McFayden. Seville Pictures, 2005. DVD.

in influenced his lyrics. A great example is the song “Wicked World” from their first album, *Black Sabbath*.

The world today is such a wicked place
 Fighting going on between the human race
 People got to work just to earn their bread
 While people just across the sea are counting their dead

A politician's job they say is very high
 For he has to choose who's got to go and die
 They can put a man on the moon quite easy
 While people here on Earth are dying of all diseases

A woman goes to work every day after day
 She just goes to work just to earn her pay
 Child sitting crying by a life that's harder
 He doesn't even know who is his father⁸⁵

Butler strayed from the misogynist themes of rock and blues and wrote about fantasy, horror movies, like Boris Karloff's *Three Faces of Fear*, and science fiction like HG Wells. Butler recalls, “I still love all that stuff - *The Time Machine*, *The Invisible Man* - because it's so out there. I was living in Aston, the shittiest place on earth. I needed escapism.”⁸⁶ Butler believed that if people would pay to be scared by a movie then why would they not pay to be scared by music?⁸⁷ He took the name Black Sabbath from one of *The Three Faces of Fear* films and penned some lyrics that would freak people out. A great example is the song “Black Sabbath” off of the album *Black Sabbath*.

What is this that stands before me?
 Figure in black which points at me
 Turn around quick, and start to run
 Find out I'm the chosen one
 Oh nooo!

Big black shape with eyes of fire
 Telling people their desire
 Satan's sitting there, he's smiling
 Watches those flames get higher and higher

⁸⁵ Black Sabbath. “Wicked World.” *Black Sabbath*. CD. Vertigo. 1970.

⁸⁶ Leigh Harrison. “Factory Music.” 149.

⁸⁷ Andrew Cope. *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music*. 34.

Oh no, no, please God help me!

Is it the end, my friend?
Satan's coming 'round the bend
People running 'cause they're scared
The people better go and beware!
No, no, please, no!⁸⁸

The lyrics to this song can be viewed in many ways, for me it is reminiscent to the story of Robert Johnson at the crossroads in Mississippi seventy years earlier when he sold his soul to the devil.

Bill Ward, drummer for Black Sabbath, was a very aggressive drummer and this aspect of drumming became very important in metal music. He credits his aggressive style of play to the environment he grew up in and the sounds of the factories. Ward recalls, "You could hear the drop of the stamp forges, and I'd be laying in bed at night, just kinda tapping on the headboard, putting the extra rhythm into the stamp."⁸⁹

Tony Iommi was the core of Black Sabbath, and as we can now see after forty years of metal, the core of a new genre of music. Deena Weinstein said, "If you don't have an electric guitar with really good amps and really good distortion you don't have the core of heavy metal."⁹⁰ When Iommi played his guitar again after his injury he discovered that bending the strings was painful so in order to remedy this he began to tune down his guitar.

A guitar is normally tuned to E which is the standard tuning and the strings are very taut. When it is tuned down you are loosening the strings making them easier to bend, lowering the pitch, and changing the tone. Iommi would tune his guitar to C# which is one-and-a-half steps lower than standard tuning, giving him a very heavy sound. C# and

⁸⁸ Black Sabbath. "Black Sabbath." *Black Sabbath*. CD. Vertigo. 1970.

⁸⁹ Leigh Harrison. "Factory Music." 150.

⁹⁰ *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*. Dir. Sam Dunn, and Scot McFayden. Seville Pictures, 2005. DVD.

lower tunings are normally avoided in rock music, which added to the uniqueness of Iommi's sound. Iommi played a Gibson SG and since the neck was shorter on this guitar it gave him a darker sound as well. Andrew Cope, a musician and music scholar, explains, "The shorter the scale length of the instrument the 'darker' it will sound. Thus, a Gibson SG (used by Iommi) with a scale length of 24.75 inches tuned to E would sound darker than a Fender Stratocaster (used, for example, by Jimi Hendrix) in the same key with its scale length of 25.5."⁹¹ Cope gives us much insight into Iommi's influences, style, and technique, which help us understand how the sound of metal was created.

Iommi's hero was Django Reinhardt, a European jazz guitarist, who many consider one of the greatest guitar players to ever have lived. Reinhardt was badly burned in a fire when he was eighteen and doctors told him he would never play his guitar again. Reinhardt dismissed the doctors and through perseverance and determination taught himself how to play the guitar again in a new way using only his ring finger and middle finger on his left hand to press the strings down on the neck because his ring and pinky finger were paralyzed.

Iommi took inspiration from Reinhardt after his tragic accident in the factory and retaught himself how to play the guitar with no middle and ring finger. Cope writes:

What he did to overcome the problem of the missing middle fingers was to play his chords with the index and little finger resulting in a chord with no 3rd, a kind of mutant chord with no major/minor tonality but having a new, unique character marked by a certain starkness when combined with the timbre of down-tuned guitars.⁹²

Iommi was also influenced by Alvin Lee, the guitarist and lead singer for the band Ten Years After. This band was famous within the 1960s British blues scene and Lee used modes (types of musical scales and melodic phrasing within a given scale) and the

⁹¹ Andrew Cope. *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music*. 32.

⁹² *Ibid.* 31.

pentatonic minor scale in unique ways, adding his own blues notes. He also played the pentatonic minor scale in its pure form while adding melodic riffs using different modes.⁹³

People respond to different modes in different ways and metal musicians choose their mode carefully to fit the theme of their music. Walser writes in *Running with the Devil* about modes and how the terminology we use for them is taken from Medieval and Renaissance music theory. Modes go back much further than this though as people alive during the Renaissance borrowed modes from the Greeks who named different scales after the musical styles of different ethnic groups: the Dorians, the Aeolians, the Phrygians, and others.

Walser also gives a great example that shows how playing the same piece in different modes can affect how a musical piece is perceived. He writes:

A mode is a scale that implies a set of functional syntactical relationships and affective potentials. The differences are quite easy to hear: imagine the beginning riff of Deep Purple's "Smoke on the Water" in its original blues-Aeolian form (G-B flat-C, G-B flat-D flat-C); now play it in major/Ionian (G-B-C, G-B-D-C) - it sounds like a Pat Boone cover; give it a Phrygian twist (G-A flat-D, G-A flat-E flat-D), and it sounds like Megadeth.⁹⁴

Iommi began to experiment with these styles and techniques and he created a style and sound that no one had yet experienced. Iommi tells us in *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*, a film directed by anthropologist Sam Dunn, how music influenced his style: "I liked the blues. That's actually where we started. Before we called ourselves Black Sabbath we were a blues/jazz band."⁹⁵

Black Sabbath did not use the coding of rock and roll in their music, they used blues styles and techniques, but the context of their music was so far from the blues that the

⁹³ Andrew Cope. *Black Sabbath and the Rise of Heavy Metal Music*. 32.

⁹⁴ Robert Walser. *Running With the Devil*. 47.

⁹⁵ *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*. Dir. Sam Dunn, and Scot McFayden. Seville Pictures, 2005. DVD.

band acquired a whole new identity. Black Sabbath was considered musically violent; Bill Ward attacked his drums with ferocious strikes, the volume and distortion of Iommi's guitars were deafening along with the level of attack (how hard the guitar strings are plucked) he used while playing his riffs. On top of it all the violent outbursts of Ozzy created a barrage of sound hitting your face like a freight train. Iommi described their sound as "The sound of being... you know... demonic. It just appealed to us. We liked what we were doing. We liked the idea of these evil sorta sounding riffs."⁹⁶

Black Sabbath was an angry band and this is where people have a problem understanding metal music. These guys were angry with their situation, they were not angry or hateful of others, and they were not evil, they were young guys who felt trapped, betrayed, and hopeless, and as Ozzy recalls, "We had nothing to gain, nothing to lose... it was better than working in a factory."⁹⁷

Metal was a constructive release for the anger they felt. It was an escape into another realm where tension and frustration rode away on the notes being aggressively played. This is a very important theme in metal music and we can see it remains true from the original blues musicians, to the birth of metal, to the metal musicians in Iran. When people are oppressed their feelings of depression, anger, and hopelessness build and compress and need an outlet; for some that outlet is metal. Bill Ward described Black Sabbath's music as "healthy anger" so releasing these feelings through metal is a positive thing and should be viewed as such.⁹⁸

Black Sabbath, along with bands like Led Zeppelin and Deep Purple were the most

⁹⁶ *Metal: A Headbanger's Journey*. Dir. Sam Dunn, and Scot McFayden. Seville Pictures, 2005. DVD.

⁹⁷ "Never Say Die." *Seven Ages of Rock: Heavy Metal 1970-1991*. Dir. Anna Gravelle. BBC Worldwide, 2007. Web.

⁹⁸ Ian Christie. *Sound of the Beast*. 4.

influential bands during the formative years of metal music. According to Weinstein the formative years ended in 1972 and metal began to crystallize. The crystallization phase lasted from 1973 to 1979 and bands like Judas Priest, Alice Cooper, Motorhead, Thin Lizzy, UFO, and Rainbow began adding to the bricolage of sonic, visual, and verbal categories that make up the genre of metal.⁹⁹

Judas Priest appeared on the metal scene right on Black Sabbath's heels and took the genre in a different direction musically by creating more organized music. Black Sabbath was very primal and chaotic and as Ian Christie writes in *Sound of the Beast*, "Judas Priest's music was very formal, tightly organized around breaks, bridges, and dynamic peaks."¹⁰⁰

Rob Halford, the lead singer of Judas Priest, wrote lyrics about politics, oppression, genocide, fantasy, and literature. Coming from the same area of Britain as Black Sabbath he shared much of their outlook on life and perceived the world and its happenings in much the same manner. Christie writes:

This was the mission of heavy metal: to confront the big picture - to create a connection between life and the cosmos. If there were to be love songs, they would be epics, not odes to teenage puppy love at the soda shop. Lyrical conflict would exist on a grand scale, which in the 1970's meant lashing out against despots, dictators, and antidemocratic Watergate burglars.¹⁰¹

Visually, Judas Priest created an image that would be copied by metal bands for decades. They popularized leather, wearing the stuff from head to toe complimented with steel studs and spikes. They began using pyrotechnics which is a staple of any big metal concert and Halford's epic stage entrances on a Harley Davidson is a common

⁹⁹ Deena Weinstein. *Heavy Metal*. 21.

¹⁰⁰ Ian Christie. *Sound of the Beast*. 20.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 21.

talking point of anyone who has been to a Judas Priest show. Rob Halford reminisced about the early years of their existence:

We really, truly created metal fans as we made album to album. We would go around the UK and Europe, and eventually over to America, and people were just slowly turning on to this brand-new style and brand new sound. Each generation finds something that's relative musically, that they want to identify with and call their own—that's how we were connecting with our new fans.¹⁰²

From 1979 to 1983 metal music took an unprecedented turn and the decay that Byrnside claimed all musical genres pass through did not happen as metal music began to grow at a rapid pace. It is true that during the last half of the 1970s record sales for metal music had slumped because of disco, punk, and rock, but just as Black Sabbath had exploded out of Britain, new bands were about to explode out of Britain again and what is known as the “New Wave of British Heavy Metal” took place from 1979 to 1981. Bands like Iron Maiden, Scorpions, Def Leppard, Saxon, Motorhead, and Venom began bringing new fans to the genre by the thousands. Walser writes in *Running with the Devil*, “The new wave of metal featured shorter, catchier songs, more sophisticated production techniques, and higher technical standards.”¹⁰³ Bands in Britain and the US began appearing everywhere and by 1983 two major subgenres had established themselves.

These subgenres were very much the opposite of each other. The first, lite metal included bands such as Van Halen, Def Leppard, and Poison. This genre was aimed more at the mainstream of music and removed the thick undertones of traditional metal while emphasizing melodic guitar work. The vocals utilized harmony much more than traditional metal vocals and abstained from growling. The lyrics focused on love and lust rather than heaven and hell or politics. Lite metal musicians ditched the black leather

¹⁰² Ian Christie. *Sound of the Beast*. 22.

¹⁰³ Robert Walser. *Running With the Devil*. 12.

and primped their big hair and wore colorful costumes. Metal's traditional audience had many names for these bands like "poseurs," "nerf metal," "poodle bands," and "glam."¹⁰⁴

Next, thrash metal emerged out of the new wave of British heavy metal and punk (another genre of music that exploded in the late 1970s). Thrash metal was a "fundamentalist strain" of metal music, as Weinstein calls it in *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology*, meaning that many traditional metalheads were disgusted with the flamboyance and decadence of lite metal and wanted to return to the golden age of metal, or what many metalheads perceived as a prior state of purity.¹⁰⁵

Thrash metal was different from traditional metal in that it sped the tempo up and stayed away from many of the elements that characterized it; the overblown, the fantastic, and the heroic. It succeeded in being everything that lite metal was not, giving it a very mean image. Lyrically, it moved away from the vague, mysterious, and elusive and took a more direct approach. The lyrics focused on the real world, corruption, war, politics, and the atrocious way people around the world treat each other. Some of the bands that make up this genre are Metallica, Megadeth, Sepultura, Anthrax, and Slayer.¹⁰⁶

Thrash metal grew in popularity in the mid-1980s, and from this genre many metalheads went even further underground and new genres of metal were spawned. These genres, like black metal and grindcore are known as "extreme metal." Michelle Phillipov writes in *Death Metal and Music Criticism* that "extreme metal refers to a diverse collection of musical styles, each of which seeks to disrupt the expected conventions of pop, rock, and heavy metal in an attempt to remain as inaccessible as

¹⁰⁴ Deena Weinstein. *Heavy Metal*. 46.

¹⁰⁵ Kahn-Harris, Keith. 2007. *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge*. New York: Berg, 2007. 2. Print.

¹⁰⁶ Deena Weinstein. *Heavy Metal*. 50.

possible to “mainstream” audiences.”¹⁰⁷ Extreme metal challenges our notion of what music is and how it can be understood. The sounds created and fused can be heard nowhere else, as experimentation with instruments and equipment created endless possibilities.¹⁰⁸

Black metal emerged in the early 1980s when a band called Venom, who was musically a very fast tempo band, released an album titled *Black Metal* with very anti-Christian and satanic themes. Venom and many of the black metal bands that followed during the 1980s were not actual Satanists, occult themes were simply a powerful resource for songwriting and created a very visceral and entertaining live show.¹⁰⁹ Of course this takes us back to Robert Johnson who used these same themes to get attention. This all changed in the early 1990s with the emergence of Norwegian black metal in Norway.

Bands like Mayhem, Burzum, Darkthrone, Gorgoroth, and others defined themselves as staunch opponents of Christianity. They proclaimed a very misanthropic style of Satanism and even spoke out against the Church of Satan for their freedom and life-loving views.¹¹⁰ They hated everything and everyone and the black metal scene in Scandinavia eventually became awash in crime, church burnings, verbal and physical band disputes, and murder.¹¹¹ After the deadly second wave of black metal came to an

¹⁰⁷ Phillipov, Michelle. 2012. *Death metal and Music Criticism: Analysis at the Limits*. Lanham: Lexington, 2012. xiv. Print.

¹⁰⁸ Kahn-Harris, Keith. *Extreme Metal*. 6.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 38.

¹¹⁰ Esa Lahdenpera. “Northern Black Metal Legends.” *Kill Yourself! Magazine*, 1995. Web. Black Metal Archive. <http://blackmetalarchive.wordpress.com/2013/07/01/northern-black-metal-legends/>.

¹¹¹ The black metal scene in Scandinavia is and was extremely complex, if you want to learn more about the bands and the chaos surrounding them read *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground*.

end many subgenres of black metal began to emerge, like Doom, Viking, War, Blackened, Suicidal, Symphonic, and Pagan metal.

The most controversial new subgenre of black metal is unblack metal. Black metal musicians denounce this genre because the fundamental ideology of black metal is against Christianity but unblack metal artists claim that black metal has transformed from an ideological movement to a purely musical genre as Simon Rosen, the lead singer of unblack metal band Crimson Moonlight said:

We believe that all kinds of music are now neutral. I mean, a music genre cannot be “evil” itself. It all depends on the purpose: why you’re doing it and what the lyrics are about. I will use an illustration to explain: a knife in the hands of a murderer can kill life, but a knife in the hands of a doctor can save life. Now is the knife evil itself? No, it depends on how you use it. The power is in our hands to decide what we want to use music for.¹¹²

Black metal and its subgenres have also been heavily influencing the Middle East and the anti-Christian ideology of the Norwegian black metal scene has influenced a lot of bands in the Middle East to replace the anti-Christian ideology with an anti-Islam ideology. For example, Seeds of Iblis are a black metal band from Iraq with songs like “The Black Quran” and “Allah is Dead” the ideology of the band is clear. Black metal in Iran is very popular, if you go to Encyclopedia Metallum and search the active metal bands in Iran, many of them are black metal bands.

The most important subgenre to emerge out of thrash metal and early black metal was death metal. The practitioners of death metal were born around the time of Black Sabbath’s debut and grew up listening to the songs of heavy metal bands during the 1970s and 1980s, not the blues musicians that the founders of metal had been influenced by. The bands that would emerge in the death metal scene like Death, Morbid Angel, and Deicide would take traditional heavy metal and create a louder,

¹¹² Jason Jordan. “Crimson Moonlight at their Most Brutal.” *Ultimate Metal*, Jul. 2003. Web. Ultimate Metal. <http://www.ultimatemetal.com/forum/interviews/195667-crimson-moonlight-their-most-brutal.html>.

angrier, and more chaotic genre of metal.

Christie described what death metal brought to the scene in *Sound of the Beast* writing, “Death metal elevated songwriting to a brutal new level of melodic depth, compositional prowess and technical skill.”¹¹³ It was just as fast as thrash metal but it also slowed the beat down drastically creating many tempo and time signature changes within a single song. Drummers utilized two bass drums that could create a wall of thumping that is known as “machine gun bass.” Guitars played bone-crushing riffs using palm muting and tremolo picking, taking the listener down and bringing them up with wild shredding solos. Vocally singers utilized guttural growls, roars, and grunts to emphasize their intense lyrical content.

Death metal has spawned numerous subgenres, for example, brutal death metal, deathcore, Swedish death metal, melodic death metal, technical death metal, black metal, deathrash, and deathgrind. Some of these have genres that have spawned under them as well, and this proves that the possibilities within metal music are virtually endless.¹¹⁴

Trey Azagoth, guitarist for Morbid Angel, described what the genre of death metal meant to him:

Some people think death metal is all about a sound. They think if you get a heavy distorted guitar and growling vocals you’ve got death metal. Death metal is a feeling—it’s not just a sound. The way the rhythm attacks and moves is what matters. I mixed up a groovy extreme—a chaos, a madness, a bunch of piranhas that would be jumping out of the speakers and chewing you as you listened. That’s what I wanted to pursue with my playing. I wanted to get something that was like listening to Black Sabbath on an eight-track tape that was dragging, or a warped record. Like a storm moving forward, something triumphant.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Christie, Ian. *Sound of the Beast*. 239.

¹¹⁴ The website “Map of Metal” introduces a user to all of the different genres of metal and from which genre they emerged and what genres each is related to. This website creates a visual picture of the world of metal music. Go to <http://mapofmetal.com/#/home>

¹¹⁵ Ian Christie. *Sound of the Beast*. 239.

Extreme metal was underground so musicians and fans relied on live shows and cassette tape-trading to distribute music. Tapes were recorded by simply popping a cassette into a boombox and sitting it in front of a stack of speakers and hitting record. These tapes would be inserted into networks of traders and they copied it and passed it on or sold it. With the cassette and the help of local media outlets musicians and fans were connected throughout the US and progressively all over the world.

Tape trading was taken to a whole new level as the death metal scene grew in popularity during the 1990s. People were recording performances and sharing them all over the world. A most important forum for people to trade was through magazines or newsletters that connected people through classifieds or advertising. One of the most influential magazines that was established in the late 1980s was *Metal Maniacs* which included pen-pal listings, ads for tape traders, amateur bands, and a forum where readers could write about anything from scene politics to world politics.¹¹⁶

Albert Mudrian describes what tape trading meant to death metal and the global metal scene perfectly in his book *Choosing Death*, he wrote, “If it hadn’t been for the demo tape-trading underground, death metal and grindcore wouldn’t have reached the attention of their audiences, of the record companies who signed the bands, or of the musicians themselves.”¹¹⁷ Little did everyone know that these tapes arrived in places many people never heard of, and knew nothing about.

A field of research that has been growing is global metal studies which compares local and global metal scenes around the world. Scholars like Keith Kahn-Harris compared local and global scenes in Israel in an article called “I Hate This Fucking Country: Dealing with the Global and the Local in the Israeli Extreme Metal Scene.” The

¹¹⁶ Ian Christie. *Sound of the Beast*. 249.

¹¹⁷ Mudrian, Albert. *Choosing Death: The Improbable History of Death metal and Grindcore*. Los Angeles: Feral House, 2004. 21. Print.

relationship between these scenes clash with the dominant idea of what it means to be an Israeli. He has also studied extreme metal in Brazil focusing on the famous thrash metal band Sepultura. He wrote "Roots? The Relationship between the Global and the Local within the Global Extreme Metal Scene" and showed how Sepultura managed their Brazilian culture and a Western style of music in the global scene.

Mark Levine, author of multiple works about global metal including the book *Heavy Metal Islam*, has researched metal scenes in the Middle East and North Africa and explains how metal takes on a new meaning in these places. Here metal is a cultural tool used to criticize the status quo and imagine a more positive, fulfilling, and free life that removes them from under the oppression that they are experiencing.

Governments in many of these countries outlaw metal recordings, concerts, metal clothing, and even alterations to your appearance that would associate you with the metal community or the Western world, such as long hair and tattoos. These governments fear metalheads because they threaten the authoritarian order that has been established and raise moral, ethical, and political questions. Levine determined that metal has an important role to play in the transition to greater transparency, tolerance, and democracy in these nations, including Iran.

Iran has had a very rocky relationship with music over the centuries, and during the late 1960s that relationship was rocky as ever. The economy was booming and entertainment, such as music, was in high demand. Hamid Dabashi, Professor of Iranian studies at Columbia University, describes Iran in the late 1960s saying "There was a cosmopolitan multicultural... before multiculturalism became a four letter word here. A presence in Iran in the 1960s and '70s that you would have a very difficult time dividing it between westernization and non-westernization. It was a global culture with

an Iranian spin on it.”¹¹⁸ Some traditional Iranians and Muslims felt that the music scene in Iran was sleazy and irreligious, that it was too Western and threatened Persian culture. There were also those who felt the opposite, or simply did not care.

Bruno Nettl, an ethnomusicologist, was doing fieldwork in Iran during the late 1960s and early 1970s. He was interacting with a small group of classical Persian musicians and observing their lives. From his writings during this time he gives a detailed view into the music scene in Iran and the attitudes of Iranians toward music. In a formal interview Nettl described how music is viewed in Iran, “Music is simultaneously feared and loved, enjoyed but viewed with suspicion; it is subject to a kind of ambivalence. In Islamic societies, music must be kept far from the centers of religion; devout Muslims should avoid it. Instruments are to be viewed with suspicion, and dancing is to be viewed with even more suspicion.”¹¹⁹

While Nettl was in Tehran the population of the city was only about four million people. That is not very many people considering that in 2013 the population of Tehran is about 12.2 million people.¹²⁰ The population of Iran has exploded since the revolution and I will explain the reason for this shortly, but in the late 1960s Iran was growing at a steady pace. There were few musicians in Iran at this time and according to Nettl there were only between 100 and 200 professional musicians in the whole country.¹²¹ These musicians regarded themselves as professionals in much the same sense as professional musicians regard themselves in the West. They performed on the radio and

¹¹⁸ Hamid Dabashi. *Googoosh: Iran's Daughter*. Dir. Farhad Zamani. Atash, 2000. Film.

¹¹⁹ Patricia Shehan Campbell. "Bruno Nettl on Music of Iran." *Music Educators Journal* 81.3 (1994): 19. *Professional Development Collection*. Web. 18 Oct. 2013.

¹²⁰ World Capital Institute. "2013 Tehran, Iran." *Worldcapitalinstitute.org*. World Capital Institute, 02 Mar. 2013. Web. 03 July 2013.
<http://www.worldcapitalinstitute.org/makciplatform/2013-tehran-iran>.

¹²¹ Patricia Shehan Campbell. "Bruno Nettl on Music of Iran." 19.

the stage, they taught students, and they performed for the government at regular and special events, all for a fee of course.¹²²

There were three main types of music in Iran at this time and they were classical Persian music, popular music, and folk music. Folk music was not necessarily the least popular but it was hard to judge its popularity in Iran because it was a very regional music that changed dramatically throughout Iran.

Persian classical music on the other hand was known by most Iranians. By this I mean they knew the music existed, they had heard it throughout their lives, but it was not necessarily something that they listened to for pleasure.

Many Iranians told Nettl that although they did not actively listen to classical Persian music they felt the music represented them. They felt that this music separated their culture from neighboring cultures around Iran. They also felt that listening to classical Persian music identified them in a way that was not necessarily good, and potentially dangerous. It either identified them as someone very traditional which meant that you identified too much with Iranian culture before the arrival of Islam, or it identified them as a more modern person who did not care much about the Iranian clergy's disapproval of music.¹²³

Classical Persian music is very complex and very different than the Western structure of music. In the West we have two modes that we use called "major" and "minor," but in Iran there are twelve modes known as "dastgahs" and each of these dastgahs has a different mood. Inside a dastgah a musician will use quarter tones, half tones, and whole tones. Quarter tones are rarely used in Western music because they do not translate

¹²² Bruno Nettl. "Attitudes towards Persian Music in Tehran, 1969." *The Music Quarterly* 56.2 (1970): 194. JSTOR. Web. 03 July 2013.

¹²³ Bruno Nettl. "Attitudes towards Persian Music in Tehran, 1969." *The Music Quarterly* 56.2 (1970): 194. JSTOR. Web. 03 July 2013.

into Western music theory easily. Some of the *dastgahs* are actually unplayable on fixed key instruments like the piano. Rhythm is also very complex and includes nonmetric music as well as music in many different meters.¹²⁴

To play classical Persian music you must study it for four years under a master. There is a book, known as the *radif*, which is a book of small pieces of work, known as “*gusheh*,” that have been compiled over the centuries. The “*gusheh*” can vary depending on the master that you are studying under. The *radif* is learned by memorizing the entire thing and can take anywhere from eight to ten hours to play. It is never performed in public, only for the master, and taught to be your guide as you begin to write your own music and choose your own direction.¹²⁵

Popular music really grew in popularity as Iran became more modernized. Pop music in Iran was very different than Western pop music because it drew inspiration not only from the West, but from Iran, and many of its neighbors, such as Egypt, India, and different Arabic countries. When it came to performing though, Persian pop music was divided specifically into Western and Persian styles.¹²⁶

The Western style was performed in nightclubs, similar to nightclubs in the West. The music was usually performed by Iranians singing in English, French, or Italian, but there were many foreign musical groups in Iran at this time performing as well. These venues brought in tourists, and modern-minded Iranians because they attempted to imitate Western nightclubs. They were also very women friendly.¹²⁷

The Persian style of pop music was performed by Iranian musicians in large music

¹²⁴ Patricia Shehan Campbell. "Bruno Nettl on Music of Iran." 19.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 19.

¹²⁶ Bruno Nettl. "Persian Popular Music in 1969." *Ethnomusicology* 16.2 (1972): 219. JSTOR. Web. 03 July 2013.

¹²⁷ Ibid. 219.

halls that were almost exclusively found in one area of Tehran. The main street through this area was called Lalezar Avenue and featured countless music halls to choose from. These halls were open for business about five to six hours every evening and were frequented almost exclusively by men. Interestingly, each hall has a specific clientele that is based upon occupation. There were music halls for taxi drivers, businessmen, construction workers, etc.¹²⁸

Much of the entertainment in these music halls was dancing: folk dancing, unauthentic dances from neighboring countries, belly dancing, and even more suggestive dancing. All of these dances were performed using different ensembles of instruments. There were groups who performed using only Persian traditional instruments, groups using only Western instruments, and groups who chose to use both. Women were very popular performers at these halls and performed many different styles of Persian pop music.¹²⁹

Googoosh, who is without a doubt the most iconic singer in the history of Iran, grew up in the nightclubs and cabarets of Tehran during the 1950s. Her father was an acrobat who performed in cabarets in Tehran and she lived with her father during her childhood in a small apartment directly above one of these cabarets. Googoosh began performing at the age of five or six and she became so popular that she quickly began making more money than her father.¹³⁰ By her teens she was already the most popular singer in Iran and she was performing, recording, acting in films, and making television appearances. She is one of the main reasons pop music became such a force in Iran and one of the reasons the record and television industry began to blossom as well.

¹²⁸ Bruno Nettl. "Persian Popular Music in 1969." 220.

¹²⁹ Bruno Nettl. "Attitudes towards Persian Music in Tehran, 1969." 196.

¹³⁰ *Googoosh: Iran's Daughter*. Dir. Farhad Zamani. Atash, 2000. Film.

The record companies that were producing records in Iran were small but there was a lot of them and they were mostly located in the entertainment district of Tehran. Most of these record companies produced recordings of Western popular music at cheap prices (a 45 record could be purchased for as little as thirty-three cents from a record store in Iran in 1971).¹³¹ These records were one-sided and held four songs. Nettl describes in his article “Persian Popular Music in 1969” how the record labels and listeners could not distinguish between the different genres of Western music. The records contained a random grouping of four songs from genres like rock, soul, jazz, gospel, and it made no difference to the listener.¹³²

As I have discussed, heavy metal appeared in Britain in the late 1960s, and by the 1970s there is evidence that rock music and possibly metal music had influenced musicians in Iran. There was a band known as The Scorpio who played in Tehran in the early 1970s. They formed in 1971 and they performed for about four years together covering Western rock hits. They played in a German club in Tehran that only allowed performers of rock music, as well as other nightclubs and discos.¹³³

The most influential rock musician in Iran during the 1970s was Kourosh Yaghmaei. He was a masterful guitar player and considered the Jimi Hendrix of Iran. His father had given him a santour when he was ten, and he learned a lot about classical Persian music. When he was fifteen he acquired a guitar and became immersed in Western rock music.¹³⁴ His biggest influences were the Ventures, the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and Bob Dylan and he successfully melded these influences with his knowledge of classical

¹³¹ Bruno Nettl. “Persian Popular Music in 1969.” 221.

¹³² Ibid. 221.

¹³³ *The Scorpio*. Dir. Faride Saremi and Omid Hashemlu. Rush Group, 2010. Film.

¹³⁴ “Kourosh Yaghmaei Biography.” *Kourosh-yaghmaei.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 10 July 2013. <http://www.kourosh-yaghmaei.com/biography/biography.htm>.

Persian music creating a very genuine hybrid style of rock music. Kourosh was the embodiment of anyone in Iran who wanted to be a rock god.¹³⁵

By the mid-1970s Iranians were becoming visibly frustrated with the Shah's regime, including musicians who began encrypting their lyrics with allegorical musings against the regime. Shahyar Ghanbari, a singer and songwriter who wrote for famous Iranian singers like Dariush, Farhad, and Googoosh, talked in the movie *Googoosh: Iran's Daughter*, about how hard it was to be a songwriter writing modern music. Many people were against it and did not like the fact that they were breaking rules. He said, "Music is about freedom of expression, and we didn't have it in Iran. There was censorship, although it is nothing comparable to what we have right now, but we had it and I remember once the secret agent who was sitting in front of me told me "How many times did we tell you that you shouldn't write such a thing?"¹³⁶

As the Iranian Revolution grew closer the Shah really cracked down hard on musicians and many of them ended up fleeing the country or being arrested. Shahyar Ghanbari was one of the musicians arrested before the revolution and he said:

You know I spent a couple months in prison, in an awful place called Evin. The reason was... was a song called "Booye Khube Gandom." Seems it was yesterday. Dariush was in prison too. Yah, that was very tough situation and you never know why you're in prison next to someone who wanted to kill someone.¹³⁷

The musicians that fled the country before the revolution were spared the grief that the new Islamic regime would impose upon them, but the ones that stayed are held with high regard by many Iranians, and in the case of Googoosh, who decided to stay in Iran,

¹³⁵ Jessica Hundley. "They Rocked in Iran Before the Revolution." *Los Angeles Times* 21 Aug. 2011: 1. Latimes. Web. 09 Dec. 2012. <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/aug/21/entertainment/la-ca-iranian-rock-reissues-20110821>.

¹³⁶ Shahyar Ghanbari. *Googoosh: Iran's Daughter*. Dir. Farhad Zamani. Atash, 2000. Film.

¹³⁷ Shahyar Ghanbari. *Googoosh: Iran's Daughter*. Dir. Farhad Zamani. Atash, 2000. Film.

she is arguably more of a Persian icon now than she would have been if the revolution did not take place.

The Islamists were the strongest party because they had the support of millions who believed in Khomeini, whether they were Muslims or not. The Islamists swiftly and violently went after all opposition and within about a year they had consolidated their power and began focusing on social life.

The new Islamic Republic, as the Islamists decided to call Iran, began to impose Sharia law and decided that one of the things that needed to be completely removed from Iranian society was the “popular” aspects of Iranian culture. All prerevolutionary singers and performers were informed that they no longer had the right to perform music.¹³⁸ A lyricist and friend of Googoosh, Zoya Zakarian, said about the regime’s attitude toward music, “Well it was very quick and without any pretenses that they prohibited it. The recording of songs, the singing of songs. The broadcasting of songs from the radio and television, in the way that it was done before was forbidden. It was forbidden. One day it was just forbidden. It’s that simple.”¹³⁹ Unfortunately the prohibition of music went much deeper than just the commercial aspect, the regime did not want people listening to music anywhere. This happened in other aspects of popular culture as well including film and fashion and it took many Iranians by surprise. Many were in a state of shock after the revolution, they were so depressed that they internalized all of their broken hopes and dreams and just tried to live their lives.

My friend Farhad described to me how dangerous it was to even have cassettes in your car in the early 1980s. He said:

There was a time I remember I was a kid, God forbid you had a cassette in your car driving around, if you got pulled over... they do regular pull-over all of the sudden there is a roadblock, religious police checking the cars. If there is a car

¹³⁸ *Googoosh: Iran’s Daughter*. Dir. Farhad Zamani. Atash, 2000. Film.

¹³⁹ Zoya Zakarian. *Googoosh: Iran’s Daughter*. Dir. Farhad Zamani. Atash, 2000. Film.

with two young guys and two young girls, definitely get in trouble. Or two, three guys, they'll search the car, so... God forbid they find a cassette, I remember, my dad at that age with a family... he would like hide it up the ass of the car somehow if he sees a roadblock. People who get caught with cassettes they will take them, they arrest them. Ooh! It used to be like even having a cassette was...¹⁴⁰

Things were about to get even worse for Iranians as Saddam Hussein decided to preemptively invade Iran to overthrow the new Islamic regime. There are many reasons given for the origin of this invasion, but simply put, Saddam Hussein saw an opportunity, with Iranian regime change, to destroy it before it destroyed him.

The Iran-Iraq War which started in September, 1980, had a devastating effect on Iran's youthful population. Hundreds of thousands of young Iranians lost their lives during the war and the Islamic Republic began encouraging people to have more children through Islamic war propaganda. The encouragement was a success because the population growth percentage rose from 1.7% to 4.5% and the amount of people under 25 jumped from 3-5% of the population to 24.5% of the population.¹⁴¹ These are amazing results and prove that even if many Iranians were unhappy with their new leaders they were proud of their country and not willing to give up.

For the regime, the plan to keep the army's ranks full of new fighters backfired when the war ended in August 1988. They soon encouraged people to stop having children, but it was too late, the damage was done. Just to put the population explosion in perspective, in the 1976 census Iran's population was 33 million people, and in 2006 the census indicated that Iran's population had reached 70 million people.¹⁴²

The regime had no idea how to socially and economically deal with the new generation. There were no jobs available for the youth so the unemployment rate was,

¹⁴⁰ Metal musician 1. Personal interview. 18 July 2013.

¹⁴¹ Kaveh Basmenji. *Tehran Blues*. London: SAQI, 2005. 46. Print.

¹⁴² Shahram Khosravi. *Young and Defiant in Tehran*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008. 5. Print.

and still is extremely high today. Literacy and education rates of Iranian youth were high until the university level, then they declined. Iranians place a very high value on education and millions of youth being turned away from a higher education and a chance to fulfill their dreams brought serious depression, anger, hatred, hopelessness, and a myriad of other feelings.

Learning about the youth culture of Iran and their mindset and attitudes toward all aspects of their lives was essential to my research. There are a handful of scholars that have written about youth culture in Iran and the most important works for my research were: *Tehran Blues*, by Kaveh Basmenji, *Young and Defiant in Tehran*, by Shahram Khosravi, *Passionate Uprisings*, by Pardis Mahdavi, *Lipstick Jihad*, by Azadeh Moaveni, *Warring Souls*, by Roxanne Varzi and *Persepolis*, by Marjane Satrapi. These works allowed me to understand the youth and explain my experience with Iranian metalheads better.

When the war was over the youth went back to being youth and focused their time on discovering who they were and getting involved in things they enjoyed, and although music had essentially been vanquished from Iran in the previous ten years it was returning with the speed and force of a lightning bolt. Young Iranians were aware of the world outside of Iran and they had a strong ambition to become part of the global community. One of the easiest ways for them to get involved in global culture was music, and millions of young people in Iran wanted to get their hands on cassette tapes. The black market exploded with cassette tapes and there was nothing the regime could do to stop it.

Negar Shaghaghi described the black market during this time in Iran as a place in central and northern Tehran where a person who was nostalgic for popular music during the Shah's time could find cassettes that would remind him of the cabaret and clubs of the '70s and a younger person could go and find cassettes of Nirvana and Black

Sabbath. She also described how the popularity of Western music could be seen in graffiti throughout Tehran.¹⁴³

The literature for my research gives insight into the origins of metal music and the culture that developed in the West, and then Iran. For early blues musicians the blues was a genre of music that was an outlet for the oppression and hopelessness that they experienced every day. The blues was an ominous sounding music to an outsider, but to many blacks, hope, unity, and optimism were buried in its notes.

In Birmingham, England, during the late 1960s, Black Sabbath was heavily influenced by blues musicians from the United States and they adapted it to fit their time and place. They were hopeless teenagers who visualized their life and death in a poor, dark, polluted city. Their interpretation of the blues became a new genre of music called metal.

Metal's influence covered the globe and in Iran in the early 1990s teenagers discovered the genre of metal. A metalhead in Iran said to Mark LeVine when he discovered metal music, it was "like a flower in the desert."¹⁴⁴ To Iranians metal stood for something different than it did for young Americans in the early 1980s. Metal music in the early 1980s was all about rebellion, rebellion against commercialized metal and authority figures. Young Americans had the freedom to express themselves in this manner and release the feelings they had inside. Young Iranians on the other hand did not have the freedom to express themselves and instead of standing for rebellion, metal in Iran stood for freedom.

As a kid entering my teenage years in the early 1990s the message of metal music from the previous decade was still very strong and I remember being a part of that and

¹⁴³ Negar Shaghghi. "Sounds of Silence." *Index on Censorship* 39.3 (2010): 52. Academic Search Premier. Web. 23 Aug. 2012.

¹⁴⁴ Mark LeVine. "Headbanging against Repressive Regimes." 25 Jan. 2010. 45. Web. 12 Mar. 2012. <http://freemuse.org/archives/1540>.

feeling those feelings, but now after researching the metal scene in Iran I realize that whatever young people in the US felt they were rebelling against by listening to metal music was trivial and a part of me feels ashamed. Young people in Iran have grasped the true spirit of metal just like Black Sabbath did in Birmingham in the late 1960s. Under the dismal tone, ominous lyrics, and emotional power many people see darkness, sadness, and pessimism. Iranians have discovered freedom, optimism, and hope. They have brought purity back to metal music and I hope that my analysis of the Iranian metal bands I interviewed reveals that purity.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

When I began my research into the topic of metal music in Iran I did not have much to go on, and I was not sure if I was going to be successful at breaking into this underground music scene. As I mentioned before the literature about metal music in Iran is virtually nonexistent and I was worried that I would not be able to create a project worthy of research. I compiled the literature I found and the conglomeration of blogs, articles, and Iranian metal band social website pages and tried to envision the theme these data were telling me. I had an overall question in my mind as I did my research which was “What is life like for a metalhead in Iran?” and at the time, the way I perceived this question was very literal and the underlying truth to what life is like for a metalhead in Iran eluded me. I knew the music was illegal according to the regime and that metal musicians played their instruments in secret but that was about it.

At this point I was frustrated how I was going to proceed because according to traditional theory I needed to have my hypotheses ready to prove or disprove and I did not feel I had enough data to make proper decisions. This is when I discovered critical theory and the idea that I should not conduct my research in an objective manner but truly become a part of it. This appealed to me greatly because the more data I pieced together about these bands the more I wanted to know them on a personal level.

After learning more about critical theory I discovered two methods that employ it brilliantly and were exactly what I needed to motivate me to continue my research. These methods were critical ethnography and grounded theory. Once I started learning

about these methods my research ideas really began to take off and I knew that I could bring a proper awareness to the metal scene in Iran and most importantly write a thesis that could foster actual change for my informants and all the metal musicians in Iran.

Theory

Theory is knowledge that has been stored up and formed to create understanding or explanation of facts, and in the case of this thesis, societal facts. Critical theory is a social theory that has the goal of critiquing and changing society and freeing people from oppressive societal circumstances. Critical theory was first discussed by Max Horkheimer, in 1937, in his essay *Traditional and Critical Theory*, and is a strain of Marxist theory that emerged from dissident Marxists who were unable to accept the inherent authoritarianism of current Stalinist Marxist thought. They were interested in lesser known strands of Marxism that carried a libertarian leaning, for example, Emma Goldman and Anarcho-Communism, and Karl Kosch who were responsible for Western Marxism. These scholars gathered at Frankfurt University and they came to be known as the “Frankfurt School.” These scholars began challenging the regimes of power in the world at that time, especially the liberal and democratic ideologies inherent in capitalism, and claimed that ideology is the major obstacle to human liberation.¹⁴⁵

There are a couple key concepts at the core of critical theory: first, that critical theory should be aimed at the totality of society at the specific time in history that is being researched. Horkheimer said, “In this intellectual work the needs and goals, the experiences and skills, the customs and tendencies of the contemporary form of human existence have all played their part.”¹⁴⁶ Second, that critical theory should use all of the

¹⁴⁵ Raymond Guess. *The Idea of a Critical Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University P., 1981. 56. Print.

¹⁴⁶ Max Horkheimer. “Traditional and Critical Theory.” *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*. New York: Continuum, 2002. 215. Print.

sciences available, natural and social, to understand its subject.

Horkheimer believed that using traditional theory was not sufficient for uncovering the true picture of individuals and groups in society. He used the example of proletarian consciousness claiming that “It would yield only an application of traditional theory to a specific problem and not the intellectual side of the historical process of proletarian emancipation.”¹⁴⁷ If the researcher, however, took a step closer and turned his objectivity into subjectivity so that the societal contradictions he came across were not only viewed using already established historical facts, but also as a force to foster change, then a researchers true function would emerge.¹⁴⁸

In ethnography, theory is theory, but also method; for example, in ethnography theory is used as an interpretive or analytical method. The theory is relied upon to spotlight an individual or group and inspire the researcher in design, but the method is what directs the completion of the research.¹⁴⁹

Critical theory is at the core of critical ethnography and a simple way of thinking about these two things is that critical ethnography is critical theory in action. Jim Thomas emphasized this point when he said:

The roots of critical thought spread from a long tradition of intellectual rebellion in which rigorous examination of ideas and discourse constituted political challenge. Social critique by definition is radical. It implies an evaluative judgment of meaning and method in research, policy, and human activity. Critical thinking implies freedom by recognizing that social existence, including our knowledge of it, not simply composed of givens imposed on us by powerful and mysterious forces. This recognition leads to the possibility of transcending existing forces. The act of critique implies that by thinking about and acting upon the world, we are able to change both our subjective interpretations and objective conditions.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 215.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 215.

¹⁴⁹ D. Soyini Madison. *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012. 13. Print.

¹⁵⁰ Jim Thomas. *Doing Critical Ethnography*. London: SAGE, 1993. 18. Print.

Thomas describes how a researcher should approach employing critical theory in research, but also the aim of critical ethnography and how research can bring about real social change.

Critical theory is rooted in Marxism as I mentioned, it was created to address the injustice that occurred during the rise of industrial and corporate capitalism as a political-economic system, but I take a different approach, I focus on politicizing social problems in Iran in a historical and cultural context, implicating myself in the process of collecting and analyzing data, and then discovering what these problems are dependent upon.¹⁵¹ Applying this in my research meant that I focused on the social problems that metalheads in Iran must contend with in their day to day lives and how these problems affect their lives, the people around them, and why they exist.

Recently some critical theorists have moved away from Marxian thought and using critical theory with other sociologic and philosophical traditions, which Marxists call revisionism. I tend to be a more classical liberalist thinker and this really fits well with the subject of my research because metal music culture is rooted in non-conformist thought. Martin Jay stated that "critical theory is best understood as not promoting a specific philosophical agenda or a specific ideology, but as "a gadfly of other systems."¹⁵²

Critical Ethnography (Method 1)

Critical ethnography relies on the same methods as ethnography and is basically the same methodology, the difference being that when you examine things critically you dig deeper and expose underlying problems that are not visible from the surface. This position is appropriate because as the researcher I have an intimate connection to this

¹⁵¹ Thomas Lindlof and Brian Taylor. *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2002. 52. Print.

¹⁵² Martin Jay. *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950*. Los Angeles: University of California P, 1996. 41. Print.

research and the participants. I have been listening to metal for over twenty years and have been involved in metal culture for just as long. I also have a strong understanding of the Persian language and culture through my education and my Iranian friends who enjoy sharing their culture with me.

Critical ethnography attempts to discuss processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular lived domain. Researchers interpret the data showing how these make sense for the participants, then they reframe the data showing it in a new way, revealing aspects of exploitation, power, and injustice. They do this reflexively, always aware of how their own ideas have affected their work.¹⁵³ Tina Koch and Ann Harrington describe “reflexivity” well in their article *Reconceptualizing Rigour: The Case for Reflexivity* by stating, “We contend that researchers bring to the research product, data generated, a range of literature, a positioning of this literature, a positioning of one-self, and moral socio-political contexts. We suggest that reflexive research is characterized by ongoing self-critique and self-appraisal and that the research product can be given shape by the politics of location and positioning.”¹⁵⁴ Critical ethnographers feel that they have a responsibility to their participants to make a significant contribution to changing their lives. In the case of this research I feel I have a moral obligation to inform people about the lives of metalheads in Iran, based on basic human freedoms.

Traditional ethnographers have been quick to dismiss “reflexivity” as being narcissistic, and a “diary disease” as a famous American anthropologist Clifford Geertz referred to it.¹⁵⁵ I think that many ethnographers that use “reflexivity” would agree that

¹⁵³ Karen O’Reilly. *Key Concepts in Ethnography*. London: SAGE, 2009. 54. Print.

¹⁵⁴ Tina Koch and Ann Harrington. “Reconceptualizing Rigour: The Case for Reflexivity.” *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. 28.4 (1998): 887. Academic Search Premier. Web. 22 Aug. 2013.

¹⁵⁵ Douglas Foley. “Critical Ethnography: The Reflexive Turn.” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 15.4 (2010): 475. Academic Search Premier. Web. 22 Aug. 2013.

focusing too much on the ethnographer could lead to a narcissistic portrayal of the ethnographer, but as Phil Carspecken notes, including the self in a dialogue with the “cultural other” gives the ethnographer two unique positions not available to a traditional ethnographer. First, being a participating witness in a cultural scene positions the ethnographer in a much less imperialist position. Second, it requires that the ethnographer acknowledge that the people being studied have inalienable rights just like himself and he has a responsibility to affect change in the cultural scene being researched.¹⁵⁶

As I mentioned earlier, I do not identify with Marxist thought, I identify more with classical liberalist philosophy. I do not share the Marxist idea that industrial and corporate capitalism should be abolished, which is not to say I agree with the present system of capitalism, but regardless, I believe that individual liberty is the highest political end. All humans have natural rights and no matter what nation state a person lives in today natural rights are being violated by the state, especially in Iran. This is another reason why studying metalheads in Iran is so important for me, because the ideology that is currently in power in Iran is totalitarian. It not only controls all aspects of government, it controls all aspects of social life and I empathize with my Persian metal brothers living in Iran who are subject to this totalitarian ideology. I identify with them so strongly that I asked myself, “Will I be content to understand the situation of my informants without attempting to change it?” The answer is “No.”

Two of the most important influences in critical ethnography are Phil Francis Carspecken, who wrote *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*, and Jim Thomas, who wrote *Doing Critical Ethnography*. These two gentlemen really showed what can be accomplished through a critical approach to

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 475.

ethnography and how researchers can change people's lives, rather than just observe them. Carspecken writes, "Criticalists find contemporary society to be unfair, unequal, and both subtly and overtly oppressive for many people. We don't like it and we want to change it."¹⁵⁷

While I do not agree with the Marxist thought behind this statement claiming that society needs to be changed because of its unfairness and inequality, which in my opinion are not bad qualities of society, I do agree that societies can be overtly oppressive and people should be free to live the life they want. Even though my view of what we should be critical of in society is different than Carspecken, the core aspects of critical ethnography still apply.

Grounded Theory (Method 2)

I also employed aspects of grounded theory in research. Grounded theory is the act of generating theory through the data, rather than verifying the theory after the data has been collected. By taking this approach a researcher can be relatively sure that the theory will fit and work within his research. Glaser and Strauss, the presenters of grounded theory explained that theory; that was based on data was very difficult to refute or replace with another theory because it is so intimately linked with the data and was destined to last.¹⁵⁸

Grounded theory takes advantage of both inductive and deductive reasoning to generate theory; for example, grounded theory does not search for truth in empirical data using deductive reasoning but attempts to conceptualize what is happening. Deductive reasoning is used in the beginnings of research to collect empirical data that help

¹⁵⁷ Phil Carspecken. *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide*. New York: Routledge, 1996. 7. Print.

¹⁵⁸ Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. Chicago: Aldine, 1967. 4. Print.

conceptualize the subject of the research and create questions. Inductive reasoning is applied to the data that is collected to generate theory.

Grounded theory is not used as a descriptive method (like ethnography), but a method that generates concepts that explain the way people deal with social problems in their lives. Grounded theory does this by intensely analyzing the data through coding, which breaks down data sentence by sentence and phrase by phrase to not just collect and make order of a large mass of data, but to organize ideas that emerge from the analysis process.¹⁵⁹

I used this method to code the interviews I conducted in Armenia. I transcribed the interviews onto paper and I read through them carefully pulling out re-emerging themes. I categorized these themes and then carefully read through each category identifying more specific trends and patterns. From these trends and patterns I carefully read through my data one more time recognizing even more specific trends and patterns. I discovered over 140 themes, patterns, and trends that I used to organize and create my analysis.

Research Setting

Armenia is on the northeast border of Iran and was a republic of the Soviet Union until its disintegration. In the years since it has embraced democracy and as of 2011 is attempting to become an associate member of the European Union. Armenia adopted Christianity in the first century and it is the dominant religion, which is a large contrast from its southern neighbor Iran, which is Islamic. Many Iranians travel to Armenia for vacations, freedom of dress, and opportunities to enjoy entertainment, like movies, music, and alcohol. Yerevan, the capital city, is only 24 miles across the border of Iran and about 633 miles from Tehran which is about a 12 hour bus ride.

¹⁵⁹ Anslem Strauss. *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University P, 1987. 22. Print.

During my research a festival took place in Yerevan, Armenia, called the Persian Metal Festival 2012. This festival showcased ten Iranian metal bands encompassing many genres of metal music from folk metal to death metal (Figure 3.1). It was the first festival ever put together exclusively showcasing Iranian metal bands and gained a lot of publicity across the Middle East and the Caucasus. I attended this festival and conducted six of my interviews in Yerevan. I conducted these interviews in many different locations throughout the city: in apartments, rented homes, and in public.

The Persian Metal Festival was possible because of the vision of a man named Meraj, the lead singer of one of the most influential Persian metal bands today, Master of Persia. The members of Master of Persia relocated to Yerevan from Mashhad, Iran after some of its members suffered severe persecution by the government, which I will refer to in more detail later. Meraj started his own music company called MOP Music Co. and organized the Persian Metal Festival that I attended.

The festival brought well deserved recognition to a struggling group of invisible, underground, Iranian metal musicians as well as interest about Iranian culture and society. Metal music is not a new phenomenon in Iran, it has been around for decades, but so far underground it was difficult to find. Now, many factors, the most important being the internet, have made it possible for Iranian metal musicians to ascend to the surface and become part of the global metal community.

Informant Selection

When I started my research I discovered about fifty underground metal bands in Iran. I spent days scouring the internet, navigating through social media websites like Facebook, Myspace, metal music forums like Ultimate Metal and Metal Forum, metal music databases like Encyclopaedia Metallum and Wikipedia, popular metal websites like Metal Storm and Metal Hammer, websites where musicians upload music like Reverb Nation and Soundcloud, and video websites like YouTube and Vimeo. I created

a list of the bands and then began to research each band individually looking for a band website, Facebook page, Myspace page, or Reverb Nation page. I gathered all the data I could find on each band and then I began to break the bands down into their members and began scouring Facebook for profiles of these individuals.¹⁶⁰

The profiles I researched fascinated me because in a country where metal music was publicly oppressed, it was thriving on the internet. Many bands were very open on the internet about what they stood for and the attitude they held toward the social and economic situation of many Iranians. I compiled quite a bit of empirical materials from the internet and after organizing the materials I created a solid picture of the expanding metal scene in Iran.

Now that I collected the data on these bands and their members I needed to contact them. My best option was to travel to Iran and meet them in person, but I knew that this would be dangerous for a couple reasons: first, I am an American who served in the military, second I would be visiting metal musicians who are not friendly with the regime, and third I would be recording and possibly filming my conversations with these individuals. I was definitely worried that I could create trouble, but I was willing to take that chance if the opportunity to travel to Iran became possible. These guys needed to know that there were people who care about their plight. Unfortunately my attempts failed and I could not get a visa to go to Iran. This was very disappointing, but it did not deter me.

Many of the Iranians I know in the US enjoy using a messaging service called Oovoo to communicate with friends and family in Iran. This service is similar to Skype and they use Oovoo because it seems to connect well through Iran's highly guarded internet servers. If I could not go to Iran then I would contact as many of these metal bands as I

¹⁶⁰ Facebook was an extremely important tool for this research and to me it will always be much more than just a social network, it is an ethnographer's dream.

could and see if they would do an interview with me through Oovoo. The great thing about Oovoo is that there is the option to record conversations, so I could conduct a great face to face interview without having to worry about taking notes.

One of the bands I researched was named TarantistT. I discovered through Facebook that the lead singer and bass player of TarantistT, Arash, had recently relocated from Iran to Los Angeles, California. This happened at a very fateful moment because I was going to record a video of myself soon, directed to metalheads in Iran, describing my research. Now I had the idea that if I could go to L.A. and convince Arash to say a few good words about me and my research in the video it could really help my chances of being viewed by the Iranian bands as authentic.

I contacted Arash through Facebook and told him who I was and what my plans were concerning my research. He was very happy to hear from me and I learned that he was a very outspoken advocate of human rights in Iran. He had appeared on telecasts such as Voice of America informing people about his story and the persecution he had received, and the persecution his bandmates still in Iran were receiving. From our conversations on the phone I learned that he knew many of the band members that I wanted to get in contact with, not personally, but through the underground and through the internet. He would be the credibility I needed to gain the trust of these individuals.

It was important for me to convince metalheads in Iran who I was. I wanted to showcase for them my knowledge about their language and culture, and my passion for metal music. For all they knew I could be a spy to get them to talk about things that could get them in trouble. I needed to show them that although we were not brothers by blood we were brothers by metal music and I wanted to help them.

One technique ethnographers use to convince people to communicate with you is to emphasize how little you know about them and that you are reliant on them for information. By essentially playing “dumb” you facilitate the willingness of people to want

to talk about themselves. In the case of my research I did the exact opposite. My experience with Persians has shown that when I make an effort to show them how much I know about Iran their expressions widen and they are so happy. They absolutely love the fact that an American has a genuine interest in their culture and lengthy conversations generally ensue, because of this I made every effort to show them how much I knew about Iranian language and culture, metal music, and the metal scene in Iran. Showing them my passion for them and their lives would hopefully translate into them being excited to reveal their lives to me.

In May, 2012 up in the hills looking down on Salt Lake City I recorded a video in Farsi, wearing a black metal t-shirt, jeans, black combat boots, and sunglasses. I informed metalheads in Iran who I was, what I was researching, why I was interested in their lives, and how I wanted to communicate with them in the future. I ended this message by telling them that I have an Iranian friend that lives in L.A. that I want them to meet and he will give more information about myself and what I am doing.

Shortly after recording this video I traveled to Los Angeles and met with Arash for the first time. We talked for a while and got to know each other. He told me that because of his outspoken stand for human rights in Iran, his family in Iran was being threatened, and it was a very scary time for him. He allowed me to interview him, and he was my first formal interview participant.

We went up into the Hollywood hills with Arash's brother Arsalan, who is the guitarist of TarantisT, to record the second half of the video and Arash and I stood on a precipice overlooking the valley and Arash gave the metalheads in Iran more information about me, my research, and how it is important for this research to be done so the world can hear about what is happening inside Iran, concerning young people and musicians. Arash was the gatekeeper for my research and I hoped that his presence and participation in my research would influence bands from Iran to contact me.

After the video was complete I created a small package of items I would send to the bands. It consisted of an IRB consent form stating that these questions could be answered anonymously if they wished, pseudonyms could be used, and it would be published. The video, and a letter written in English and Farsi that reiterated points from the video, but also gave them a detailed description of the research, ethical issues in the IRB consent form, and how we could contact each other and remain in contact.

I was ready to contact the bands when one day I discovered some news about a Persian metal festival. I was intrigued and spent some time researching the event. I postponed contacting the bands and followed the Facebook feeds for the next few days because Iranians were buzzing about the festival. I discovered that there were going to be ten Persian metal bands playing at this festival and the festival would be held in Yerevan, Armenia, at the Puppet Theater. Instead of contacting the bands that seemed to be the most active online I focused my attention on the ten bands that were going to be at this festival.

I sent my package to all ten bands that were scheduled to be at the festival. These bands were 5grs, Arsames, Avesta, Credenc, Death-fuse, Master of Persia, Mordab, Persian Force, Slave Mark and Scox.¹⁶¹ In less than twenty-four hours I began receiving responses and communicating through email with some of the bands. Our email conversations swiftly transferred to Facebook and friends were added and instant messages flew back and forth. I was surprised with the speed and enthusiasm that some of the bands contacted me. I knew through my experience with Persians in the US that listened to metal that metalheads in Iran love all things American including clothes, cars, movies, comics, etc., and I could sense that they were excited an American was interested in them and had contacted them. I received responses from every single band

¹⁶¹ See Appendix A for a profile of all ten bands at the Persian Metal Festival.

and at this point I knew that the Persian Metal Festival in Yerevan, Armenia is where I needed to go to meet my informants.

Conceptual Framework

Finding a framework for my research was difficult because there is very little research that discusses metal music in Iran. There is a slightly larger amount of research that discusses metal music in the Middle East, but nothing that focused on Iran. There is quite a bit of literature on youth culture in Iran and this research correlates well with metal music in Iran because many of the people in Iran that listen to metal are young people, so whether youth in Iran are metalheads or not they share many of the same societal dilemmas.

The initial research using empirical materials helped me construct a “conceptual framework” of broad domains that I wanted to learn more about.

- 1) Personal band information
- 2) Instrumentation
- 3) Metal culture
- 4) Persian culture
- 5) Technology
- 6) Islam and politics
- 7) Practice/live shows
- 8) The future (band, personal, Iran)

Carspecken wrote in *Critical Ethnography in Educational research: A Theoretical and Practical Guide* that a critical ethnographer should not focus on one research question because there is a risk of introducing bias. Do not even create specific questions, but formulate general, flexible questions. Create domains from topics discovered from

empirical research and create questions from there.¹⁶² I wrote down each domain on a sticky note and stuck it to the wall so I had eight sticky notes in a lateral row. I set a goal of ten questions for each domain and I brainstormed these domains for a week.

While Carspecken suggests not having one specific research question to focus on for fear of introducing bias, all of the domains and subsequent questions I created fall under the question I put forth in my introduction which was, “What is life like for a metalhead in Iran?” The domains and questions under this one overarching question address the historical, social, and political factors that contribute to the understanding of power relations between the Iranian regime and the metal community.

I scoured the internet looking for any information I could find about metal bands in Iran and researched as many band webpages as I could find. I talked with my Persian friends who were associated with bands while they lived in Iran and tried to get a clearer picture of life as a metalhead in Iran. I also reflected on my own experiences growing up with metal music and the friends I had who were in rock and metal bands. Combining this knowledge I inserted myself, metaphorically, into the life of an Iranian metalhead and I came up with eighty questions.

I used the questions I had come up with to create one question that would accurately represent each domain. The interviews I would conduct would be formal interviews but I wanted them to be relatively unstructured. I wanted to bring up a domain with a question and lead them into talking about the many subdomains or questions that I created.

These are the questions that I created and used to conduct my interviews:

- 1) Tell me about you band? How many members? What is the theme of your band?
What is your purpose or objective?
- 2) How do you get your instruments? How did you learn to play them? How do you maintain them (strings, cables, drums, drumsticks)?

¹⁶² Phil Carspecken. *Critical Ethnography in Educational Research*. 7.

- 3) How is metal perceived in Iran? In the West metal is seen as childish and rebellious, do people take metal seriously in Iran? What is the most popular genre of metal in Iran? Why?
- 4) Are there a lot of metal fans in Iran? Who are they? What distinguishes a metalhead in Iran (clothing, hair, tattoos)?
- 5) How does your Persian culture and language influence your music composition? Do you use any traditional Persian instruments? Do you use any Persian rhythms or scales? Lyrically, do you prefer English or Persian? Why?
- 6) How has the internet affected metal in Iran?
- 7) How does metal fit with Islam? How has the metal scene changed from when Khatami was President to Ahmadinejad? (This question was only asked of my informants that do not presently live in Iran.)
- 8) Where do you practice? Do you ever perform for an audience? If so where, and how are the performances arranged?
- 9) Where do you see metal in Iran in five years? Where do you see yourself? Where do you see your band? What would you do if you could not play music anymore?

Data Collection Methods

I obtained my data using two methods: participant observation and in-depth interviewing.

Observation

I observed these metalheads interact with each other, relax, party, prepare and perform a music festival, and I was fortunate to observe them for the whole week I was there. I was not treated like an observer while I was there. They treated me as an insider and I felt very comfortable around them. This was very important and helpful because interpretation of culture requires an insider's, or emic perspective and an

outsider's, or etic perspective.

From the moment I made contact with the first band in Yerevan I was able to observe my informants for at least twelve hours every day. They were the greatest hosts I could have asked for and I really enjoyed observing and interacting with them and I felt that they really enjoyed interacting with me as well.

Interviews

I conducted interviews with six bands in formally unstructured focus group interviews at the apartments the bands rented and in public. I could not conduct interviews with all ten bands because of time constraints and the busyness of the festival. In addition, two of the bands were harassed at the border of Armenia and Iran, detained briefly, and sent back to Tehran. I conducted this research over a period of one week from September 11, 2012 until September 18, 2012. I conducted my interviews before the festival and after it. I conducted them at all hours of the day because trying to schedule an interview with a band during a busy music festival is very difficult. All of the interviews I conducted in Yerevan were focus group interviews. For some of the interviews the whole band was present and for some they were not. The conditions for conducting the fieldwork could not have been better. The bands were enthusiastic about my project and eager to participate. They were all staying in close proximity of each other within Yerevan which made them easily accessible (except for Persian Force who was staying outside the city center). Yerevan is a fairly small city so I was able to walk everywhere I needed to go and the weather was beautiful which made travel easy.

I also conducted interviews with two members of two different bands outside of Yerevan. I conducted an interview with Arash, from the band TarantisT, in Los Angeles, California, in May of 2012, and I conducted an interview with Sina, from the band Death-fuse, in Los Angeles, California, in May of 2013. These interviews were both one-on-one interviews and very different from the large focus group interviews I conducted in

Yerevan. The reason for this is that Arash and Sina had been given permission to come to the US and the other members had not. Metal bands in Iran face a lot of adversity because of situations like this, where one member is given the opportunity to leave Iran, forcing the band to break up or find a new member.

My interview with Arash, from TarantisT, was the first interview I conducted and this is important because I need to determine that the domains I had created were going to allow the concepts to emerge. If the concepts I wanted to emerge did not, then my goal was to find out through our discussion what domains I should be focusing on.

The interviews vary in length. The longest one lasted about two hours and the shortest one lasted about forty minutes. None of these interviews were conducted with a deadline because the bands had other obligations, they were in-depth discussions that lasted until all the domains had been covered. The discussion varied by band and their willingness to speak. Some bands were very talkative and had a lot to say. Some bands were more reserved and did not elaborate on the topics a lot.

Protection of Human Rights

As a researcher I took many precautions to ensure the confidentiality and protection of the participants' human rights. My experience with Iranian culture and my preliminary research helped me determine what type of questions would be acceptable for this research. I drafted a consent cover letter that I gave to all the Iranians that I interviewed which stated that their identity would be protected if they chose. If there were questions they were uncomfortable with they did not have to answer them and most importantly, their participation was voluntary. The consent cover letter included the contact number and email address for the Middle East Center at the University of Utah and the contact number for University of Utah Institutional Review Board.

Analysis

The analysis of this research was an inductive, and reflexive, process. By inductive I mean that the patterns, themes, and categories came out of my data. Of course, as I mentioned earlier I created domains from preliminary research, but these were subject to change based on the data. The patterns, themes, and categories that emerged from the data were driven by what I wanted to know and how I interpreted the data according to my critical position.¹⁶³ The data I acquired was unstructured data, which means that I did not collect it in an organized fashion such as a survey. The data were acquired in the form of open-ended interviews, field notes, and other empirical sources.

My critical position in this research takes me all the way back to my teenage years when I listened to metal music freely and publicly anywhere and anytime I wanted. I also played metal music freely and publicly and I had friends who were in bands that played shows all over Portland, OR, where I grew up. I never once considered that I should be careful for fear of being branded as an enemy of my country, or being arrested and sent to prison for my actions. When I think about the great experiences I had growing up playing and listening to metal music with my friends it really stirs emotions within me that my informants are not able to experience the music we all love so much, freely, without the fear that they could end up in prison. I want Iranian metalheads to be able to have the same nostalgic memories about growing up playing and listening to metal that I did, therefore I am constantly aware of the freedoms I have as a metalhead in the US and I will never take them for granted.

I documented a surface description of metalheads in Iran, but I also dug beneath the surface to understand the metal culture in Iran and how it interacts with social and political structures in Iran. To do this I applied a method used and written about by

¹⁶³ Prachi Srivastava and Nick Hopwood. "A Practical Iterative Framework for Qualitative Data Analysis." *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. 8.1 (2009): 77. Academic Search Premier. Web. 22 Aug. 2013.

Glaser and Strauss in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Applying grounded theory allows the data from my interviews to be coded into concepts. These concepts were organized into categories, which agreed and disagreed with the domains I originally created for my interviews and allowed theory to be generated. This process is contradictory to traditional research as the theory is generated after analyzing data and not before.

Combining critical thought to grounded theory allowed me to not only look at the individual actions of my participants but also the social structures that affected metalheads in Iran. Corbin and Strauss wrote, “to understand experience, that experience must be located within and can’t be divorced from, the larger events in a social, political, cultural, racial, gender-related, informational, and technological framework and therefore these are essential aspects of our analyses.”¹⁶⁴

Interpreting the data was a reflexive process. I described the data I collected from my participants and maintained a critical self-awareness during the whole process. For example, I took responsibility for the research process; I chose the topic, the questions, the participants, what I heard, what I saw, and what I recorded, these things are all done in the context of who I am. My participants were not just people I interviewed, they are my friends, and their input on what data they would like to be used and how I should present it is of great importance to me. Analysis and interpretation are processes that never really end and I will learn from my experiences, and this process as a whole, to represent metalheads in Iran in a way that will make them proud, as well as myself. As Charlotte Davies wrote in *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, “Critical reflexivity is not an end in itself—the research is not about the

¹⁶⁴ Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1990. 8. Print.

ethnographer; rather it is a means—in fact, the only means—of coming to know, however imperfectly, other aspects of social reality.”¹⁶⁵

Participant Observation

I contacted Zhesht Productions, the company producing the festival, and confirmed that if I made the journey I would be guaranteed a ticket to the show because I could not just buy one online. They assured me that tickets would be available and there was no need to worry about not being able to attend the festival.

It was difficult to nail down any definite meetings or interviews because I had never traveled to Armenia. I did not know the city, I did not know anybody. I did not know where any of the bands were staying in the city, I did not have any phone numbers or way to communicate with any of these people except through the internet. I was flying blind, but these people knew I was coming and I had faith that I made a good impression on them over the internet.

There was one band that I communicated with really well through Facebook and that was 5grs. These guys gave me the most hope that I would be accepted in the social circle of these bands if I decided to make the trip.

Yashar and Pooya are members of 5grs and they really encouraged me to come to the festival. They spoke English very well and it was easy to communicate with them on Facebook. They were excited that I was interested in their music and I could feel this as we communicated online. Without their support I would have been more nervous on my journey to Yerevan than I already was. I did not want to travel to Armenia, attend the festival, conduct some interviews, and return home. I wanted to spend time with these guys while I was there and get to know them.

¹⁶⁵ Charlotte Davies. *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*. New York: Routledge, 1999. 222. Print.

The opportunity I had while I was there to observe my informants was better than any pre-conceived notions I had of how much I was going to be able to interact with them. Once I was introduced to everyone I was officially part of the group and I slept, ate, traveled, and partied with these guys for six days. At certain times, as an American, I felt as if I was imposing upon them, but they would not listen to me when I communicated this to them. I kept a journal of my observations and my experience and documented the festival, my interviews, and my everyday interactions with my informants with photographs.

Field Experience

The night I arrived in Yerevan, a taxi driver, hired by the Theatre Hostel I lodged at picked me up the Zvartnots International Airport and drove me to the hostel. When I arrived at the hostel it was around 8:30 p.m. and the guests were preparing tea. I was welcomed warmly and after introductions I discovered I was lodging with people from all over the world: Georgia, Poland, Russia, Belarus, Switzerland, and Iran. A young Iranian man I met was named Majid and I began talking to him. He was impressed by my knowledge of Farsi, and his English was also very good. I told him what I studied and why I was in Yerevan and he became excited because he enjoyed metal music and was not aware of the festival taking place on September 14, 2012. We talked for a bit and decided to connect the next morning and he would show me around.

The next morning Majid and I headed into the city. I had a couple important tasks I needed to accomplish and Majid knew exactly where I needed to go. I had to buy an adapter for my laptop so I could use it in my room. My battery died on the long trip and I needed to recharge my laptop so I could contact the bands. I needed to buy a ticket to the festival and according to the promoter I could purchase a ticket from two different pubs in the city. The first was Troll Pub and the other was The Factory. I also needed to be at the Puppet Theater, where the festival was going to be held, by noon, because I

made tentative plans through messaging on Facebook to meet with the band 5grs the day before I left Salt Lake City.

Majid took me to buy an adapter and we found The Factory with no problems and bought tickets (Figure 3.2). Majid was supposed to leave for Georgia the next day but he could not pass up the opportunity to attend the festival so he decided to stay. It was nearing noon so we headed to the Puppet Theater and I told Majid that I had plans to meet the band 5grs at the theater at noon. We arrived at the theater and went inside to look around. It was totally deserted but there was a woman at the box office who I attempted to talk to, but she spoke absolutely no English. We returned outside and waited for about ten minutes and then I noticed five guys walking up the sidewalk with long hair, wearing black t-shirts, black and camouflage shorts, and boots. They stopped in front of the large Persian Metal Festival poster that was in the window of the theater and talked excitedly. I approached the guys and introduced myself and their eyes lit up and they said, "Jeremy?! It is good to meet you!" We exchanged greetings by hugs and handshakes and I discovered this was indeed the band 5grs. The guys were very happy to meet me and they immediately wanted to know about life in America. We talked for about fifteen minutes in English and they informed me that there was a meeting here at the theater at 8 p.m. that night. They told me all or most of the bands were in Yerevan now and the meeting was to discuss how the festival will be conducted. I asked them if I was invited to this meeting and they laughed and said, "Of course you are invited." We ended our conversation shortly after this and Majid and I departed after saying our goodbyes and returned to our hostel. I was really excited because this was more than I could have hoped for. All of the bands were going to be gathered together in one place and I was invited.

Before I arrived at the meeting at the theater that night I was nervous because I was going to meet roughly seventy Persian metalheads all at once and it was slightly

overwhelming. I did not want to waste even one second so I arrived really early, around 7 p.m. I had to wait an hour before the first band even showed up and my nervousness was building. Persian Force was the first band to arrive and I identified them easily because of their hair, black jeans, metal t-shirts, and boots. Our greeting was similar to my greeting with 5grs, hugs and handshakes. They knew who I was instantly and we began talking about life, metal, and the festival. I do not remember being nervous at all after they arrived, it was like we already knew each other.

This feeling grew as more bands arrived and I realized that most of the individuals in these bands had not met each other either. They knew each other through social media and their shared identity through metal music and being Iranian, which seemed to transcend the fact that they had never physically met each other. I, of course, am not Persian, but my passion for their culture and metal music had been viewed as genuine by the bands and they greeted me as a trusted friend (Figure 3.3, 3.4).

Bands continued to arrive, and if you were a stranger who happened upon this gathering you would think you were in the midst of a family reunion. Everyone mingled and talked for about a half hour before Meraj (lead singer of Master of Persia and festival organizer) decided that we should take the gathering inside. I enjoyed watching this gathering unfold and tried to observe without becoming overly involved. This was impossible and I eventually gave up (Figure 3.5, 3.6). I was overwhelmed with Persian names and I did my best to remember as many as I could but the attempt was futile and it took me a couple days to have a functioning knowledge of everyone's name.

We entered the theater and we all got comfortable in the lobby as Meraj laid out how the festival was going to proceed. He informed us about rehearsal times for each band, set times, equipment sharing, and a myriad of other things the bands would need to know for the festival to run smoothly. Meraj also called me out at the end of the meeting and officially introduced me to everyone, which I was not expecting. I told everyone who

I was and my purpose for being in Yerevan and everyone cheered loudly at my presence, which felt strange. I did not know what to say so I made it clear that I was just a normal guy from the US and the real stars were the Iranian musicians that surrounded me and their passion for metal music. After the meeting everyone hung out and talked for at least a couple of hours or so and many pictures were taken. I took this opportunity to talk to as many people as I could and try to set up some interviews.

At some point during this time Yashar from 5grs asked me if I wanted to come to their place and hang out after the meeting. I gladly accepted and after the meeting I walked with the band through the city reminiscing about what had just happened. We stopped at a nice restaurant that was open and we ate, drank, and talked. I tried to buy my food, but they would not hear of it. I tried to buy a round of drinks to celebrate their accomplishment but that was unacceptable as well. It was my first true experience with Persian hospitality. I experienced it many times over the next few days as I was not allowed to pay for anything if I was with an Iranian.

After dinner we headed to the apartment they had rented and talked more, listened to music, and shared some Kotayk beer, which is a local Armenian beer. Yashar asked me if I wanted to interview them and I said, "Now!" The whole band was in agreement and said, "Of course, now!" We had all had a couple beers and everyone was loosened up, so I thought this would be beneficial to my interview because everyone wanted to talk a lot. The interview went perfect and we talked for about an hour and a half which was more than I could have hoped.

During and after our interview a few members from other bands and their friends came by and we had a small late-night party taking shape. Unfortunately for me the hostel I was staying in had a policy that you had to be inside the building by 2 a.m. because they lock the doors. I told Yashar and Pouya that I was going to have to leave soon so I could make it back by 2 a.m. They both said, "Man you aren't leaving you are

staying with us tonight.” I tried to turn down their generous offer but they were adamant so I relented.

After people left the apartment and the 5grs members began to go to sleep, Pooya took me upstairs and showed me his bed where I would sleep. It was a king size bed and I said, “No way man I can’t take your bed, I am more than happy to sleep on the floor or the couch.” I soon realized this was another situation that I was not going to win so I slept in Pooya’s bed with Faraz, the bass player, that night.

We arrived at the theater the next morning about 10 a.m. and I spent the next five hours watching sound checks and getting to know the bands more (Figure 3.7, 3.8, 3.9). Meraj did a great job of getting all the bands set up and dialed in for the concert and making sure they were confident with their sound checks. Zhesht Productions was the company in charge of producing the festival and they worked with every band creating the sound each band wanted and how their instruments would be set up. Each band had about 25 minutes to accomplish everything they needed and for the bands with many instruments it was more stressful, but Meraj and Arsen (the CEO of Zhesht Productions) coordinated nicely to complete the arrangement of the festival. There were some minor technical difficulties with some of the bands, but they were dealt with as best they could, considering the time constraints.

The bands did not bring very much equipment with them, only the necessities, guitars, basses, keyboards, and traditional instruments. All other equipment was provided by Zhesht Productions, because traveling by bus to Yerevan is a long trip and not suitable for bringing lots of equipment. The other reason is that carrying lots of musical equipment through Iran is not a good idea because it advertises that you are a musician and for a metalhead this is dangerous. For themselves and their equipment, which could be confiscated for any number of reasons by Iranian officials, and with the prices that musicians pay for instruments, it was not worth the risk.

The festival was scheduled to begin at 4 p.m. and a couple hours before that the bands and crews received their backstage passes from Zhesht Productions. I did not receive a pass but it really did not matter because the organizers of the festival knew who I was and my relationship with the bands. Whenever I had a problem with the security guards, who did not know me, someone in one of the bands always vouched for me. I went outside the front of the venue a couple of times to see if people were gathering and by the time the doors opened there was quite a long line to get in and a nice crowd of people mingling in the lobby.

The order of the line-up for the festival was Master of Persia, Scox, Credenc, Persian Force, Avesta, 5grs, Mordab, and Arsames was the headliner.¹⁶⁶ There was about 200 people that came out for the festival which was a perfect amount for the size of the theater. The theater had seats in it so you could sit or stand in the aisles but there was quite a large gap between the stage and the seats so it was perfect for a great metal concert and I made sure I was right up in the front for every band, head banging with everyone else to show my support (Figure 3.10, 3.11, 3.12, 3.13, 3.14, 3.15, 3.16).

There were some memorable highlights during the festival. Credenc got the crowd excited with a couple Metallica covers which was a big deal for a lot of the bands and fans that were there. Many Iranians that were there listened to Metallica growing up and to hear Metallica songs live, whether by Metallica or a cover band, was exciting.

5grs took the stage making history for the Persian metal scene by being the first metal band to perform live with a female vocal. An Iranian woman is forbidden to sing any style of music as a solo vocalist in front of men¹⁶⁷ and an Iranian woman screaming solo in a

¹⁶⁶ Slave Mark is not included in this line-up because only one of their members was present and nobody, including Ehsan Kayedi, the drummer of Slave Mark, knew why the other members of the band still had not shown up. It was a definite worry in the back of all the bands minds.

¹⁶⁷ Roxana Saberi. "Exiled from Iran, A Singer Makes the case for Beauty." *NPR Music*, 27 Feb. 2013.

metal band in front of hundreds of men is on a whole different level. The audience was aware of the significance of 5grs performance and cheered loudly when they came out and after their set screams for an encore were heard. It was clear after 5grs left the stage that they were the crowd favorite at this point in the festival.

Arsames, the headlining band, put on a really good show and it was clear from their performance that they had the most experience performing live. They are highly respected by the Iranian metal scene for their professional accomplishments of playing gigs in other countries. Arsames brought credibility to the festival and the energy of the crowd proved their status as mosh pits opened and closed during their set. After the festival all the bands hung out with all the fans that showed up and it was a big party as people talked and took pictures (Figure 3.17, 3.18, 3.19, 3.20, and 3.21).

I spent this time walking around and observing the bands as they enjoyed being the center of attention. For most of them this was their first taste of feedback from people actually seeing them perform and they loved the critiques, good or bad. All of the bands seemed very excited to hear what I had to say about their performance and I told every band the truth. I said, "I was really blown away by your performance. I have been going to metal show since I was seventeen and I have seen amazing bands and horrible bands. To go out there with little to no experience and perform at that level proves to everyone the passion, hard work, and talent that is imprisoned in basements throughout Iran and I was very surprised." I was honest with them about being surprised, because I was not expecting their performances to feel like I was at a metal festival in the US. They were all really excited and I felt good for them, that their talent was able to be admired by so many people. Navid, one of the guitarists for Credenc commented to me as I roamed around that he really enjoyed my energy during their set. It made me feel

<http://www.npr.org/2013/02/28/172122587/exiled-from-iran-a-singer-makes-the-case-for-beauty>.

good knowing that his confidence had been boosted. I also arranged interviews with Mordab and Master of Persia for the next day.

The next morning I got up about nine am and began a long walk through the city to reach the British Embassy where I was going to meet Mordab for an interview. Nazanin, the wife of Ali, the guitarist for Mordab, came and met me outside the embassy at 11 a.m. and we walked a short distance to an apartment that Mordab had rented while they were in Yerevan. We talked for a while and had some tea and biscuits, and then I interviewed them.

This interview was much more toned down than my previous interview and I had some really good discussion with Mordab (Figure 3.22). Ali's English was not very good, but Sohrab, the guitarist, and Elnaz, Sohrab's sister, helped translate for him if he needed help with the questions. I only had an hour and a half to conduct my interview with Mordab because I had to rush over to the Yerevan Opera House to meet Meraj for an interview at 2 p.m.

I made it to the opera house in plenty of time but Meraj never showed up. I was going to leave when I saw the Pouya and Pezhman, twin brothers and members of Persian Force, walking in my direction. We greeted each other and they informed me that Meraj was really busy and he had called them to come meet me instead so I could still conduct an interview. I was really glad Meraj had done this and it was good to know he had my interests in mind.

I conducted my interview with Pouya and Pezhman in the square outside the opera house. They were very excited to talk to me and I think they gave me the best interview out of all the bands. They really had a lot to say. After this interview we parted ways and I headed back to my hostel for a much deserved and needed nap.

I slept for a couple hours and then headed across town again for the after party that Meraj had planned for the bands at a place called Stop Club. This was a pretty cool little

bar that was two levels and the top level overlooked the lower where there was a stage. Meraj had arranged for a few Armenian and Georgian metal bands to perform while we were there.

I arrived early and waited patiently at the bar. Navid, the guitar player of Credenc, was the first to arrive and as he came in I waved to him and he came took the seat across from me and we began to talk about the show. He really wanted to hear about what I thought of their performance some more and I told him that I really enjoyed the style and quality of his guitar playing.

I wore my new Mordab t-shirt that Ali had given me when I interviewed him. He asked me if I would wear it to the after party and I said, "Of course." When Ali, Nazanin, and the rest of Mordab arrived Ali saw me with the shirt and he was very pleased. We talked for a bit and he gave me a nice Mordab pendant that he had with him. I thought this was a generous gesture and I accepted it gladly.

More people began to arrive and I had a good time listening to many of the guys tell stories about things that happened to them the previous night while they were on stage and different views of the festival experience as a whole (Figure 3.23, 3.24, 3.25). Eventually the bands started playing and they were entertaining, but nothing compared to the bands the night before at the festival.

After the bands finished everyone gathered downstairs for a spontaneous jam session and various people grabbed an instrument and began playing. Siamak, a guitar player for Credenc, did some great soloing on the guitar (Figure 3.26). Certain guys even got called out by everyone to perform, like Shervin, the drummer of Avesta, and Yashar, the drummer of 5grs, who seized the moment and expressed the positive effect this festival was going to have for the Persian metal scene and thanked everyone band by band for their involvement. After this Meraj came up and gave a speech about the positive outlook for future festivals and how everything had gone very smoothly. He thanked all

the bands and reinforced the common bonds they all shared and were proud of; one, they were all Iranians and two, they were all metalheads.

After the after party everyone remained outside for a couple of hours talking and horse-playing. These guys were all very playful and joking, they were running around jumping on each other's backs and being very physical with each other, having a good time.

I arranged interviews with Credenc and Master of Persia for the next day while we were all gathered outside and everyone took a lot of crazy pictures to remember the experience. Soon it was time to say goodbye for two of the bands, 5grs and Mordab, as they were going back to Iran the next day. As we began to disperse something happened that I absolutely did not expect to happen. I felt a little emotional as I said goodbye to these guys. Especially 5grs, we really connected well and if those guys lived in the US we would definitely be closer friends.

As I was walking through the city to my hostel I stopped at a fast food joint called Hi Lunch that was open late to get something to eat. I ran into Masoud, the drummer of Persian Force, and his three friends, Hossein, Hamid, and Houshang. We talked for a while about the last couple of days and they wanted to know more about the US, and the metal scene there. Unfortunately I could not eat with them and I had to take my pizza and run because I was in danger of not making it back to my hostel again by the 2 a.m. deadline. If I had to name a negative aspect of my research it would be the interesting conversation I missed out on because of my curfew.

The next morning I got up at 9 a.m. again and went to meet Credenc at the same location I had met Nazanin the day before at the British Embassy. I arrived at the embassy and the guys from Credenc arrived shortly after me and we walked about a half mile to the apartment they had rented. On the way we stopped at a market and bought some sodas and water and I offered to pitch in knowing that it would not be accepted.

As an American I found it difficult to be treated with such generosity.

Their apartment was in this very large building and when we got inside the small elevator I almost walked out before the doors closed. This elevator was not safe, but we arrived on the eighth floor and I remember thinking, "I am taking the stairs when I leave." We talked for a bit about the festival, my research, and family and then began the interview. I really enjoyed talking to these guys and getting a slightly different perspective on my research, because Credenc is from the Mazandaran area which is north of Tehran on the Caspian Sea. The other bands are from Tehran except for Arsames who is from Mashhad, and Master of Persia who is also from Mashhad but is now living in Yerevan.

After the interview they asked me if I wanted to stay for lunch and I said, "Sure!" Apparently there was a burger joint nearby and a couple of the guys took everyone's order and headed down to the burger joint to pick up lunch. While they were gone we talked some more about Iran, the US, metal, and life on the Caspian Sea.

I had to leave soon after we ate lunch to walk down to the Opera House to meet Artib, the guitar player of Master of Persia, and Ehsan, the drummer for Slave Mark, at 2 p.m. When I arrived at the Opera House I waited around for a while before they showed up and I went with them to Meraj's apartment.

There was quite a few people at the apartment because Master of Persia was getting ready to do an interview for the Persian Metal Festival DVD. I hung out for a while and observed what was happening because everyone seemed occupied with something (Figure 3.27). I talked with Shahin, the drummer of Mordab and Master of Persia, out on the balcony for a bit. He wanted to know about my life in America and I could tell that America really intrigued him. He eventually got called inside for the interview and I went in as well and listened quietly. The interview took about an hour and afterwards I was worried that they would not want to do another but Meraj looked at me and asked me if I

was ready to interview them so I jumped up and pulled out my recorder.

The interview went very well and I again I received a slightly different perspective on the metal scene in Iran because Master of Persia is from Mashhad, which is in the northeast of Iran, and one of the most important religious cities in Iran. The shrine of the eighth Imam, Imam Reza, is located here and Muslims from all over the world come here to visit the shrine. The band had some huge problems in Mashhad that I learned about and this was the main reason they were living in Yerevan now.

When my interview was finished someone was sent to the sandwich shop down the street who came back with two big bags of sandwiches. I talked with Meraj while we ate and he informed me about a meeting that was taking place that night at the apartment that Persian Force was renting. All of the bands that were still in Yerevan would be there and a discussion was going to take place highlighting the positives and negatives for everyone at the festival and how things could be improved. It was an important meeting that could determine if there was going to be another festival.

There was about twelve of us so Meraj coordinated with a few taxi drivers about where we were going and I jumped into the taxi with Shahin and a couple of others and we headed out of the city center up into the nearby mountains. It took us about thirty minutes to get there and it was getting dark when we arrived and below you could see the whole city as the sun set behind it. You could also see Mt. Ararat perfectly, it is the most gigantic mountain I have ever seen. We hung out on the balcony for a while and then I went inside and realized what an amazing building I was in. We had to go up to the second floor to get into their place and I realized that the whole floor was one big apartment. There were at least three or four bedrooms and the family room and dining rooms were huge! I got the tour from Hossein, the photographer for Persian Force, who they brought along to document their experience, and we all cracked a beer and relaxed and waited for everyone to show up.

Everyone came except 5grs and Mordab who had left the day before and we all easily fit into the family room for our meeting. While everyone was gathering a guitar was passed around and a few guys played some riffs and passed it on, but Arash the lead singer and guitarist for Avesta, played a whole song that he had just written and it was really good. The meeting was conducted in Persian so I listened quietly and tried to understand as much as I could. We were sitting in a giant circle so Meraj started and then we went around the circle and everyone talked about the things they liked and disliked about the festival. From what I heard it seemed liked the rushed sound checks and a lot of minor technical problems, that musicians think are huge but the average fan in the crowd never notice, were the main issues. Of course the main concern that was still on everyone's mind was the fate of Death-fuse and Slave Mark.¹⁶⁸

These were two very important Iranian bands that never arrived at the festival, and up until then, which was two days after the festival took place, no one had heard from them. Most, if not all these guys had cell phones and not even Ehsan, the drummer for Slave Mark, had heard from his bandmates. It seemed that the metal gods were looking over us that night because during our discussion Meraj received a phone call that both bands were alright and they were in Tehran. That was all Meraj told us and everyone cheered that the bands were alright and back in Tehran. I would not find out more to this story until I interviewed Sina, the drummer for Death-fuse in Los Angeles, California eight months later.

At the end of the meeting Meraj began to talk about me to the group and asked me if I would give my critique of the concert and the organization of the festival. As I stood up everyone began to clap and cheer. It was a little strange because I see myself as a normal guy, but to these guys I was more than that, I was a symbol of freedom. Many of

¹⁶⁸ Ehsan, the drummer of Slave Mark, had traveled to Armenia separately from the rest of the band and he arrived in Armenia without any problems.

things I do on a daily basis I never think twice about, like what I have to wear to go out in public or the authorities might hear my music. These are two of many things that the guys in this room had to consider every day and when I was around these guys I thought about things like this a lot. It really humbled me and made me appreciate the freedoms I have.

I told the guys that the many technical difficulties they were discussing were not noticeable from out in the audience. Of course, these issues are important to becoming better musicians but I do not think that the people in the audience noticed these things and were talking negatively about them. I told them I had been to many metal concerts in the US and this concert really felt like a metal show at any venue in the US. Any band in the US would not like this comment because they want to stand out but my informants could not have been happier. I told them that the most exciting moments of the concert judging by the crowd were the Metallica cover songs that Credenc played and the historic performance of 5grs.

During the conversation they had discussed the location of the next festival and locations like Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the US were tossed around. They had talked about location and I wanted to reinforce the reality that the farther they travel from Iran the more difficult and expensive the festival is going to become. I suggested staying close and traveling further when more of a permanent base had been established. As far as a festival in the US, if there was anything that I could do to support them they knew how to contact me. The idea of having a festival in the US was impossible for them under the current regime but my informants are optimistic about the future and I wanted to encourage that.

We hung out for a while after the meeting and people eventually started to leave (Figure 3.28). It was getting late and as the group I arrived with were leaving and going down the stairs to the street an older man came out of his apartment on the first floor and

was yelling and cursing at us in Armenian. Meraj actually tried to calm the guy but he was inconsolable and Meraj walked away and told us to get walking down the street. We walked for about a mile and I tried to figure out what happened by asking Meraj. Apparently we had been loud and the guy was going to call the police. There was also some racial tensions between Iranians and Armenians that Meraj expressed but he did not go into detail about it so I let it go. Meraj called some taxis that eventually came and picked us all up and I got into a taxi with Meraj and a few others and headed back to the city.

When we got out of the taxi Meraj and I scheduled a meeting with Arsames the next day. He told me to call him at 9 a.m. and find out more details. No one had a pen and we had to walk around and ask people for a pen. This was my first observations of multiple interaction between Armenians and Iranians in the city and I could feel the disdain of people towards us as we tried to find a pen. I never did discover if this was racial tension or because of the way we were dressed but from my observations it seemed like a little of both.

At 9 a.m. the next morning I called Meraj from my hostel and he told me to meet him outside a restaurant near his apartment. I walked over and met him and Anahid, the other vocalist for Master of Persia, and we walked to the apartment where Arsames was staying. When we arrived Meraj told me that Arsames was also doing an interview for the DVD as well and we arranged the furniture a little bit in the living room to accommodate the interview. The interview took about an hour and a half and again I was worried that I would not get a chance to do conduct my interview. After the interview we took some pictures and a short break and the band told me they would sit again and answer my questions.

Ali, the lead singer of Arsames, asked me if the band should answer the questions in Persian or English and I told him, "Whichever makes you the most comfortable." He told

me, "I can answer the questions in English but I can give more detailed answers in Persian." I said, "Persian would be fine because I can translate the answers later." He threw me off guard when he told me to ask the questions in Persian. I was already nervous for the interview because they were the main Iranian band and I had not prepared to ask my questions in Persian. I made it through a few questions, but then I had to switch to English. The interview went well and a lot of it I could not understand but I knew I would have some good material to translate when I returned to the US. We relaxed for about an hour and talked and then I said my goodbyes to Arsames who thanked me for the research I was doing. I said my goodbyes to Meraj and Anahid and I thanked Meraj for everything he had done for me while I was there. If it was not for him I do not think I would have accomplished as much as I did.

When I left Arsames' apartment I felt relieved because my trip was a success. All the interviews I conducted went smoothly and I gathered more information than I imagined I would. I visited a beautiful city, attended a once in a lifetime concert, and my made a lot of new friends. As I walked into the airport just outside of Yerevan to return to the US. I took one last look at Mt. Ararat, which loomed over the airport in the distance and headed inside. I had a lot of information to process and a lot of experiences to analyze and as I settled into my seat on the plane I knew I would have plenty of time to document my thoughts.



Figure 3.1. Handbill for Persian Metal Festival 2012. Source: Persian Rock and Metal Festival <http://www.persianrockmetalfestival.com/?p=1818>



Figure 3.2. Majid and I buying tickets to the Persian Metal Festival. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.3. Bands arriving and meeting outside the Puppet Theater. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.4. Arsames and I before the meeting in the Puppet Theater. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.5. Taking our gathering into the Puppet Theater. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.6. Taking our gathering into Puppet Theater 2. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.7. Persian Force doing their sound check. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.8. Avesta doing their sound check. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.9. Mordab doing their sound check. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.10. Master of Persia opening up the festival. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.11. Scox performing. Source: Jeremy Prindle 2012.



Figure 3.12. Credenc performing. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.13. Persian Force performing. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.14. Avesta performing. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.15. 5grs performing. Source: Jeremy Prindle 2012.



Figure 3.16. Arsames performing. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.17. Picture with Credenc after the show. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.18. Picture with Avesta after the show. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.19. Picture with Persian Force after the show. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.20. Picture with Master of Persia after the show. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.21. All of the bands together after the show. Source: Jeremy Prindle,



Figure 3.22. My interview with Mordab. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.23. Spending time with the members of Avesta, Persian Force, and Mordab at the after party. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.24. Spending time with members of Avesta and Credenc at the after party. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.25. Spending time with members of Avesta at the after party. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.26. Siamak and Shahrokh from Credenc playing at the after party. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.27. Sobhan, the bass player for Persian Force, and I at the meeting. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.



Figure 3.28. Ehsan, the drummer for Slave Mark, and I at Meraj's apartment. Source: Jeremy Prindle, 2012.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS: ORIGINS OF METAL MUSIC IN IRAN

My most important connection to the origins of metal culture in Iran are through my best friend, whose name I must change to Farhad for security reasons. He grew up in Tehran during the 1980s and 1990s and was involved with the metal culture. He gave me great insight into how metal culture blossomed there. His first exposure to metal was at a friend's house in Tehran who had a satellite dish.

Satellites were not common in 1996 and only a handful of middle-class families had them because they were still very expensive. One day the satellite dish at Farhad's friends' house was tuned to MTV and Farhad caught a glimpse of a commercial for Metallica's 1996 album *Load*. He recalls:

We were at somebody's house and I just caught a glimpse on TV, and I'm like "Whoa!" And I remember James like doing some sound (Farhad growling), with his beard (Farhad grabbing his beard), and I'm like "Whoa, that's why they say these people are weird huh?" Literally, at first I was like "That's so frickin weird."¹⁶⁹

Many youth had this experience in Iran and the urge to discover what was happening in music outside of Iran was overwhelming. Heather Rastovac described this phenomenon in "Contending with Censorship" and said, "The very intention of abolishing music in public life unexpectedly led to increasing practices of music... by the younger generation of all social classes."¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Metal musician 1, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Salt Lake City, UT, July 18, 2013.

¹⁷⁰ Rastovac, Heather. "Contending with Censorship: The Underground Music Scene in Urban Iran." *Intersections Online* 10.2 (2009): 67. Intersections. Web. 05 May 2012.

Farhad was a junior in high school in 1996 and he heard people talk about metal music but no one really knew what they were talking about. People were aware of the style of music, they had seen images and heard songs, but they were ignorant about metal culture. What metal music was, what it stood for, what it was doing, was not understood by people in Iran that were listening to metal music at that time.

There was a cassette trading scene at Farhad's high school and kids were getting their hands on many kinds of different music cassettes. Ninety-nine percent of the cassettes that kids had were copies and these copies came from any number of different sources. As Sohrab, the guitar player for Mordab, recalls, "We used to record from the TV to the tape so we could listen to the song."¹⁷¹ Another way, during the few years since the end of the war, young people who had connections with people that left the country had cassettes brought to them. These cassettes were copied and they filtered down through Iranian society.¹⁷²

Zan Azlee, director of a film titled *I Am Muslim Too* traveled to Iran and interviewed the band Arsames in 2007. They briefly discussed the availability of metal music and the difficulty of acquiring cassettes. Ali, the lead singer of Arsames said, "It was hard to find a CD or cassette and when someone go to a foreign country, someone went to other country, like US or European country, I told him to bring me a cassette or CD from there... to buy it for me. All the time it was very difficult for us."¹⁷³

These cassettes were expensive and many Iranian youth could not afford them but the ones that could were trading music. Farhad recalls, "Ooh, it was expensive, it was expensive. I had to like basically put together all of the money that my dad gave me.

¹⁷¹ Sohrab Alimardani, interview.

¹⁷² *I Am Muslim Too*. Dir. Zan Azlee. Fat Bidin Media, 2007. Film.

¹⁷³ Ali Madarshahi. *I Am Muslim Too*. Dir. Zan Azlee. Fat Bidin Media, 2007. Film.

You know the little money you get every week.”¹⁷⁴ He told me about a box of blank Maxell cassettes he purchased that had required months of saving.

Farhad’s first tape was acquired for him by his friend and it had two songs on it by a band called Nirvana. These songs were covers of songs from a band named Metallica. Farhad liked the songs and after listening to the tape for a few days he approached a friend that was involved in tape trading and asked him to find an album of the band Metallica. His friend found a Metallica album and copied it on a blank tape Farhad gave to him. When Farhad received the tape he took it home after school to listen to it and his reaction was “Holy shit this is pretty cool! “Sad But True,” “Holier Than Thou,” the triplets (a guitar technique), I was like ‘Damn! These are so cool!’ Then it started dude. Everyday all day listening to that.”

Ali Azhari, a former member of Arsames, and founder of the Iranian metal band Arthimoth said something very similar when he first listened to metal music. He said:

Since the very first day I listened to some metal I realized this is my way of living. This is what gonna be. If I’m gonna be a musician let’s be a metal musician. Let’s do it this way because it’s all about positive aggression. I realized that this is my life and it’s gonna be my way of living from now till fifty years, seventy years, 120 years.¹⁷⁵

There was no visible metal scene in the mid-1990s, but like-minded people eventually find each other and as Farhad began making connections and discovering new bands a primitive metal culture was uncovered and began to grow. Being part of this new culture was dangerous because people who did not listen to metal automatically identified people who did, as outcasts.

Separating yourself from others, standing out, going against the grain, are not actions that are looked highly upon in an Islamic culture, they are viewed with great suspicion.

¹⁷⁴ Metal musician 1, interview.

¹⁷⁵ Ali Azhari. *I Am Muslim Too*. Dir. Zan Azlee. Fat Bidin Media, 2007. Film.

Farhad recalls his view of people at the time acknowledging publicly that they were metalheads:

It would take a lot for you to come out and say you're a metalhead because even your friends would be scared of you a little bit thinking... everybody thought metal was like murder and kill because you know, it's harsh, it's violent a little bit, it sounded. It's brutal, it's not for softies, right? Metal is not for softies, so if you identified yourself like that they would think you might... I don't know... liking violence, not thinking... I mean you wouldn't realize the dimension of metal until you actually start, until you become it, until you get into it all the way and then you understand there is way more to the business than just a harsh sound.¹⁷⁶

As the metal culture was developing tape trading was a very selfish business as

Farhad recalls:

It was a big time trade you would see nothing like. There were some albums that you have to give four to get this one. Cause it's very hard to find, and the person owning them would give crap to everybody. "Ya I got this album, none of you motherfuckers have it. You want it? I want four albums before I give you this."¹⁷⁷

Armin, an Iranian metalhead described his tactics in *Heavy Metal Islam*:

Everyone was greedy and hungry to get albums, and they would be copied literally a million times, which meant you wanted to make sure to get one of the first copies, because cassettes lost quality with each copy. And we were also tricky. We'd always keep a song for ourselves, and people would have to beg to get it.¹⁷⁸

Tampering with cassettes was a serious offense and people used protective methods to protect the inside of their cassettes. Farhad recalls how people who let others borrow their tapes could end up being scammed for their generosity:

Every cassette was taped around with umm... nail polish so you could not, it's like sealed. You could not open that tape without me knowing. Because I don't want anybody to switch the insides. Every time you record a tape the quality of the second one is lower than the first one. No matter how you do it. But if somebody records and then swaps the insides so they have the better quality and they give the crappy one back to you. I would write... handwritten, on the tape, all my tapes, the name of the band, the year, name of the album, and I would tape on that so if you ever ripped that tape, like re-taped you would rip up my writings too.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶ Metal musician 1, interview.

¹⁷⁷ Metal musician 1, interview.

¹⁷⁸ Mark LeVine. (2008). *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance, and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam* (1st ed.). New York: Three Rivers Press. pg. 190. Print.

Farhad described another form of trade that he used to acquire cassettes and that was his basketball skills. He was one of the best players at his high school and kids were always playing basketball for money. Farhad would team up with a guy he wanted a cassette from, and the money and prestige that came from winning was a fair trade.

The selfishness of tape trading for metalheads began to wear off as they became a tighter group. Farhad recalls how instead of trying to get a better trade deal, he and others began copying cassettes for others who were deemed to be worthy of the “metalhead” identity. He said, “You’re a metalhead. I will hook you up. You’re one of us.”¹⁸⁰ He also recalled, “If I know that you are a true metalhead, because I want you to enjoy listen to more stuff, I’ll record for you, like trying to, basically thinking distribution within your own ranks.”¹⁸¹ This camaraderie among young metalheads in Iran is the fuel metal music needed to spread throughout Iran.

The next breakthrough in the spread of metal culture came with the usage of CDs. The interesting thing about CDs in Iran is that no one listened to an original CD, or a CD that had only one album on it. They became popular about the same time MP3s were becoming popular and people were creating CDs with hundreds of songs on them with their computers which were also becoming more popular as they became cheaper. Most people still did not have access to the internet to download their own MP3s but there were rich people who had internet connections and again MP3s, like cassettes, filtered down through the Iranian population. Farhad had this to say about his experience with these versions of media:

So MP3 came out I remember, it was, it was a madhouse. So now, because there was MP3s you didn’t have to have CDs. Buying CDs, empty CDs were expensive. Not everybody could afford having like fifty of them, no, but you could

¹⁷⁹ Metal musician 1, interview.

¹⁸⁰ Metal musician 1, interview.

¹⁸¹ Metal musician 1, interview.

pack them in the hard drive. Hell yeah, the computer became the friend of everybody.¹⁸²

There were people who had thousands and thousands of MP3s and they would have a thick binder of hundreds of pages of albums to choose from and you would choose what you wanted and that person would go home and create a CD. It was expensive to buy music this way, but it was convenient and saved people the time of trying to piece together the music they wanted through many other sources. Not many people distributed music in this manner because it was extremely dangerous to get caught with a large amount of Western music, and also get paid for it.¹⁸³

Farhad left Iran for the US in 2000 and most middle-class people still did not have access to the internet. According to the World Bank less than one out of every 100 people had access to the internet in 2000. The internet really opened up in Iran in 2002 and the amount of people using it has steadily risen. By 2011, twenty-one people out of every 100 had access to the internet.¹⁸⁴ This has been instrumental in the growth of the metal culture and the explosion of bands in Iran.

¹⁸² Metal musician 1, interview.

¹⁸³ Metal musician 1, interview.

¹⁸⁴ World Bank. "Internet Usage in Iran." *Worldbank.org*. World Bank Group, n.d. Web. 10 July 2013. <http://search.worldbank.org/all?qterm=internet%20usage%20in%20iran>.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS: MUSIC, POPULAR CULTURE, AND IRANIAN SENTIMENT

Music has a rich history in Iran, as we know, and the function of music in Iranians' lives has changed a lot over the centuries. Music is an active part of social life in Iran whether Iranians realize it or not, it influences how they form their identity, their cognitive, emotional, and social functioning and can serve as an avenue for youth that feel they need to express themselves outside of social norms.¹⁸⁵

George Simmel, a German sociologist, believed that the functionality of music gave social groups the ability to communicate emotions that could not be communicated verbally. This is absolutely the case in Iran, as many youth feel the only way they can bear the weight of the oppression that crushes them is by expressing themselves through music. The expression that is released becomes an aspect of social relationships that is continuously changing.¹⁸⁶

As I mentioned, soon after the Iranian revolutionaries consolidated their power in 1979 they immediately banned popular music because of its religiously contested status, its association with dance, and the fact that the Pahlavi monarchy had promoted it as

¹⁸⁵ Ali Delevar and Flora Forooghiyan. "Iranian Social Rap Music, the Developed Individuality of the Youth." *European Journal of Social Sciences*. 18.3 (2011): 354. European Journal of Social Sciences. Web. 02 Sept. 2013.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 354.

part of its modernization policy.¹⁸⁷ During the next decade popular music was torn between many intersections in Iranian discourse like: local and global, quasicolonial dependence and independence, religious and secular, and tradition and modernity.¹⁸⁸

Slowly, over the next ten years the revolutionary zeal concerning music began to fade and the ban on traditional folk music was lifted. Light classical music began showing up on the radio and television for the first time since the revolution and even Western popular music made it into the background music of television programs, without lyrics, of course, as these are still illegal today.¹⁸⁹

Immediately after the end of the Iran-Iraq War in August, 1988 young Iranians began to focus on their own interests, and music, once again became a controversial topic. The regime also had more time to focus on societal issues and Islamic values now that the war was over and they labeled all popular music that was flooding into the country as a cultural invasion.¹⁹⁰ They viewed it as unauthentic and thought the US and its allies were responsible, and the youth, the future of Iran, needed to be protected from the demoralization that it caused. Unfortunately for the regime, they could not stop the flow of music into Iran as the youth had turned into musical addicts consuming whatever music they could find.

A huge influence on the youth in Iran was the Iranian community in Tehrangeles or Irangeles, (Los Angeles) as Elnaz, the manager of Mordab, referred to it as. Iranians in L.A. had created whole new lives for themselves since leaving Iran around the time of

¹⁸⁷ Nooshin, Laudan. "Underground, Overground: Rock Music and Youth Discourses in Iran." *Iranian Studies*. 38.3 (2005): 463. JSTOR. Web. 12 Mar. 2012.

¹⁸⁸ Laudan Nooshin. Language of Rock: "Iranian Youth, Popular Music, and National Identity." *Media, Culture, and Society in Iran: Living With Globalization and the Islamic State*. Ed. Mehdi Semati. New York: Routledge, 2008. 70. Print.

¹⁸⁹ Article 19: Global Campaign for Free Expression. "Unveiled: Art and Censorship in Iran." 2006. 41. Web. 02 Sept. 2013.
<http://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/505/en/unveiled:-art-and-censorship-in-iran>.

¹⁹⁰ Shahram Khosravi. *Young and Defiant in Tehran*. 20.

the revolution. While Iran had been hidden under the fog of war Iranians in Los Angeles had been creating culture, especially popular music. Youth in Iran were listening to it everywhere and the regime adapted quickly by producing their own version of pop music that was considered to be Islamic and acceptable. The regime knew that stopping the flow of music into Iran was impossible so instead of tackling the problem from the top down they attempted to infiltrate music from the inside in order to gain control.

The regimes' strategy worked in the sense that many people liked the music and listened to it, but it became just another genre of music to listen to along with all of the other genres, it did not stop people from listening to Western music, or beginning to experiment with music themselves.

Many Iranian citizens had a problem with popular music on a more secular level. They listened to it and heard nothing that connected it with being Iranian. In Iran music and national identity have always been connected and many Iranians judge music by its display of "Iranian-ness."¹⁹¹ Since the revolution societal discourse has constantly shifted between *tajadud* and *sonat* (modernity and tradition) and the regime succeeded in convincing many Iranians that music was part of the Shah's modernization process that stripped Iran of its cultural identity.¹⁹²

Young people in Iran faced a dilemma because by listening to popular music they identified with *tajadud*, and this became problematic for them as the regime saw this as rejection of traditional Islamic values. Young people in Iran were tired of being isolated though, and music helped them make their first steps to joining the global community.

A very important fact that I learned from my informants is that Iranians love music. All types, all genres, anything that they can get their hands, they listen to it. Yashar, the

¹⁹¹ Laudan Nooshin. "Underground, Overground. 481.

¹⁹² Shahram Khosravi. *Young and Defiant in Tehran*. 162.

drummer of 5grs, told me, “Iranian people love music. We got a very powerful traditional music. Every single person in Iran loves music no matter what it is, maybe traditional, maybe pop music, maybe jazz music, metal music... but metal music in Iran is as I said facing a lot of misconception.”¹⁹³

Iranians are so enthusiastic about music, that any genre of Western band could come to Iran and fill the national stadium with screaming Iranians, according to Arash, lead singer and bassist of TarantisT. He told me that Iranians are “party people” and they love to socialize. It does not matter the occasion, if there is any reason to have a party Iranians will celebrate.¹⁹⁴ Many Iranians use the frequent religious ceremonies that take place every year as a reason to get together and socialize. Arash said, “People get together just for like socializing, finding boyfriends, and girlfriends you know, and just having fun, just being out, because we love to just... party and you know, be together and socialize.”¹⁹⁵

A public space that has really developed since the end of the Iran-Iraq War is the coffee shop. Coffee shops have popped up everywhere in Tehran, especially in the north of the city. Here, young people gather and talk about social issues like the opposite sex, music, movies, fashion, cars, and many other topics, but they do not talk about political issues, which seems like it would be extremely difficult because of the nature of the regime in Iran, every topic is political. In the book *Young and Defiant in Tehran*, Shahram Khosravi writes:

In the coffee shops young people, according to what they themselves claim, do not discuss “political aspirations” but talk tirelessly about their “social aspirations.” They make a distinction between “political” issues that deal with anti-regime activities, and “social” ones, that highlight the “unpretentious” anxieties and needs of young people. In spite of their tactic of denial of “political” topics in

¹⁹³ Yashar Mojtahedzadeh. Personal interview. September 2012.

¹⁹⁴ Arash, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Los Angeles, CA, May 17, 2012.

¹⁹⁵ Arash, interview.

order to avoid provocation, their “social demands” are very much “political demands.”¹⁹⁶

Iranians are also very informed, and according to Elnaz and Sohrab, the guitar player for Mordab, they watch all the movies and TV series, and listen to all the music they can get their hands on. Piracy is not illegal in Iran, like it is in the US. It is a rather peculiar problem because in Iran it is not illegal to pirate music, but possessing and listening to the music is. In the US, obviously it is the exact opposite, pirating music will get you into trouble, not possessing and listening to it. Arash told me that people need to understand that Iran is much different than the Arab countries around it. Iranians are so up to date and educated and they know about many things going on in the world that Americans are not even aware of.¹⁹⁷

In a portion of my interview with Mordab they told me:

Sohrab: Because of the piracy thing we talked about a little bit earlier you know. It couldn't be that a band release an album and Iranian people wouldn't listen to it, or some movie came out and the Iranian people wouldn't watch it.

Elnaz: They are so up to date.

Sohrab: Exactly, because of piracy every Iranian is probably more up to date than even...

Jeremy: Americans? Because you guys can get all the movies and...

Sohrab: And we do! The thing is we do!

Elnaz: We are so enthusiastic!¹⁹⁸

The enthusiasm that my informants described to me was evident the whole time I was with them because I was bombarded with questions about popular Western culture. On

¹⁹⁶ Shahram Khosravi. *Young and Defiant in Tehran*. 149.

¹⁹⁷ Arash, interview.

¹⁹⁸ Sohrab Alimardani and Elnaz Alimardani, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 15, 2012.

the day I interviewed Mordab I wore an old retro t-shirt from the 1980s with Marvel's "Avengers" on it. Elnaz surprised me when she asked me why I was wearing a Marvel t-shirt and not a DC t-shirt (DC and Marvel being the two most popular comic book companies in the US). She said:

Elnaz: Can I ask you a question? Why marvel?

Jeremy: Why?

Elnaz: Why not DC?

Jeremy: Oh I like DC too, it's just a t-shirt, I mean I don't know...

Elnaz: Well it represents you. What you wear, doesn't it?

Jeremy: Ya, I like DC too but Marvel uhh... I don't know, that's a good question, cause I like Batman and Superman...

Elnaz: In Iran these two are very conflicting.

Jeremy: Oh really?

Elnaz: It is like Pepsi and Coke. DC and Marvel AARRGGH!¹⁹⁹

Young people in Iran today are known as "Third Generation" Iranians and people that were young during the 1979 revolution are known as "First Generation."²⁰⁰ There is a big difference between these two generations of young people as the "First Generation" was responsible for an anti-Western revolution that overthrew the Shah and his modernization policies while the "Third Generation" is extremely curious about Western life and the global community. Khosravi asked a young person in Iran why young Iranians have such a fascination with the US and he said, "It is because mullahs shout all the time about how awful America is. A thing which is awful in their eyes must be a wonderful thing."²⁰¹ This statement is very telling and proves that the regime has no idea

¹⁹⁹ Elnaz Alimardani, interview.

²⁰⁰ Shahram Khosravi. *Young and Defiant in Tehran*. 126.

²⁰¹ Shahram Khosravi. *Young and Defiant in Tehran*. 127.

how to solve the problem that the young population is creating for them. By banning and restricting access to music, the opposite sex, the internet, and many other things they are creating a rapaciousness among the youth for those very things.

Elnaz went on to ask me if I had seen *The Dark Knight* and I told her it was one of my favorite films. She told me they had a low key screening of *The Dark Knight* in a cinema in Tehran and everyone that heard about it arrived at the cinema wearing Batman t-shirts and the excitement was thick in the air. I asked her if she went to this screening and she said, “Ya! You bet I did! But we still haven’t seen *The Dark Knight Rises* cause we don’t... we don’t want to watch it with the poor quality... the camcorder quality.”²⁰²

The Dark Knight Rises had recently been released in theaters around the world and Elnaz was disappointed that no theaters in Yerevan were showing it.²⁰³ The eagerness of Iranians to become part of the global community is strikingly apparent. It is as if Iran turned into a black hole and information about popular culture is sucked into it and consumed by millions of people.

Youth in Iran use technology to determine the social aspects of their lives. They look globally to musicians, actors, and sports figures to be role models because they do not have any role models to look to in Iran. These role models are counter to current official Iranian culture, therefore the youth are driven underground and they must constantly negotiate between these two realms.

The idea of being famous is shunned by the regime because they believe that this takes away attention that should be focused on God. The regime views the youth who look up to people outside Iran as victims of Western ideals who blindly consume and

²⁰² Elnaz Alimardani, interview.

²⁰³ Elnaz Alimardani, interview.

imitate foreign cultural products.²⁰⁴

Enthusiasm for Western culture is very dangerous, especially for metalheads. Metalheads are forced to listen and play metal in their homes, or special private places. Playing, listening, or promoting metal music in public in Iran will get you harassed, arrested, and in some cases, worse. Sina explained to me how it is not only government propaganda that is influencing Iranians and their view of metal. He said:

They are showing on national TV a bunch of crazy dudes playing metal, and like getting into different problems. Using pill and like drinking so much and everything, so I think that's the reason but... I think cause metal is more of a noisy genre and you need to have a certain level of understanding of music in order for you to listen to metal and get what they are talking about.²⁰⁵

Ali, the lead singer of Arsames, has a very different view of the way television has influenced Iranians concerning metal music. He believes that satellite television has helped Iranian perception of metal music and Iranians have become more accepting. He told me that since Iran is an Islamic country metalheads are rare and when people see a metalhead they are surprised. The more exposure they have to metal music the more accepting they will become.²⁰⁶

Both of these viewpoints hold truth because many people do not have unlimited access to a satellite television and their encounters with metal music are very limited. The brief encounters they do have tend to portray metal music in a negative light. On the other hand many Iranians now have satellite dish access in their homes and exposure to metalheads in public and this softens their ignorance about metal music.

²⁰⁴ Mahmood Shahabi. "Youth sub-Cultures in post-Revolutionary Iran." *Global Youth?: Hybrid Identities, Plural Words*. Ed. Pam Nilan and Carles Feixa. New York: Routledge, 2006. 118. Print.

²⁰⁵ Sina Talebian, interview with Jeremy Prindle, Los Angeles, CA, May 22, 2013.

²⁰⁶ Ali Madarshahi, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 17, 2012.

Iranian ignorance about metal music today is still very common. I asked Faraz, the bass player for 5grs how he felt his fellow Iranians viewed him and he said to me, “Is a hard question to answer you know, because they don’t even know what metal is. They just tell you ‘Is that music?’ They don’t even understand what it is.”²⁰⁷

Faraz also explained to me the difference between the northern and southern areas of Tehran. The North is where more middle- and middle-upper-class people live and the South is where the lower-class live. In the North people have had a small amount of exposure to metal music but in the South people do not understand what metal music is.²⁰⁸

Ali, the lead guitarist for Mordab, said that he thinks people in Iran view metal how people in the US viewed metal fifty years ago.²⁰⁹ I agree with this statement wholeheartedly because metal music is a new culture in Iran and it is going to go through the same metamorphosis that metal music had to go through in the Western world. The opposition to metal in Iran is more intense than it was in Britain or the US in the 1970s, but as metal culture grows, exposure to metal grows and ignorance gives way to awareness, then knowledge.

Iranian ignorance of metal music leads to many misconceptions. Yashar told me that many Americans have misconceptions about metal music (which they do), so how can you expect Iranians who do not understand many things about the global community to understand this style of music.²¹⁰

²⁰⁷ Faraz Jabbari, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 13, 2012.

²⁰⁸ Faraz Jabbari, interview.

²⁰⁹ Ali Esfahani, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 15, 2012.

²¹⁰ Yashar Mojtahedzadeh, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 13, 2012.

This was an excellent point, because as a metalhead in the US I deal with misconceptions about metal music by people on a regular basis. If educated people in the US have misconceptions about this genre of music, the misconceptions by an Iranian with minimal exposure to popular music in general is going to be substantial.

Sina told me that his father is one of his biggest fans but he has to sit down with him and explain to him the lyrics and what the songs are about because he does not understand the music. He said:

My father says "Ok, come sit here and explain to me what you are saying right now because I don't get anything from this music." Then I'm like "Ok, in this we are trying to show the frustrations behind leaving your country." And he was like "Ya great, so why don't you just...why are you growling? Why don't you just say these things in like a more normal way?" I was like "This is metal! This is metal dad!"²¹¹

Misconceptions lead people to make judgments and the most common judgment is that metalheads are Satanists. There was no disagreement about this by any of the metalheads I interviewed. All of them agreed that this judgment is very common and they regularly have to defend themselves. They described having to explain metal music to their family members so they would not think they were crazy or Satan worshippers. Faraz told me that he showed pictures of metal musicians to his family to show them that they are regular people who also have families. He said it is embarrassing to tell members of your family that you are a musician because in Iran there is no future for a musician.²¹²

Satanic elements have been associated with metal since its inception and I described in the literature review the satanic labels Black Sabbath had to deal with. The speedy judgment many Iranians make is that satanic symbolism in metal means that metalheads have an interest in satanic ideologies. For the majority of metalheads in Iran these

²¹¹ Sina Talebian, interview.

²¹² Faraz Jabbari, interview.

symbols represent a rebellion against social constraints and a desire for more freedom.²¹³

Adam LeVine wrote a fantastic piece about how people in the Middle East are responding to the metal scenes that are growing in many countries there. He describes the black metal scene that emerged in Scandinavia during the early 1990s and the violence and murder that surrounded it. This scene in no way represents the global metal scene as a whole, but such savage stories have made a global impression on people's view of metal music. LeVine makes an important point that "Satanism in the extreme metal scene has by and large been concerned more with 'liberation from perceived constraints' of humanity than worshipping evil."²¹⁴

I experienced some of the feelings these guys deal with while I was in Yerevan. While I was there I mostly wore a metal t-shirt, jeans, and boots, and people would give me strange looks, or even stare. At the time I was not sure if it was because I was American or because of my clothes. I assumed it was most likely both but I asked Pezhman and Pooya, twin brothers from the band Persian Force if they experienced these things and they said, "Of course!" They told me:

Pooya: One thing I want to say... ahh, and now I want to tell you about the people scene metal music in Iran, you know for example, a regular person in Iran when you see... that you said before last night "Why are Armenian people staring at me like "Oh my god he is wearing black t-shirt and boots" you know. In Iran is like too. When you are going out with chain and...

Pezhman: Necklace...

²¹³ Hecker, Pierre. "Taking a Trip to the Middle Eastern Metal Scene." *North-South Currently* (2005): 59. Academia. Web. 12 Mar. 2012.

²¹⁴ LeVine, Mark. "Doing the Devil's Work: Heavy Metal and the Threat to Public Order in the Muslim World." *Social Compass* 56.4 (2009): 570. Academic Search Premier. Web. 12 Mar. 2012.

Pooya: Necklace, black t-shirt they are saying “Oh they are Satanist, absolutely Satanist.”²¹⁵

Despite the ignorance, misconceptions, and judgments Iranians have toward metal, Mehrad, the drummer for Master of Persia, said that Iranians do not have a problem with metal music. They may not understand it or like it, but they do not have a problem with people that are involved with metal music. The government has a problem because of Islam, but the people do not have a problem.²¹⁶

It is clear that Iranians place an extremely high value on culture and it is an important part of their lives. Many of my informants talked about music and film like they were drugs and they needed as much of it as they could get their hands on. Iranians are very globally aware and with their high level of education and access to the internet they learn as much as they possibly can about the rest of the world.

This hunger for culture has proven to be the reason subcultures like metal are growing in Iran, and despite the ignorance, misconceptions, and judgments that metalheads receive by other Iranians they are respectful and do what they can to inform Iranians about metal and give themselves a better name.

The legal and social status of music in Iran is constantly changing as religious and political figures use music to benefit their agenda. The Quran does not officially condemn music as something that should not be allowed, but the clergy in Iran believes that music is a gateway to immoral acts like dancing, lust, sex, drinking, and people’s attention should be focused on God, not these earthly things.

²¹⁵ Pooya and Pezhman Moradi, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 15, 2012.

²¹⁶ Mehrad Motamedi, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 16, 2012.

CHAPTER 6

ANALYSIS: THE IRANIAN REGIME AND METAL MUSIC

In this chapter I had to take a different approach for citing my informants to protect them.²¹⁷ I refrained from asking any questions to any of the bands that currently live in Iran, specifically Mordab, Persian Force, Credenc, 5grs, and Arsames about Islam and politics. The regime does not take criticism lightly and I do not know their boundaries when discussing these topics, therefore I only discussed these topics with my informants that live in the US and Armenia. Even though these bands are free from persecution and wanted their name attached to their statements, I simply thought it best to keep all quotes from my informants anonymous for this chapter.

It was important for me to learn if the Twelver Shi'ism²¹⁸ that the Islamic Republic of Iran rules by could eventually allow metal music to exist. I wanted to learn from my informants whether it was the government that has a problem with metal music, Shi'ism, or both. Mehrad mentioned at the end of the first chapter how the government had a problem with metal because of Shi'ism. Is this the consensus? Or did my informants have other views.

Some of my informants were very adamant that metal music can never have any relationship with Shi'ism and since their own country makes them feel like outcasts the

²¹⁷ I refer to all of my informants in this chapter as "Metalhead 1-12, and Band 1-2."

²¹⁸ I will refer to the Islamic Republic of Iran's version of Islam, known as Twelver Shi'ism, simply as Shi'ism throughout this chapter and when I use "Islam" I am referring to the global religion.

nonconformist and antireligious aspects of metal was one of the initial attractions to the genre for them. I asked Metalhead 2 about metal's relationship with Shi'ism and he answered me with a question, "What is the relationship between a car and water? Do you understand what I am asking?"²¹⁹

When I asked Band 1 what the connection was, they all just stared at me for a few seconds and then one of them asked me to repeat the question. After I repeated it they began laughing and told me there is absolutely no connection at all.²²⁰

Metalhead 3 told me that music in general has almost no place in Islam, it is practically forbidden. He then answered me with the question, "If almost all music is forbidden in Iran, how do you think the regime feels about metal music?"²²¹ These answers were the most common answers I received and the ones I expected, but there were some more extreme answers, and thankfully some optimistic answers as well.

Metalhead 4 had an interesting view, he flipped the table on me and pointed out that everyone was saying Islam cannot accept metal when in reality it is metal that cannot accept Islam.²²² This brings me back to my earlier point about Iranian metalheads choosing metal for its antireligious aspects which gives them a psychological edge by demonstrating that it is the metal community in Iran that does not approve of the regime. The global metal scene though, has changed dramatically over the last ten years as Christian metal is now flourishing in the West and other nations, like Armenia, which I mentioned in the introduction.²²³ This does not necessarily mean that Shi'ism is going to

²¹⁹ Metalhead 2, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²²⁰ Band 1, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²²¹ Metalhead 3, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²²² Metalhead 4, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²²³ Wikipedia. "List of Christian Metal Bands." *En.wikipedia.org*. Wikipedia, n.d. Web. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Christian_metal_bands.

accept metal, but I absolutely believe that it is possible for Shi'ism and Islam to accept metal and vice-versa, neither of these subjects are monolithic. There is no more obvious example than the one given by Mark Levine in *Heavy Metal Muslims*.

Mark LeVine, a global metal scholar, interviewed a black metal band in Egypt that were devout Muslims. Black metal is the most extreme genre of metal and the most antireligious so for LeVine to discover a black metal band of Muslims in the Middle East is stunningly hopeful for the relationship of Islam, Shi'ism, and metal music. In *Heavy Metal Muslims* the band discussed how they attend prayer at the local mosque every Friday and then go practice. A member of the band said, "We pray, and then go play black metal."²²⁴ This is the clearest example that can be given to prove that metal and Islam can exist together. If black metal and Islam can begin a relationship then there is absolutely no reason that Shi'ism and metal music cannot start a relationship of their own, which leads me to believe that the problems between metalheads and the Islamic Republic of Iran are purely political.

Some of my informants held the belief that since metal has become such a global force, is present in almost every country, and is in contact with almost every religion, there is no reason to believe that it cannot be accepted by Shi'ism. They pointed out that there are metal bands in countries like Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and other Arab countries.²²⁵

Metalhead 2 told me that Islam never mentioned music in a clear manner and the government imposed its interpretation of how music should be dealt with.²²⁶ He is right, there is nowhere in the Quran that specifically mentions music or how music should be

²²⁴ LeVine, Mark. "Heavy Metal Muslims: The Rise of a post-Islamist Public Sphere." *Contemporary Islam* 2.3 (2008): 237. Print.

²²⁵ This is absolutely true and I will refer you again to the Encyclopaedia Metallum where a person can do a band search and discover many different metal bands that exist in the Middle East. <http://www.metal-archives.com/>.

²²⁶ Metalhead 2, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

viewed. There are a few verses that Muslims who believe music is “haram” use to validate their argument, one of the most common being this verse: “And of the people is he who buys the amusement of speech to mislead from the way of Allah without knowledge, and takes it in ridicule. Those will have a humiliating torment.”²²⁷ According to Mark LeVine, this verse warns that a person should avoid things that prevent focus on God. The focus here is on the term “amusement of speech” and during the early years of Islam, scholars argued, that this could be interpreted to refer to music.²²⁸

There are also verses in the Quran that can be interpreted to support music, for example: “Say, have you seen what Allah has sent down to you of provision of which you have made lawful and unlawful? Say, has Allah permitted you, or do you invent about Allah?”²²⁹ There are Muslims and non-Muslims who believe this could be interpreted to show that the scholars who believe music is unlawful are deceivers.

An article from *The Sydney Morning Herald* in 2010 reported that Ayatollah Khamenei had spoken out about music in Iran. He said that young people needed to focus on education in science and useful skills and stop wasting time with music. He went on to say “Although music is halal, promoting and teaching it is not compatible with the highest values of the sacred regime of the Islamic Republic.”²³⁰ This is an interesting statement because he was giving a speech condemning music and its teaching, yet he is acknowledging that music is lawful. This brings us to another interesting dichotomy, if music is lawful why are people in Iran being persecuted for it? I imagine this is a

²²⁷ Quran. “31:6.” *Quran.com*. Quran, N.d. Web. 02 Sept. 2013. <http://quran.com/31>.

²²⁸ LeVine, Mark. “Doing the Devil’s Work: Heavy Metal and the Threat to Public Order in the Muslim World.” *Social Compass* 56.4 (2009): 568. Academic Search Premier. Web. 12 Mar. 2012.

²²⁹ Quran. “10:59.” *Quran.com*. Quran, N.d. Web. 02 Sept. 2013. <http://quran.com/10/59>.

²³⁰ Sydney Morning Herald. “Iran’s Supreme Leader Seeks Music Ban.” *Smh.com.au*. Fairfax Media, 4 Aug. 2010. Web. 16 Aug. 2013. <http://www.smh.com.au/world/irans-supreme-leader-seeks-music-ban-20100804-115xn.html>.

question that will not be answered anytime soon and this causes a lot of frustration, especially with metal musicians. Many of my informants would shake their heads at me when I would press them about the details about Islamic law and tell me that I should not try to rationalize this problem because the regime keeps it confusing and vague to benefit themselves.

Actual constitutional law in Iran is not much clearer than the Quran about musical expression. According to certain articles in the Iranian constitution the government only has the authority to crackdown on freedom of speech when the expression is against Islamic values. Article 4 of Iran's constitution states:

All civil, penal, financial, economic, administrative, cultural, military, political and other laws and regulations must be based on Islamic criteria. This principle applies absolutely and generally to all articles of the Constitution as well as other laws and regulation, and the wise persons of the Guardian Council are judges in this matter.²³¹

Here it states that as long as a person expresses themselves within the boundaries of Islam their expression will not be confronted, but if their expression is outside Islamic boundaries the law is being violated. This gives the regime a lot of flexibility in interpreting what they believe is outside the boundaries of Islam. Article 24 also states something similar, "Publications and the press have freedom of expression except when it is detrimental to the fundamental principles of Islam or the rights of the public. The details of this exception will be specified by law."²³²

As you can see there is not a specific law that prohibits metal music and the governing norms of the regime are learned by metalheads through experience. If someone gets arrested for wearing a pentagram word will travel through the metal

²³¹ Assembly of Experts. *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 24 Oct. 1979. Constitution. <http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/government/constitution-1.html>.

²³² Assembly of Experts. *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, 24 Oct. 1979. Constitution. <http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/government/constitution-3.html>.

community by word of mouth and online letting people know what happened. Authorities crackdown selectively and inconsistently and metalheads live with constant anxiety.²³³

Metalhead 5 vented his frustration to me saying, “We have no idea what they’re doing. We have no idea what they are, you know, uhh... politic or whatever their way is. Why do they forbid this kind of thing?”²³⁴

Metalhead 6 said, “We don’t have any certain law in Iran, if for example you steal something you are a criminal. This is a certain law. If it is about metal music, tattoo, piercing, or long hair... (raises his arms in bewilderment).”²³⁵

The anxiety that my informants exude when they tell me about this situation is disheartening. Constantly feeling that you could be arrested at any moment for any reason, none of those reasons being actual laws, is an unfortunate fact of life for them. Unfortunately conditions in Iran for metalheads have regressed and it is hard for many of them to accept.

The situation was better for metalheads in 1997 when Khatami was elected president than it is now. In 1997 he instituted many cultural reforms, concerning things like music that had been banned since the revolution, and the youth loved him at the time of his election. This of course changed during his two terms, as the conservatives limited his power. Despite this, when he was elected the whole cultural environment of Iran improved.

In “Contending with Censorship: The Underground Music scene in Urban Iran,” written by Heather Rastovac, she describes some of the reforms that Khatami implemented, for example media publications began to express different viewpoints,

²³³ Rastovac, Heather. “Contending with Censorship: The Underground Music Scene in Urban Iran.” *Intersections Online* 10.2 (2009): 76. Intersections. Web. 05 May 2012.

²³⁴ Metalhead 5, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²³⁵ Metalhead 6, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

certain concerts were allowed to proceed, and a legal market for cassettes and CDs emerged.²³⁶ Musical instruments were now able to be legally purchased as long as they served a licit purpose.²³⁷ There is no description of what a “licit purpose” actually means and again is left to the interpretation of the regime giving them full control.

The government established eight cultural centers throughout Tehran that promoted concerts and music education. Musical publications also became popular, for example, *The Art of Music*, and *The Mahur Quarterly*. The radio and national television stations also implemented huge changes as they began playing more styles of music than war hymns and religious music.²³⁸

Metalhead 7 told me, “Ya, there were major changes, because back then when Khatami was president, at that time, music... at least musically everything was rolling and every aspect of music, every aspect of cultural activity, was trying to get better. I remember back then there wasn’t a week coming without a metal concert.”²³⁹

Metalhead 8 talked about how the metal scene really began to grow during this time and the bravery of all the musicians as they brought their talents into the public sphere. He told me that he played live concerts during this time and his band pushed the boundaries because they always played their shows with a vocal singing in English which was not allowed, but they found ways to do it.²⁴⁰

One of the festivals he was a part of was an online festival that was put on by the

²³⁶ Rastovac, Heather. “Contending with Censorship: The Underground Music Scene in Urban Iran.” *Intersections Online* 10.2 (2009): 67. Intersections. Web. 05 May 2012.

²³⁷ Ameneh Youssefzadeh. “The Situation of Music in Iran since the Revolution: The Role of Official Organizations.” *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 9.2 (2000): 39. JSTOR. Web. 21 Nov. 2013.

²³⁸ Rastovac, Heather. “Contending with Censorship.” 67.

²³⁹ Metalhead 7, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²⁴⁰ Metalhead 8, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

website called Tehran Avenue,²⁴¹ and was designed to give Iranians a place to find cultural events happening in Tehran. The festival Tehran Avenue organized in 2002 was not a physical festival, it was only online because a live rock music festival was not possible yet. The official name of the festival was the Underground Music Competition and twenty-one bands officially entered. It was an unprecedented event in Iran and it showcased new Iranian styles of music to many Iranians who had no idea the bands even existed, showing the international community that there is a rock music scene in Iran. Bands entered via *tehranavenue.com* where people could come listen to songs from the bands and vote on their favorite.

Laudin Nooshin wrote in *Underground, Overground: Rock Music and youth Discourses in Iran* that the winner of the contest was given webspace, time in-studio, contact with professional musicians, and a place in a concert comprised of the bands that had placed in the top four spots. The concert was to be held at Farabi Hall but was cancelled two days before it took place.²⁴² Regardless of the prizes this was a huge event for every band involved and really opened up Iran and the world to music that was being produced underground there.

Metalhead 7 told me about a concert that took place in Azadi Square in Tehran. Azadi, which means freedom, is the largest square in Tehran and has a large monument, known as Azadi Tower, in its center. A huge stage was erected in the square and they would hold concerts there during Khatami's presidency. Metalhead 7 said, "There was a Metallica tribute on a huge stage in middle of Azadi center, just imagine playing a Metallica tribute on that stage. Right now it is almost impossible to play on that stage,

²⁴¹ Tehran Avenue is an interesting website because it is still operational in the sense that you can examine the archives of the website but nothing new has been posted for a few years. I am not sure what the situation is with this website. <http://tehranavenue.com/>.

²⁴² Nooshin, Laudan. "Underground, Overground: Rock Music and Youth Discourses in Iran." *Iranian Studies*. 38.3 (2005): 474. JSTOR. Web. 12 Mar. 2012.

play metal on that stage.”²⁴³

Some of my informants, while they agreed that Khatami’s reforms were helpful, did not want me to be deceived into believing that this meant they were free to listen and perform metal music. Metalhead 2 said to me, “Of course we have lots of changes when Khatami was president, but we have a problem too, you know. You can’t say lots of changes, no, they are not lots of changes. That time is easier to have a festival. You can go up and show yourself and playing your songs.”²⁴⁴

Metalhead 8 said, “You had more... I don’t want to say freedom, like comfortability in doing things, so it was going in a better direction.”²⁴⁵

A conversation I had with Band 2 about Khatami’s reforms went like this:

Jeremy: He was very open-minded I guess kind of...

Ali: No... little.

Jeremy: Little, ya. But I mean he allowed...

Sohrab: Within his own limits you know, that the government, that they... you know the president is like part of a system in Iran.

Elnaz: He is the presenter of the system.

Sohrab: You’ve got the Supreme Leader, you’ve got the parliament... you’ve got all types of things in the government, he was a little bit more open-minded...

Elnaz: A little bit

Sohrab: Peace and, let’s be friends. But, but... don’t think that he was in his time Iran was a free place and then Ahmadinejad came and, no it wasn’t like that.²⁴⁶

I think the point that they were making here was that reforms were strictly

²⁴³ Metalhead 7, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²⁴⁴ Metalhead 2, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²⁴⁵ Metalhead 8, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²⁴⁶ Band 2, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

political and that yes, they had more freedom, but they were not free. The president is just the spokesperson for the Supreme Leader and while he has a little room to make changes he ultimately does what he is told. Metalhead 4 did not think that there was much benefit from Khatami's reforms, he felt that maybe more harm had been done than good. He said, "I think Khatami as president was like a painkiller, just like a painkiller."²⁴⁷ I asked him why he felt this way and he told me that because of the reforms instituted by Khatami many metal musicians surfaced from the underground and showed themselves to the public. This ended up being very bad for them because when Khatami's second term was finished and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took office the reforms vanished and the government knew who all the metal musicians were.²⁴⁸

I think that metal bands were over enthusiastic about the new shape the public sphere was taking during Khatami's presidency and should not have appeared aboveground so quickly because Khatami was interested in making concessions with young people about pop music, not metal music. Khatami brought pop music to the surface allowing the government to take control of it and create an industry which came to be known as pop-ejaded (the new pop). Metal musicians were excited as pop musicians surfaced and they followed, thinking they would be included, but this was not the case. Metal musicians unknowingly moved in to occupy the space that pop music had vacated when it was allowed to surface.²⁴⁹

Khatami spent a lot of time improving and promoting civil society but he had a rough time enacting many of the reforms he talked about because the hardliners in power

²⁴⁷ Metalhead 4, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²⁴⁸ Metalhead 4, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²⁴⁹ Nooshin, Laudan. "Underground, Overground: Rock Music and Youth Discourses in Iran." *Iranian Studies*. 38.3 (2005): 476. JSTOR. Web. 12 Mar. 2012.

marginalized him until his time as president was over. When the hard-liners²⁵⁰ got their man “Ahmadinejad” into power they immediately took action against the civil progress Khatami had made. Ahmadinejad, as president, was also the head of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution and he revived the harsh rules that Khatami had loosened, and banned all Western music from the state media.²⁵¹ He also cracked down on most musical expression in the public sphere and metal musicians were forced back into their basements.

From the discussions with my informants I learned that there was an interesting dichotomy that had appeared since the succession of Ahmadinejad to the presidency. Despite reforms disappearing and rules directed at musicians becoming stricter, there are still more and more bands making themselves known in Iran. I think this is a testament to the power of metal music and Iranians love for it. Once the door that restricted music was cracked by Khatami the weight of the Iranian people pushed against it and when Ahmadinejad’s cabinet decided that door needed to be closed they simply did not have the strength to close it.

Metalhead 9 believes that the metal scene in Iran is growing because of the strength of the musicians. He said, “After Khatami it was harder and bands could not play concerts. There is a proverb ‘What doesn’t kill me makes me stronger.’ Bands have become stronger and it is easier now for them to come out of Iran.”²⁵² There is a lot of truth to this statement because originally bands were unaccepted by the regime, then reforms made it acceptable, and then one day it became unacceptable again. I think it

²⁵⁰ Hard-liners are people and regime officials that fully support the regime and are in direct opposition to reformists.

²⁵¹ Article 19: Global Campaign for Free Expression. “Unveiled: Art and Censorship in Iran.” 2006. 42. Web. 02 Sept. 2013.
<http://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/505/en/unveiled:-art-and-censorship-in-iran>.

²⁵² Metalhead 9, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

was very hard for bands to deal with and many disbanded because of it, but many continued, setting an example for new bands.

The government, like the Iranian people, have misconceptions about the global metal scene. Metalhead 4 mentioned that since the reforms were introduced many bands showed themselves in public. The regime was surprised at the amount of young people that were involved in rock and metal culture during Khatami's administration and conducted research into the culture. They discovered the dark side of metal music and labeled all metal musicians and fans as devil worshippers. Metalhead 10 said, "Some metal bands in the world, lyrics about Satan, lyrics about anti-religion, anti-Christ. They fucked it up for everybody else."²⁵³

Metalhead 2 and 11 said:

2: You can't play in our country, you know.

11: Yes, it is like Satanist.

2: You know they are stopping you like that.²⁵⁴

Mahmood Shahabi wrote about "bricolage" in his piece titled *Youth sub-Cultures in post-Revolutionary Iran* and how all aspects of global culture are being filtered by the youth of Iran. Objects and meanings create a sign within a culture and these signs are assembled into discourse. When these signs are collected by another culture a new discourse is created.²⁵⁵

Iranian metalheads have created their own metal culture in Iran by collecting symbols and meanings from all different metal genres and the regime has interpreted this to be a

²⁵³ Metalhead 10, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²⁵⁴ Metalhead 2 and 11, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²⁵⁵ Shahabi, Mahmood. "Youth sub-Cultures in post-Revolutionary Iran." *Global Youth?: Hybrid Identities, Plural Words*. Ed. Pam Nilan and Carles Feixa. New York: Routledge, 2006. 111-129. Print.

conscious politically motivated act against the regime. The regime examined global metal culture and found overtly political and satanic symbols and meanings and interpreted them without examining how these things have filtered through the Iranian youth. There are many different symbols and meanings for every genre of metal and to lump these into one category shows how the regime is focused only on the satanic aspect of metal.

While many Iranian metalheads display a bricolage of metal culture symbols there is by no means any evidence that these metalheads are involved in active political resistance. For them these symbols mean freedom of religion, freedom of thought, and their desire to be themselves. All my informants made it clear to me that they do not care about the Islamic Republic, all they want is to be able to play their music, be left alone, and make a living. Global metal culture in its very nature is not an organized culture, it is the exact opposite. One of the core attributes of metal culture is nonconformity and this is no different in Iran. Shahabi said, "Youth subcultures in Iran lack any focus to formally challenge existing political structures."²⁵⁶ This is because the subcultures that are becoming popular in Iran are once removed from their place or culture of origin. For example, in the US punk music culture was driven by ethnicity, in Britain it was driven by class (very similar to metal) and once it made its way to Iran the political meanings were not carried with it. Shahabi said, "There was no sociocultural base for a movement dedicated to subverting the consumerist lifestyle in a developing country with a different level of development and affluence."²⁵⁷

Freemuse is an organization dedicated to the freedom of musical expression around the world and they published an article in 2007 about a party in Karaj that was broken up

²⁵⁶ Shahabi. Mahmood. "Youth Sub-cultures in Iran." 121.

²⁵⁷ Ibid. 120-121.

by police and 230 people were arrested. There were rock bands, rap groups, and DJs who performed as well. The government confiscated alcohol, CDs, and un-Islamic clothing for women and labeled the whole event as a satanic event. Swedish-Iranian free-lance journalist Nima Daryamadj was interviewed for this article and he does not believe the event was satanic, he said, "Hard rock groups do flirt with Satanism, just like a funny thing, maybe it has been misinterpreted. But most often the regime is using these words on things they consider immoral or un-Islamic. For example they refer to the USA as the Great Satan."²⁵⁸

Negar Shaghaghi wrote in *Sounds of Silence* about this concert as well and she described the state run media reporting "the musicians had served blood and screened pornography."²⁵⁹

This is another example of the government not being clear about what the law is regarding these things, because they have to create scenarios in order to charge people with crimes. Kave, a musician who attended the concert said, "Satanic concert? I don't understand what neither Vahid DJ nor that rap group have to do with Satanism!"²⁶⁰ The government is cracking down on things deemed un-Islamic, and therefore "satanic" in their eyes, and literally charging them with Satanism. There is a major disconnect between the government and modern society and the government likes this because it always keeps modern society guessing about what is lawful and unlawful, and Islamic and un-Islamic.

Moral panics have been incited against metal all over the world for acts of violence

²⁵⁸ Kristina Funkeson. "About 230 People Arrested During a 'Satanic' Music Event." *Freemuse.org*. Freemuse, 2007. Web. 25 Jun. 2012. <http://freemuse.org/archives/5674>.

²⁵⁹ Negar Shaghaghi. "Sounds of Silence." *Index on Censorship* 39.3 (2010): 57. Academic Search Premier. Web. 23 Aug. 2012.

²⁶⁰ Kristina Funkeson. "About 230 People Arrested During a 'Satanic' Music Event." *Freemuse.org*. Freemuse, 2007. Web. 25 Jun. 2012. <http://freemuse.org/archives/5674>.

and devil worshipping and it is no different in Iran. The regime creates a moral panic about metal musicians being Satanists and the panic is magnified in Iran because of Iran's relationship with the word "Satan." There are paintings all over Tehran claiming that the US is "Satan." The name Satan is also thrown around a lot by the regime especially during Ahmadinejad's presidency. There are many international news reports of him calling the US a satanic nation, President Bush being inspired by Satan, Zionists being a manifestation of Satan, etc. Labeling something or someone as satanic in Iran is not something to be taken lightly and metalheads have a lot to worry about by being falsely accused of such dangerous acts.

Iranian metal musicians never know when they could get in trouble but they tell me they have a much easier time if they stay away from two specific topics, which are women and politics. By women, I am referring to women participating in the band, especially vocally, which is forbidden. By politics, I am referring to lyrical content of songs, because any vocal dissent about the Iranian regime is strictly forbidden.

It is forbidden in Iran for women to sing as a soloist. A woman can sing in a band if she is a back vocal, but only if there are three or more. I had never heard of this until I talked to Metalhead 12 and 6 and I was curious about this law and wanted to learn more about it. Again, attempting to understand the reasoning behind a law is extremely difficult. Here is a piece of our conversation:

12: You cannot understand the law.

Jeremy: You have to have three but...

6: He's confused.

12: At least three women as a back vocalist not solo vocalist because... because Islam or Akhoun or something like that said, "One woman can turn you on." But with three women their sound... mix together and you don't turn on.

6: We don't understand this either.

12: This is serious.

Jeremy: hmmm... but wouldn't three women turn you on three times as much?

12: No, because the sounds mix together and you can't tell which one is singing.

Jeremy: ok, ok, so then... so three women coming to one voice and creates like, one sound, wouldn't that be the same as one woman?

6: You should tell that to them.²⁶¹

There are bands in Iran that are challenging the idea of women singing and 5grs is a current Iranian band living in Iran with a female vocalist. The reason I am mentioning them here is that this information was documented at the Persian Metal Festival, and their performance can be seen on the DVD.²⁶² At the festival 5grs was one of the most popular bands because they have a female vocalist. The crowd was aware of the significance of their performance, because this was the first time that a female vocalist living in Iran has performed in a live metal concert.

Master of Persia, who also performed at the festival, has a female vocalist, Anahid, but the band currently resides in Yerevan so they do not face the same problems that 5grs does. Anahid is well aware of the situation though, she grew up in Mashhad, Iran and was forced to leave because of problems she faced with the government. She was afraid for her life along with other members of Master of Persia and they fled to Armenia together.

The government is unpredictable in their treatment and enforcement of law in Iran and you can never know when they will take action. Metalhead 11 told me how the government would randomly tell bands to disband. He said, "In internet for example we have a problem. Sometimes in random they are sending messages to stop your work.

²⁶¹ Metalhead 12 and 6, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²⁶² Persian 2012 Metal Festival. Audio/Video Production by Vladimir Melikyan. Zhesht and MOP Music Co, 2012. DVD.

For example you see one band stop so you say ‘Oh ok, easy, easy, easy. Don’t go so fast.’²⁶³

A more severe action the government randomly takes against metalheads is arresting people. I experienced the intense fear, while I was in Yerevan, that an arrest can cause because many times the government does not tell friends and family someone has been arrested and it is impossible to know what can happen once an arrest is made.

In Armenia Death Fuse and Slave Mark were supposed to participate in the festival but they did not arrive. Everyone was worried about what happened to them and although no one knew for sure, it was evident to everyone they had been arrested at the border of Armenia and Iran. Everyone had been worried for four days at this point and it was an odd experience for me. I say odd because I grew up in America where we blast metal music until our ears bleed. I had never experienced what it would be like to be arrested by your government for listening to music, and it really hit me hard to experience that with them.

Here is an excerpt from a conversation I had with Band 1 about the situation:

13: They got to the Iran and Armenian territory and they got caught there.

9: Ya.

4: Death-fuse.

9: Death-fuse band is not complete, not news from them and...

13: Why?

9: We don’t know about...

13: We don’t know what has happened.

4: This can be very dangerous.

9: And Slave Mark band.

²⁶³ Metalhead 11, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

14: They said their t-shirts... but they can't go to Armenia, I don't know why.

9: We worry about that. We worry. We worry about that.

Jeremy: So you guys...

9: I have not news about Death-fuse and Slave Mark guys and we hopefully have not problem.²⁶⁴

Metalhead 7 told me that he felt very lucky that he was never arrested while he lived in Iran because many of his friends who were in bands were arrested for playing metal and they were in prison for months. One of his friends got arrested before band practice one day and he told me this story: "So the guitarist, he has long hair. He has long blonde hair and every time we had practice in the studio, those guys were trying to help us as well, so every Wednesday or Thursday if I'm not mistaken we used to see those guys in the studio and there was a day I remember he just... he came like an hour late to the studio and we were like 'Dude, what happened?' He was like 'I got arrested because of my hair. They were trying to cut my hair and I had to bribe them to just let me go.' He was crazy about his hair."²⁶⁵

Metalhead 9 told me that he had been imprisoned twice and the second time he had received 130 lashes. He acted like there was more to the story but he did not give me any more information and I did not pry.²⁶⁶ My best friend, Metalhead 1, spent time in the notorious Evin Prison for political reasons, and his involvement with metal music prolonged his imprisonment. The torturous acts committed by the authorities scar many young Iranians for life, physically and emotionally.

My informants constantly told me that all they want is to be allowed to play music.

²⁶⁴ Band 1, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²⁶⁵ Metalhead 7, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²⁶⁶ Metalhead 9, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

They have no desire to get involved in politics or religion. If the government would leave them alone they would not hear a word from them. Metalhead 15 said, "Politics is for politicians, religion is for religious men. We are not any of these, we are just musicians who want to play music. There is not going to be any religious or political statements coming out of this band."²⁶⁷

As long as bands stay underground the government seems to ignore their presence, but any attempt to surface gets them in trouble. There is a red line that the government has established and as long as authorities are never alerted to a band's presence they can exist, but do not attempt to publicize that there is a metal music culture in Iran, because officially there is no such culture.

One of my informants in Los Angeles told me, "I respect the religion and everything but unfortunately in my country religion is becoming more like a prison for people. Cause the ones that tend to respect religion trying to stay in a circle that religion have created for them so... and everything outside that circle is just restricted or not accepted by society."²⁶⁸

This of course is the crux of the problem because the interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence that the government rules by is very oppressive, and when it comes to Islam, Christianity, and other religions there is no gray area, only black and white. Unfortunately, I just do not see any compromise that can be made that would allow metal musicians to be more accepted in society at this time.

I asked one of my informants in Los Angeles if there was any support at all in government for metal musicians. He looked at me and started laughing and said, "Are

²⁶⁷ Metalhead 15, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²⁶⁸ Metalhead 7, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

you kidding me? Imam, or those people, they are saying... like labeling us as devil worshipper against religion and all of those things.”²⁶⁹

I knew the question was ridiculous when I asked it but I felt in my “American” mind that there had to be a reformist in the government that was advocating for more freedoms for musicians but this is absolutely not the case.

The only positive aspect to the metal scene in Iran that my informants talked about was the fact that the government has much bigger problems to worry about than what metalheads are doing underground. Metalhead 9 said, “They don’t have time for metal. If they get a little bit more free they can come to arrest. Yes, there is always something for them to come.”²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Metalhead 8, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

²⁷⁰ Metalhead 9, interview by Jeremy Prindle.

CHAPTER 7

ANALYSIS: THE METAL MUSIC SCENE IN IRAN

The metal music scene in Iran is very diverse, there are bands in so many different genres of metal music. If you go to the Encyclopedia Metallum²⁷¹ and select Iran there are fifty-five band entries at the moment and the genres of these bands include power, doom, progressive, death, black, technical death, brutal death, symphonic, progressive death, depressive black, and many more.²⁷² It really is quite remarkable that the metal culture has developed so well in Iran after roughly twenty years of oppressive existence.

The metal scene in Iran is just one small scene in a transnational network of local scenes that are independent of each other but operate in the same fashion. In Iran an infrastructure of bands, record labels, shops, magazines, and fans operate underground below the public sphere. This metal scene is a grassroots music scene that is growing as musicians and fans use this genre of music to express themselves. Being part of this scene is a form of indirect resistance against the Iranian regime whether members of this scene see it that way or not. Critics of metal music in Iran claim that this genre of music is another example of extreme Westoxification and it should not be given any opportunity to become part of public discourse.²⁷³

²⁷¹ "Iran." *Metal-archives.com*. Encyclopaedia Metallum: Metal Archives, N.d. Web. 24 Oct. 2013. <http://www.metal-archives.com/lists/IR>.

²⁷² If you go to the Wikipedia link below there is a list of many of the subgenres of metal and a description about these subgenres. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heavy_metal_subgenres.

²⁷³ Laudan Nooshin. "Underground, Overground." 488.

The sound of the overdriven guitar through an amplifier is a very unnatural sound and is purely Western, music in Iran has always sounded natural and been judged by its nationalistic qualities. Laudan Nooshin said in “The Language of Rock” that Iran “wears its national identity on its sleeve.”²⁷⁴ By this she means that Iranian music is purely Iranian and Western influence has not tainted it. Critics fear that allowing metal music to emerge from the underground will taint the purity of Iranian music. Metal musicians do not see things this way and have no desire to be identified within a nationalistic framework. Metal musicians want to be identified and judged for their metal on the global stage, not their nationalistic fervor in Iran. This absolutely does not mean that metal musicians in Iran are not proud of their national identity, on the contrary, my informants are extremely proud of their Iranian heritage, but they want a cultural dialogue to be opened about Iran, and the future it has as part of the global community.²⁷⁵

Since official discourse in Iran has labeled metal music with its illegal status all metal musicians participate in a high anxiety scene where they never know what could happen to them, ironically though, the illegality of metal music in Iran is what gives the scene its power. The foundation of metal music is about being an outcast, individuality, having no hope, being oppressed and the scene in Iran embodies these qualities completely. Looking at the conditions of the extreme metal cultures emergence in the US during the 1980s, it has become hard to sympathize with the first world problems that young people who gravitated toward metal music faced after discovering the metal scene in Iran.

According to my informants the two most popular genres of metal in Iran are thrash metal and death metal. I had a rough time deciding on a clear answer as to which was the most popular because they could not decide. After hearing their arguments I decided

²⁷⁴ Laudan Nooshin. “Language of Rock.” 76.

²⁷⁵ Heather Rastovac. “Contending with Censorship.” 81.

they are both equally popular; here is an example of how most of the conversations with my informants went:

Jeremy: Ok, what is the most popular... is there a most popular genre of metal music in Iran?

Sohrab: I think thrash metal is the most popular.

Ali: Thrash metal, and death metal.

Sohrab: After that ya, death metal.

Ali: After that, after that. Thrash metal more than...²⁷⁶

The most common reason given for thrash metal was the fact that the origin of the metal scene in Iran began with people listening to bands like Metallica and Slayer and for a metalhead bands like this never die, they will always be legends and at the core of most people's music collection.

The case for death metal was stated perfectly by Shahin, the drummer of Mordab and Master of Persia, he said:

The fact that the majority of people that listen to metal listen to death metal because Iranians themselves... because they have a big culture, because this feeling of largeness comes over you when you're listening to death metal. Looking at the headlining for this show, shows how much death metal matters. It's the main taste of Iranians in metal music.²⁷⁷

I think it is acceptable to say that since the metal music scene is growing in Iran, most genres are growing as well, including very controversial styles of metal, like black metal. Black metal is on the fringe of the metal scene in the West and highly controversial even between metalheads because of its satanic and misanthropic nature. In Iran it seems to be becoming a very popular genre, Pooya said:

After 2010 lots of black metal, gothic metal going up, like for example, gothic metal, Within Temptation... after that band Nightwish. Black metal for example,

²⁷⁶ Sohrab Alimardani and Ali Esfahani, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 15, 2012.

²⁷⁷ Shahin Jebelli, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 16, 2012.

Behemoth, Dimmu Borgir, Cradle of Filth, Immortal, you know, fans of these genres is going up in our... for example in our university I have lots of friends that listening to black metal. And when they saw me, exactly about that story I told you “Are you listening to metal music?” “Yes, yes, yes.” And we have lots of conversations and they say to me “You know I like black metal genre” and I say “Oh my God! One person I have found that listen to black metal music.”²⁷⁸

As I said, black metal is extreme even within the metal community and to see it rising in popularity in a place like Iran is not surprising. Black metal originated in Scandinavia and strongly rejects Christianity; it uses every opportunity to portray Christianity in the most vile way, and celebrates pre-Christian pagan codes and ancient Northern European mythology.²⁷⁹ The core message of black metal is that there is absolutely no hope, it is about emptiness, sadness, death, hate, and attaining solace in darkness.

Iranians have acquired a bricolage of black metal symbols and meanings and created a scene where Christianity, which is vilified by the black metal scene in the West, has been substituted for Shi'ism in Iran and a focus on pre-Islamic empires and ancient Iranian mythology is valued. There are no direct references to Shi'ism in any Iranian black metal that I have come across, it is unnecessary, because just being a black metal band sends a clear message. Astoundingly, 25 of the 55 bands from Iran on Encyclopedia Metallum are black metal bands.

Arvin, a Satanist living in Iran, from the book *Young and Defiant in Tehran* said:

Gradually I became interested in the philosophy of satanic worship. You know, I like its sorrow, loneliness, and hatred. The world is full of misery, war, and hostility. It means that it is Satan who dominates our life and not God. The master is indeed Satan. Look at our own society, which is called “divine.” I seek refuge from this divinity in Satan.²⁸⁰

Now, there are many people who listen to and play black metal who are not Satanists. Not all black metal carries the satanic element and not all fans are Satanists as I

²⁷⁸ Pooya Moradi, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 16, 2012.

²⁷⁹ Pierre Hecker. “Taking a Trip to the Middle Eastern Metal Scene.” 65.

²⁸⁰ Shahram Khosravi. *Young and Defiant in Tehran*. 67.

discussed in the literature review. In Iran many metalheads listen to black metal strictly because it is the absolute opposite of Islam. Iranians are drawn to the evil and eeriness of the music because it is the ultimate attitude of defiance and a way to communicate to others that they are not supportive of the regime, and are an extreme individual.

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Mark Levine discovered a black metal band in Egypt that were devout Muslims. The metal scene in Egypt may have different elements than the scene in Iran which supports such a phenomenon but I have not met any black metal fans from Iran who were Muslims. It will be interesting to see if this phenomenon spreads and creates a new vein of religiously grounded black metal in the Middle East.²⁸¹

It is ironic that many Iranians find hope in the hopelessness of black metal. I just hope that the popularity of black metal does not crush the metal scene in Iran for everyone, similar to what Ali mentioned earlier about black metal, because it has the ability to terrify people, especially a government who rules in the name of God.

The most popular band that is active in Iran right now is the ancient melodic death metal²⁸² band Arsames. Arsames was the king of the Parsa, which had been given to him by his great-grandfather Teispes. Cambyses I was Arsames' first cousin and he had been given Arshan to rule by Teispes. Cyrus the Great, the son of Cambyses I, gained control of Parsa, creating the Achaemenid Empire, and brought Arsames and his son Darius to live in Anshan with him. The transition was smooth but there was some shame involved when Arsames relinquished his power to Cyrus. Darius hated Cyrus for what he did to his family and when Cyrus' successor, his son Cambyses II, took control of the empire Darius murdered him and became the leader of the Persian Empire.²⁸³

²⁸¹ LeVine, Mark. "Heavy Metal Muslims." 237.

²⁸² Ancient melodic death metal is death metal set to the theme of ancient cultures.

²⁸³ Hamma Mirwaisi. *Return of the Medes: An Analysis of Iranian History*. Tucson: Wheatmark, 2010. 85. Print.

Arsames' music is about ancient Persian history and they tell many stories of ancient kings, battles, and folklore. All the metal musicians in Iran look up to Arsames because of the success they have had as a band. They have been together since 2002 and have played in festivals in Istanbul, Turkey, Dubai, and the U.A.E. They have been invited to play in other festivals in the Middle East, India, and Eastern Europe, but for varying reasons, some involving the Iranian government, some not, they could not make it to those festivals.

I experienced the almost god-like status Arsames has in relation to fellow Iranian metal musicians while I was in Armenia. Ali Madashari, the lead singer, and Morteza Shahrami, the lead guitar player, are the core members of the band and are treated like father figures by the other metal musicians. They are humble and gracious guys and have taken the role as the “spokesband,” so to speak, for the Iranian metal community. They have learned how to promote themselves and maneuver around the Iranian regime without too much trouble.

Meraj had this to say about Arsames and their influential status in Iran:

What most people like about metal music, the taste of Iranian people is completely obvious and shown in their music. The principles of the society is completely obvious and shown in their music and all the norms and unnorms of listening to metal in Iran. Arsames really showed a lot by being the headliner and being from a religious city.²⁸⁴

Meraj is absolutely right. The lyrics of Arsames songs speak to the pride of Persian culture and the attitude of Arsames and the way they present their music gives Iranians pride in their culture. The feeling of empowerment that Arsames give to their fans is the reason they are respected so much. Here are the lyrics from two songs from their album *Immortal Identity*.

Persepolis

Standing antiquity on the ground with dignity

²⁸⁴ Meraj, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 16, 2012.

Mythic territory that make us proud to be Irani

Kingdom of toleration away from carnage

Majestic throne our cultural heritage

Stay tenacious

The mountain of courageousness

There is no fire to destroy your stone

Shining place on our land

The diamond of Persia

We never built columns on the blood and genocide

The symbol of freedom without lashing the masonry

Not to instead of lashing people for masonry

Not for build the columns on the blood and genocide

There is no fire to destroy your stone

Shining palace on our land

The diamond of Persia²⁸⁵

Cyrus the Great

Unsuccessful guys in capturing our land

Unsuccessful guys in capturing our blood

Voming with fear and hesitation

Varying hill of presents on their shoulders

They're staring with protruded eyes

Looking at the sun but they see nothing

Unsuccessful folks in capturing our bravery

Unsuccessful folks in capturing our glory

Voming with fear and hesitation

Varying hill of presents on their shoulders

Their souls have shrunk in their corpses

Their minds have been torn in pieces

Defeating all their aces

We had on our feet their kisses

Our Cyrus gave them culture

No pain no sigh no torture

To live in peace is our nature

Not killing like a vulture

²⁸⁵ Arsames. "Persepolis." *Immortal Identity*. Self-release. 2010.

This is the first kingdom of the world (Persian empire)
The state on the earth as wide as the sun

Unsuccessful guys in capturing our land
Unsuccessful guys in capturing our blood
Coming with fear and hesitation
Carrying hill of presents on their shoulders

They're staring with protruded eyes
Looking at the sun but they see nothing²⁸⁶

I must say that as an American I do not have the ancient cultural history that Persians have. My cultural history only goes back roughly three hundred years while Persian cultural history dates back thousands. After watching and listening to Arsames it makes me wish I had a culture as ancient and diverse as Persian culture. The lyrics are so powerful and I got to see how this band makes Iranians feel and why they are so revered.

Arsames is based in the city of Mashhad, Iran, the second most important religious city in Iran because the shrine of Imam Reza, the eighth Imam, is located there. Arsames deserves a lot of credit for being able to peacefully continue their work in such a religious city. I think that metal bands in Iran can learn a lot from Arsames and how they maneuver the religious and public sphere.

One of the main things that metal musicians lack in Iran is music education. I asked my informants about their knowledge in music theory and how Persian culture influences their music, and most of them told me that they are just not educated enough in Persian classical music to feel comfortable incorporating it into metal music. They explained to me that metal music comes from the West where the modes and scales of music are totally different than in Iran.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ Arsames. "Cyrus the Great." *Immortal Identity*. Self-release. 2010.

²⁸⁷ Refer back to pg. 24 in the literature review.

Ironically I was discussing this issue with Pooya and Pezhman outside the University of Music in Yerevan and they told me that it is difficult for them to connect metal with Persian classical music because there is no place where they can study it. The only option that they have right now is to learn what they can from the internet. Pooya said, “If you want to use traditional instruments you must be so powerful in theory to connect these but some of the bands use it as a sound effect you know, for example, using the sound of sitar in metal music, but as sound effect, not theory playing, yes?”²⁸⁸ Pooya is saying here that of course any band can take a sitar and play some notes on it to incorporate the instrument into a song, but to actually play the instrument as it was intended to be played on Persian scales and incorporate that into metal music which is played using Western scales is extremely difficult.

I discussed this with 5grs as well and here is what they said:

Jeremy: What about rhythms or scales?

Pooyan: It is a different issue. Is a different issue I think you need to have a lot of information and you have learned a lot of things to use the subject in your music.

Farhaz: It is not that easy.

Pooyan: It's not that easy.

Farhaz: It is really hard.

Yashar: But the point is it's very easy to use an instrument like sitar or daf in the middle of a song if you just play drums but the point is how to convert the original rhythms... to convert it into metal.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁸ Pooya Moradi, interview.

²⁸⁹ Pooyan Madadi, Faraz Jabbari, and Yashar Mojtahzadeh, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 13, 2012.

Since Ahmadinejad became president in Iran he has gotten rid of most of the reform minded officials and replaced them with military commanders and religious hardliners.²⁹⁰ These officials have cracked down on music very hard and shut down all music academies. Pezhman said, “They close all of music academy in our country, like Daneshgha Tehran, University of Tehran. University of Sooreh in our country in Tehran closed the music, academic... you know we don’t have any academic.”²⁹¹

The only music education that Iranians can receive is through private instructors and this seems to be fairly common as a few of my informants talked about the private instruction they were receiving from professional musicians. For example Pooya talked with me about how he is learning the theory of jazz privately, he said:

Ali is our theoretic teacher, he is the father of jazz in Iran and he is learning music in France, in a conservatory in France and he is teaching jazz music for about thirty-five years in France and England and after that he is coming back to our country and when we found him “Oh my God! He is my God!” You know.²⁹²

The lack of music theory education has divided the metal musicians in Iran on the subject of whether Persian classical music should be fused with metal music. Certain bands like Mordab, Arsames, and TarantisT, and Master of Persia feel more comfortable with fusing the two and have created some great metal with a Persian feel. A perfect example is the song “3000 Years” by Mordab. The introduction of the song incorporates a Persian scale on the guitar that gives a very ominous Middle Eastern feel to the song to portray Iran’s ancient history.²⁹³

²⁹⁰ Ali Dareini. “You Can’t Stop the Music, Say Young Iranians After Ban.” Washingtonpost.com. The Washington Post, 26 Dec. 2005. Web. 02 Sept. 2013.

²⁹¹ Pezhman Moradi, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 16, 2012.

²⁹² Pooya Moradi, interview.

²⁹³ Mordabband. “3000 Years.” Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 04 Aug 2011. Web. 13 Feb. 2013. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKat2m58DJs>.

When I talked with Arash he said, “Well I am personally in my band TarantisT, I am trying to mix, or bringing some kind of like local rhythms and melodies into that, to sound like something new and exotic.”²⁹⁴

Ali and Morteza said:

Ali: Yes, yes, we want to use rhythms from traditional music with distortion.

Morteza: We want to incorporate our sound, our culture in metal music.²⁹⁵

On the other side, there are bands that are against fusing musical theory with metal music. Bands like Credenc and Death-fuse are not interested in fusion, they want to keep their culture out of their music. It is not because they are less educated in Persian musical theory it is simply that they do not want to be identified within the metal community as being exotic. Not because they are ashamed of their heritage, but they want to be judged by their metal only, not where they are from.

When it comes to Persian instruments there is division as well. Bands like Master of Persia, because of their folklore style of metal use Persian instruments regularly. Meraj said, “Yes of course, in our 2012 album, 2010 and 2012 album we have a sitar, daf, mix with metal. Tar, ne, doduk, flute, daf, dohol, neanban. We have fifteen, fifteen instrumental, folkloric instrumental, is in this album.”²⁹⁶

Ali, the lead guitarist for Mordab, told me that he would love to use Persian instruments in all his songs but because of the differences in Western and Persian music theory it is very hard to use them correctly. He said, “You can’t just pick up a sitar, it is very complicated. I would bring in a professional otherwise I could ruin the track. I use

²⁹⁴ Arash, interview.

²⁹⁵ Ali Madarshahi and Moteza Shahrami, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 17, 2012.

²⁹⁶ Meraj, interview.

these instruments only when it is perfect."²⁹⁷

Ali and Morteza of Arsames said:

Ali: We don't want to use all the traditional instruments... maybe some parts.

Morteza: There is a limit for us to use these kind of instrument, sitar, daf... we try not to. We try to use our intonation or accent within metal structure to distinguish ourselves.²⁹⁸

Persian Force is open to the idea of using Persian instruments in their band but they feel that because there is no place they can get educated about Persian instruments they just do not feel comfortable trying it.

Bands like Death-fuse and 5grs are against using Persian instruments in their music.

Here is part of my interview with 5grs:

Jeremy: Do you guys ever use like a daf or a...

Pooyan: Once, we did it once.

Yashar: It's something that, I think so many Iranian bands try to do that...

Pooyan: It not work.

Jeremy: It doesn't work?

Pooyan: In the long time. In the long time it not work, I think, this is my opinion.

In long time.²⁹⁹

For most of my informants it comes down not having enough education with Persian music theory to incorporate the instruments properly. The fear of not knowing if you are proceeding in the correct manner is also a deterrent because I got the impression that they could really embarrass themselves if they used the instruments in the wrong way,

²⁹⁷ Ali Esfahani, interview.

²⁹⁸ Ali Madarshahi and Morteza Shahrami, interview.

²⁹⁹ Pooyan Madadi and Yashar Mojtahzadeh, interview.

and this goes back to the nationalistic aura that surrounds Iranian music. I was curious if this pertained to lyrics as well and wanted to know how they felt about singing in Persian and English.

Laudan Nooshin interviewed an Iranian rock band called 127 in her article “The Language of Rock: Iranian Youth, Popular Music, and Identity.” She asked them about why they use English lyrics and one of their members said:

I am so tired of answering this question. Do you guys ask Sepultura or Air or Bjork why they don't sing in their native tongue? This phenomenon started in England and the US for instance, German rock is never sung in German, and if it is it will never go beyond German borders. Prominent bands such as the Brazilian Sepultura, the German metal groups Jane and Eloy that are famous worldwide make use of English lyrics.³⁰⁰

All of the bands I interviewed had the same feelings about language. They felt Persian in metal music is not a good idea and not something they are interested in trying. There were four different reasons for this, the main reason being that English is the only choice if you are interested in being an international band. Sina said, “If you want to work like, internationally, then you need to. You need to have your listener to know what you are talking about, if you are going to talk in Persian no one is gonna understand what you are talking about. That's why we only writing the lyrics in English.”³⁰¹

Sohrab, the rhythm guitarist for Mordab said: “Mordab wants to communicate with a wider audience, with other countries other than Iran with its music. Ya, like you've heard “3000 Years” you can check its lyric up and see what he's singing about, but when a band is singing only in Farsi, it will only communicate with people in Iran.”³⁰²

The other bands had similar statements and Pooyan, the lead guitarist of 5grs pointed out that it makes the music making process harder for them to incorporate English lyrics

³⁰⁰ Laudan Nooshin. “Language of Rock.” 82.

³⁰¹ Sina Talebian, interview.

³⁰² Sohrab Alimardani, interview.

because English is not their first language, but despite the difficulty they feel it is very important. My informant's portrayed one thing very clearly, they all want to learn English better. I was expecting to practice my Persian with them, and we did a little, but these guys wanted to speak English with an American more than anything and I hope they learned a lot from me.

The second reason is that according to Sina you can translate your feelings better in English. He said, "I think you can translate your feelings better in English than in Persian, like right now when I am talking to my family, like from time to time I use some English words in my... while I'm speaking. When I'm thinking about it I think the best way to put it is in English because I can't find any better words in Farsi."³⁰³

The third reason is that the Persian language does not have as many words you can use to express yourself, as English does. Using English you can be much more precise about what you want to say and the meaning can be interpreted globally, and also, many of these musicians know English and there are many feelings and expressions that just do not translate into Farsi. Here is what the guys from Credenc said:

Navid: Our lyrics are English.

Jeremy: Right.

Navid: All of them.

Jeremy: All of them, so you've never...

Shahrokh: So far... of course.

Jeremy: You've never thought about using Farsi in any of your...

Navid: No because Farsi I think is a little difficult in a... kind of Western music.

Shahrokh: It doesn't fit in the music. It doesn't fit in this kind of music. If you do fit it doesn't sound good. Then you can't... You won't be able to...

³⁰³ Sina Talebian, interview.

Navid: Choose a lot of words in your lyrics. Because it's kinda funny when you use some words in Farsi as a lyric but it's not in English, you can use anything you want.³⁰⁴

The fourth reason is the stresses used in English and the large amount of breaks or choppiness to English. Persian is a very poetic language and it has a very beautiful flow to it. In metal music this is not good because there is a lot of growling, screaming and changes in tone of voice and it is hard to do that in Persian. Sina said, "Think about it like you want to say a simple sentence like 'I can't take this anymore' and in Farsi it's like 'Man deeghe nemi toonam' so it's just a longer sentence and you can't fit it in, in one or two bar, and... just the stress are different and I think it takes a lot more time to try to fit those lyrics into music that way."³⁰⁵

Sohrab and Elnaz said:

Sohrab: And there is another reason as well I think, I can check with him too but, this type of music, metal type music really fits English because of the accents. Because Persian it's just like uhh, more flowing...

Elnaz: Up and down. Ebb and flow is different.

Sohrab: Ya, but English you've got accent that really fits the metal music so that's why I think many metal bands in Iran, even local bands use English language for their lyrics.³⁰⁶

A reason that was not told to me by informants but discussed in Laudan Nooshin's article "Underground, Overground: Rock Music and Youth Discourses in Iran," is that by using English lyrics it totally disconnects a band from the nationalist discourse that

³⁰⁴ Navid Asadian and Shahrokh Kafashzadeh, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 15, 2012.

³⁰⁵ Sina Talebian, interview.

³⁰⁶ Sohrab and Elnaz Alimardani, interview.

surrounds Iranian music.³⁰⁷ This is not the result that some bands want and Mordab is a perfect example. They incorporate a Persian identity into their music and their goal is not too disconnected from Iranian nationalism, to redefine what it means to be Iranian.

There was one band at the festival called Avesta who sang their lyrics in Persian, but unfortunately I did not get to interview them. They were one of my favorite bands at the festival and I loved the fact that they sang in Persian. Arash, their vocalist and rhythm guitarist, has a great voice and he uses the language superbly in his songs. The only other metal band I know about that sings their songs in Persian is Electroqute.³⁰⁸

Lyrics for metal bands in Iran are a very controversial topic because in a country that is governed by religion every topic becomes political.³⁰⁹ Most of the bands I interviewed sing about social problems in their lyrics. Pezhman said, “The lyrics is about the problems in the public. But because our genre is about black metal, as you know, lots of black metal band lyrics is about Satan and God, but our lyrics is about problem, problem about everything, like rape, thieving, or things that are a problem for your mind.”³¹⁰

Ali said:

Most of the lyrics of the songs are antiwar and the mental occupation of the problems of Iranians. Also problems that the whole world is involved with, not just Iran, physically and emotionally. Also love songs that deal with hate, love, and lies, problems that drive a person to commit suicide. Problems the whole world is struggling with.³¹¹

A song titled “War” off their album *Room No. X*, written by Ali and performed by Mordab, is an excellent example of one of their antiwar songs. Here are the lyrics:

³⁰⁷ Laudan Nooshin. “Underground, Overground.” 484.

³⁰⁸ Amir v. Khakestari by Electroqute. Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 18 Jun. 2011. Web. 23 Mar. 2012. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WEiMqtmj_yl.

³⁰⁹ To read lyrics from some of the bands I interviewed go to Appendix B.

³¹⁰ Pezhman Moradi, interview.

³¹¹ Ali Esfahani, interview.

From first day until the end
 War has spoken about death
 Innocent hearts, such roses
 Are overturned in the river
 Virtuous spirits in way of home
 Turns in blood they see their doom
 Criminal minds are so glad
 To confuse social rules

Stop the war
 Stop the war
 Oh you have to hide
 Let them die

Look at her eyes, you can see
 Fear of the noise, vagrancy
 What is her sin? she must be

In battlefield, conspiracy

Brutal countries, as demons
 Have eaten lands, no remorse
 Millionaires rule in earth
 You have my words, you're like horse

Stop the war
 Stop the war
 Oh you have to hide
 Let them die³¹²

The music problematizes the metal scene just as much as any controversial lyrics, so Iranian metal musicians do not necessarily need to make their lyrics overly controversial.

Nooshin wrote:

Ultimately, rock's meanings are shaped by a series of discourses: official government discourses through which its peripheral position has been largely defined; the verbal discourses of musicians themselves, which oscillate between capitalizing on their enforced peripherality while also recognizing the need to become part of the "center"; and finally, the discourses of the music itself. And it is the latter that have become a unique space of empowerment, a forum in which young Iranians—politically marginalized for so long—are making their voices heard.³¹³

³¹² Mordab. "War." *Room No. X*. CD. Zurvan. 2011.

³¹³ Laudan Nooshin. "Underground, Overground." 489.

What Nooshin explains here is that since the revolution the official discourse of rock music in Iran associates it with the West and its anti-establishment ideology. For these reasons alone rock music without any lyrics carries a very oppositional quality. There is no place for rock music to exist outside of this discourse which is why it is underground. When lyrics are added to the music it only adds to the opposition that is already being displayed and is like throwing gasoline on an already large bonfire.

CHAPTER 8

ANALYSIS: MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS IN IRAN

Acquiring instruments in Iran can be difficult if you do not have a lot of money, but access to the instruments is not a problem. There are many shops in Tehran that sell musical instruments and musical accessories. The interesting aspect of buying things in Tehran, whether it is a musical instrument or a lamp, is that there is a special street or section of the city that all shops for a certain item are gathered. For example, if you want to buy a lamp you would go to Lalezar Street, if you want a guitar you would go to Jomhuri Street, if you want a sound system you would go to the opposite side of Jomhuri Street.

Shahin told me that it is important that I understand that Iran did not always have music shops. When he started playing drums ten years ago there were no shops where you could buy musical instruments and advance your skills. He said, "There are many, many shopping, buying instrument everything. But ten years ago there is no shopping, buy instrument, there is no drum set, there is no guitar, there is no everything, understand? But yes there are just folkloric instrument. There is no cymbal, no drums, no... people today have access to these."³¹⁴

Today there are shops everywhere on Jomhuri Street selling musical instruments. Mordab told me more about Jomhuri during our interview:

³¹⁴ Shahin Jebelli, interview.

Elnaz: Ya, there is a street that is the center, center for instruments and it is called

Jomhuri.

Sohrab: You just go and even if they don't have it on display you go and ask them "I want this" and they will bring it to you like in a week or something. It's easy to buy, ya.

Ali: Like Dubai, but in Iran is very, more.

Sohrab: Ya, it's real easier. There are a lot of musical instruments you can buy. Ya, it's not a problem.³¹⁵

There are even a few shops that specialize in metal music, which was interesting to hear because it is a huge risk for a merchant to make his shop vulnerable by supporting metal music. These shops appear to be regular music shops just like the others in Tehran but the owners like metal music and help metal musicians. According to Sohrab you can buy CDs, tickets to live shows, guitars, and other instruments. These shops are not legal, but they manage to stay under the radar and supply metalheads with the things they need.³¹⁶

The problem for the metal musicians that buy instruments at these shops is that they cannot play them. Shahin said, "Ya, you can go to buy it, but you can't play it. Metal music, rock music, everything. And this is, this is very big problem now and uhh, everything is forbidden, everything is bad."³¹⁷ Mehrad said, "There are stores in Iran... music... music instrument store in Iran that you can buy instrument, maybe a metal guitar... like V or something. Like it's not a problem, the problem is you can't use it you

³¹⁵ Elnaz and Sohrab Alimardani, and Ali Esfahani, interview.

³¹⁶ Sohrab Alimardani, interview.

³¹⁷ Shahin Jebelli, interview.

know... you can just buy it. You can't use it."³¹⁸

The availability of instruments in Iran is a complicated topic because instruments are easy to acquire, and difficult at the same time. It is clear from my informants that there is no shortage of instruments in Iran and you can get any instrument you want, but there is one catch, as Yashar, the drummer for 5grs said:

You can have any single instrument, anything... any tiny part of the drum, drum head, tama, cymbal, Zildjian, Paiste, anything... if you have... it's just for you to spend a little money. You can order, you can go to shop and say, "I want this custom... the best pedal, or the cymbal, or the cymbal stand, the best snare, or the best drum head." You can order and they provide you but... but... as I said you have to spend money.³¹⁹

Drummers seem to have particularly hard time because there are so many intricate pieces to a drum set. Pouya said, "The drummers is more than problem... so many pieces and is too expensive. You know for example, last night after festival our drummer say 'Did you see Avesta cymbals?' Is about 3,000,000 toman in our country!"³²⁰

Although there is no shortage of instruments in Iran that does not mean that the instruments metal musicians are looking for are available. Metal musicians use certain brands of instruments to achieve the metal sound they are looking for and to portray a certain image. Faraz said, "There is always an instrument, you love to have that instrument but you can't get that. I myself when I want to buy a bass guitar I exactly know what I need. That instrument doesn't exist (in Iran) you know so..."³²¹

The selection of different brands is a problem in Iran and many metal musicians cannot buy the instruments they want. Arash said:

You only have a few choices, you cannot get the thing that you want so you have to deal with whatever they have. You know whatever is available there. And of

³¹⁸ Mehrad Motamedi, interview.

³¹⁹ Yashar Mojtahedzadeh, interview.

³²⁰ Pooya Moradi, interview.

³²¹ Faraz Jabbari, interview.

course we don't have like good instruments, and like the top brands, and like up to date amplifiers, and those things. Either, I mean the only option is that you may just go buy from abroad, or somebody brings it to you.³²² Faraz said, "I had to go to shops and play with any instrument that they have. I chose the instrument that is nearest to... had in my mind. For example, I went to that shop, I played with that bass, and I said to myself 'That's it... is the nearest sound... the closest sound.'"³²³

The quality of the instruments that people have access to is also a problem. The quality of instruments that the shops in Iran carry is poor because the instruments come from places like China, Japan, and India. High quality guitars are rare in the music shops and they are extremely expensive. Pezhmn said, "All of the brands from China, Japan, and Indian guitars but the best guitar center have, all of them, one Jackson, one BC Rich, one Washburn, you know... and they are so expensive, for example I bring 1,200,000 toman and the owner said, "Oh, that instrument is about 3,000,000."³²⁴

A guitar company that makes high quality guitars that Iranians have access to is Ibanez. Ibanez is based in Japan and there are no trade restrictions between Japan and Iran so it is much easier to get a high quality Ibanez guitar than any other brand. The US, and many European countries do not trade with Iran and guitar brands like Washburn, Dean, and BC Rich have to be smuggled in, therefore they cost a lot more. Many of my informants told me how they spend months waiting for a guitar they are interested in to show up in a shop.

I asked my informants about buying instruments online and if this was an easier way to acquire instruments, but this is an even bigger problem since there is no trade between Iran and Western countries, companies are not allowed to ship their products to Iran.

³²² Arash, interview.

³²³ Faraz Jabbari, interview.

³²⁴ Pezhman Moradi, interview.

The other problem is that Iranians cannot buy anything online anyway because Iranians do not have credit cards. Arash said, "If you want to purchase something online you have to have credit card so... we don't have that. International credit card, and then post office, or those companies in the West... in America or in Europe, they will not ship to Iran."³²⁵

Another problem that people have when they buy an instrument in Iran is determining if it is fake or real. Many of the instruments that shops sell are copies of expensive brands and shops sell them as if they are the name brand guitar and people get ripped off. Pooya told me a story about an experience he had in a music shop on Jomhuri Street. He said:

About two years ago I and my brother have lots of information about our genre and other genre instruments. I am going to Jomhuri and I say "Oh my God is that Gibson?" It had working on the wood you know, umm... 3D pictures, for example dragon comes out and I go into the store and say "Sir, how much does it..." and he said, "You can't buy it!" and I told him "How do you know I don't have any money are you looking at my side?" and he said, "Please keep your voice down it is about 4,000,000. Now you have the money?" And I... and one person came to that store before me and he buy a piano, a grand piano, Yamaha, and he's going to pay money about 5,000,000 toman, uhh... 15,000,000 toman. In your country is about... I think now price of the dollar is \$5000, \$5000 US dollar. I said to him "Are you kidding me!" Because that Gibson is from China, not the US. US never do that to some artwork on wood. He said, "Keep your voice down he is paying us" and that person catch all of the money and go out and no buying piano.³²⁶

Not only do they have to worry about the instruments from other countries being fake they have to worry about shop owners altering cheap guitars to look like name-brand expensive guitars. Pezhman said:

You know in our country we have two problem, expensive instrument and fake instrument. You know, our country... because all of the stores have no choice to bring the best guitars on the US and very expensive so they call to for example, nearest brands and bring it and then change the brand with lots of problem and sell it to each people and they think for example, buying a Jackson, but it is from China.³²⁷

³²⁵ Arash, interview.

³²⁶ Pooya Moradi, interview.

The most reliable way to purchase a quality, name-brand instrument in Iran is to have a connection to someone who travels to the West and can bring you what you want. Connections are very difficult to find, especially one that can be trusted, so most people do not have this option. Pooya told me about a friend he has in the West and a guitar he bought from him. He said:

One of my friends called me and said, “Yes I can. I have a MasterCard,” you know we have lots of problems to have a good instrument in our country. So I told him I want Jackson that was a signature of Mushroomhead guitarist and he told me that it was about \$1200 for you. I said, “Ok I have no problem,” in my country the price going to be umm...3,003,000 tomans and I said, “Ok I have this money.” After he bring this to my country the dollar is going up and I must pay it in my country about 5,400,000 tomans. I say, “Ok I don’t want this you can sell it and I buy another.”³²⁸

Another problem that became apparent when listening to Pooya’s story is because Iran’s economy is so bad the inflation of Iranian money fluctuates drastically and swiftly makes things so expensive at times that Iranians cannot afford them.

Pooya also told me that he has an aunt that lives in Canada and they always ask her to buy things for them because she visits Iran occasionally and can bring them. Even with a family member as a connection it is difficult because Iranians cannot just send large amounts of money to family members overseas and vice versa. The government pays close attention to these things as Sina, who is currently living in the US going to school, said, “Even when my father keeps sending me money and everything, they always call me to see where the money is coming from and what do you want to do with this money and all these crazy questions.”³²⁹

The black market in Iran is massive and is always an option for people to buy things that they would not be able to buy legally. Elnaz said, “We have a saying in Farsi, they

³²⁷ Pezhman Moradi, interview.

³²⁸ Pooya Moradi, interview.

³²⁹ Sina Talebian, interview.

say ‘Az sheere morghe ta june adamizad.’ It means ‘A hen’s milk to a person’s life you can find in Tehran.’”³³⁰ Hens obviously do not have milk but this is the point, if you wanted it you could find it in Tehran. Money is a huge factor in the black market as well, because buying things from the black market that have to be smuggled into the country costs a lot of money.

Not all items people buy from the black market are expensive though, especially things that do not have to be smuggled, like DVDs. Elnaz and Ali told me:

Ali: All the Hollywood movies in Iran cheap. I buy DVD with...

Elnaz: Five movies in it...

Ali: More than, 8 to 10 movies...

Elnaz: For like half a buck.

Ali: HD quality, in the DVD with one dollar.

Elnaz: Less.³³¹

One thing that my informants have been telling me when they talk about things that they are forbidden to have is that they will always get what they want, and they will always find a way. Ali told me a couple times that “We will find the eye of a needle and go through.”³³²

Metal musicians must be very cautious with their equipment because the time and money it takes to replace something can be a big problem. This is especially hard for metal musicians because metal music is not meant to be played conservatively, but this is exactly how metal musicians in Iran must play, conservative. I talked with Credenc about this dilemma:

Siamak: They don’t have repairing support. There are no dealerships.

³³⁰ Elnaz Alimardani, interview.

³³¹ Elnaz Alimardani and Ali Esfahani, interview.

³³² Ali Esfahani, interview.

Navid: When something breaks you can't fix it because there is nowhere to fix your instrument.

Jeremy: Especially drums, I mean a drum set is a hundred pieces of equipment I mean,

if something breaks do you have to like wait weeks before you can find...

Shahrokh: uhh... I think it is easier when it comes to drums...

Jeremy: Oh, really.

Shahrokh: Yes, because when you are talking about a guitar, electric guitar, there are you know electronics and you know, stuff like that, but about drums it's all physical and it's all you know like...

Navid: Hardware.

Shahrokh: Hardware, right.³³³

Siamak said that there are no official vendors in Iran where they can get their instruments repaired. It is important to note that companies that make instruments like Jackson, BC Rich, and Zildjian do not have official shops in the US either. They sell their products through local music shops and music superstores like Guitar Center. These places also do maintenance and repair work. In Iran music shops do not do repair work and a broken instrument can be catastrophic.

Iranians really have a tough time acquiring and maintaining their instruments but this has not hindered them from doing whatever they can to become better musicians. The quality of some of the metal music coming out of Iran is very good and it would be incredible to see how metal musicians in Iran would improve if they had free access to musical instruments on the global market.

³³³ Siamak Mobarhan, Navid Asadian, and Shahrokh Kafashzadeh, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 16, 2012.

CHAPTER 9

ANALYSIS: METALHEADS IN IRAN

Are there a lot of metalheads in Iran? Well, it depends on how you look at it. I asked my informants this question, but it can be perceived in an optimistic or pessimistic way, much like the question, “Is the glass half full or half empty?” I received varying answers from my informants, for example, bands like Credenc and Death-fuse told me that there are not very many people in Iran listening to metal music for the simple reason that not many people know about metal music.³³⁴ Bands like Master of Persia, Mordab, and Persian Force disagreed and told me that there are many metal fans in Iran. Meraj believed that if he arranged the Persian Metal Festival inside Iran at least 100,000 people would attend.³³⁵

Shahin said, “There are 80 million people Iranian ok? I think to you for example 5 percent of people listen to music I think... 4,000,000 people listen to metal music ya.”³³⁶

No one really knows how many people are interested in metal music in Iran because it is completely underground. Answers to this question will always vary drastically until metal moves aboveground, but the aspect of this question that can be fairly judged is that Iranians believe the metal scene is growing. Ali said, “During the past few years I think they have increased. If you see on Facebook you can see that each band has

³³⁴ Credenc and Sina Talebian, interview.

³³⁵ Meraj, interview.

³³⁶ Shahin Jebelli, interview.

many fans.”³³⁷ One thing all my informants did agree on is that the majority of people interested in metal music are young people. Pouya and Pezhman believe that most metal fans are between the age of fifteen and thirty. I agree with them, but it is important to note that more than a few of my informants were over thirty years old.

The youth may be the majority of people listening to metal but there are older people listening to and playing metal as well. Pooya told me a story about an encounter he had with an older cab driver in Tehran, he said:

One day I catch a cab and sit, sit exactly near him, in the front of the car and he said to me, “Don’t worry I play music” and I said, “No it is ok” and when he play it I say “Is that AC/DC?!” and he said, “Yes, you love it?!” and he is about, for example 45 or 50 years old. I said, “Oh yes I like that! Thank you very much!” Every taxi I catch, songs is too... dim, fucking, I hate that... And he really say “Oh thanks God one customer come along and like my song.” Then I say “ok, give your number and I call you every time I want a cab.”³³⁸

It is clear that we cannot get an accurate picture of how many metalheads live in Iran but we can determine who they are. All of the metalheads I interviewed came from middle to upper middle class families, because in order to travel to Armenia, play gigs, buy instruments, equipment, and have space to practice is expensive. This is a sharp contrast to metalheads in the Western world, who tend to be middle to lower class.³³⁹ Another good example is that all the bands I interviewed in Yerevan had rented flats or apartments to stay in while they were there, not one of them stayed in a hotel. Now this could simply be that they could get cheap group rates by renting a house as opposed to staying in multiple hotel rooms, or maybe they have connections and know people who own flats in Yerevan, but regardless these flats were very nice and could not have been cheap.

³³⁷ Ali Madarshahi, interview.

³³⁸ Pooya Moradi, interview.

³³⁹ Deena Weinstein. *Heavy Metal: The Music and its Culture*. Massachusetts: Cambridge, 1991. Print.

They are also very educated. Most of my informants were attending a university or had attended one in Iran and some of them had advanced degrees in different types of engineering, biochemistry, and physics. I distinctly remember when the bands gathered a couple days after the festival to discuss future events, at the flat of Persian Force, I looked around the room seeing a bunch of metalheads, but if they all changed their clothes and put on a suit I was surrounded by doctors, scientists, and engineers.

Nooshin had much the same experience when she spent time with underground rock and metal musicians in Iran. She said, "Members are primarily urban, young, educated, relatively affluent, as well as modernist, internationalist, and secular in outlook, lifestyle, and aspiration."³⁴⁰

The global metal scene has always been viewed as an all-male scene but as the culture has grown women have become more and more involved. Women are members of many famous metal bands around the world including bands like Arch Enemy, Lacuna Coil, Otep, and Nightwish. Women in Iran also like metal music and are becoming more involved in the scene. All of my informants told me that they had women friends who listened to metal and a few of the bands like 5grs, Arsames, and Mordab all brought women with them to Yerevan. Some were wives, friends, photographers, and band managers.

I asked Arash if he had many female friends that listened to metal and he said, "Ya, ya, a lot of them. A lot of my friends, they were coming to our like, basement for practice, I mean watching we practice music and also listening to metal music. I have, personally I have a lot of female friends that they love metal music. Ya, there are a lot of them."³⁴¹

I met the two most important women involved in the Iranian metal scene currently and they are Sanam, the lead singer of 5grs, and Anahid, the co-lead singer of Master of

³⁴⁰ Laudan Nooshin. "Underground, Overground." 468.

³⁴¹ Arash, interview.

Persia. These women are inspirational to other women in Iran who have a desire to express themselves but just have not found the courage to try. These two women are just as much an inspiration to men as to women because of their passion for the music and the high level of risk they carry being female musicians and vocalists in Iran.

It has been established how metal music arrived in Iran, but why do Iranians like metal so much? Iranians love music in general, but metal music is how more and more are choosing to express themselves. The guys in Credenc told me that none of them have any academic knowledge of music theory at all. They are all civil and electric engineers, but they love music so much that despite their lack of knowledge about music theory and the illegality of metal, they will continue to make music.³⁴²

Mark LeVine believes they love metal because even though the Iran-Iraq War is over, Iran is a highly militarized society and heavy metal culture is an identity that is against this. One of LeVine's informants said, "Metal is like an asylum. A mental asylum that rejuvenates you and gives you hope."³⁴³

Sina said, "I think it is just a love we have for the music that we keep holding on to... making these songs and playing music."³⁴⁴

A deeper answer is, for the same reason that many people in the West like metal, because it is an excellent outlet for emotion. Pooya and Pezhman told me:

Pezhman: I told lots of my friends, when I am angry, so pissed off, I play my guitar, and I am going to be cool...

Pooya: We can't imagine what happened one hour ago.

Pezhman: You know, for example I fight my brother... I just, just play one song

³⁴² Credenc, interview.

³⁴³ Mark LeVine. "Headbanging against Repressive Regimes." 51.

³⁴⁴ Sina Talebian, interview.

and I say “ok I am so sorry.” The songs, and playing guitar, and musics, I myself, it cools me down very much. It doesn’t matter I have problem or not I am pissed off or not it makes me so cool down.³⁴⁵

Sina told me that his father did not understand why metal vocalists had to scream the lyrics instead of sing in a more normal way. Sina told me, “I always keep telling him, I’m like ‘When you are frustrated, when you’re angry, you’re not like ‘I’m angry.’ So you’re angry! You need to show your like, emotion and everything that is how we show it in metal.”³⁴⁶

Sina does not need that outlet for his emotion as much as he used to now that he is living in the US He said:

I came here like 10 months ago so, and back then in Iran I used to listen to metal music every day, I mean from my house to my workplace and everything, but ever since I came here... I can’t... I listen to metal, but it is harder to listen to metal because everything is perfectly normal here. You don’t have no restriction, no boundaries, so you’re like free, your mind is free, your mind is not restricted. You don’t have those frustrations that you used to have in Iran and you’re like “I think I am going to listen to, I don’t know, Ben Howard [a British folk guitarist] for now.” So, and that has a lot to do, I mean when I’m looking back at myself when I was in Iran even the lyrics that I wrote, they’re coming out of the frustration that we experience back then because of everything.³⁴⁷

My informants had much to tell me about the characteristics of metalheads in Iran. They were very vocal about the stereotypes and judgments that are placed on them, and the fact that they are not true. They want people to understand that metalheads in Iran are sophisticated, talented, professional, and determined.

Yashar said, “They are very [have a lot of] potential, they are very sophisticated, they are very talented, they can do a lot of things but they just need a little bit of support and

³⁴⁵ Pezhman and Pooya Moradi, interview.

³⁴⁶ Sina Talebian, interview.

³⁴⁷ Sina Talebian, interview.

help to expose themselves and show to the rest of the world what they are made of.”³⁴⁸

Pooyan told me that metal musicians in Iran should not be judged on their work because it just cannot compare to the West at this time. People need to see that they have a strong professional attitude and they take the idea of being in a band and creating music seriously.³⁴⁹

One thing I heard and felt from all of my informants is that they will never give up. Sina told me “They never give, they never give up. That’s the thing with all these guys in Iran.”³⁵⁰ I absolutely believe this is true because metal music is not a passing phase for metalheads, it is their outlet, their religion in a sense. They need it to survive. Without metal music many of my informants could possibly be in a very dark place where all hope is lost and they turn toward drugs and risky behavior just to feel something.

Faraz believes in the determination of metal musicians but he had a more realistic view of the success that determination may or may not bring, and he said, “I think the important thing is that we do our best. We want to do something, and we wanted to do something, and we tried our best.”³⁵¹

Metal musicians also struggle with negative feelings like doubt, depression, and hopelessness. There is no future as a musician in any genre of popular music (except Islamic pop) in Iran and I heard many stories about encounters my informants had with family and friends about being a musician and not many of them were positive. Some of them have support from their immediate families and some do not, but either way, extended family and friends did not approve of their desire to be a musician. It was not

³⁴⁸ Yashar Mojtahedzadeh, interview.

³⁴⁹ Pooyan Madadi, interview.

³⁵⁰ Sina Talebian, interview.

³⁵¹ Faraz Jabbari, interview.

because they disapproved of the music, but the fact that there is no future for a musician in Iran and they do not want to see their family member or close friend waste their life.

Depression is a very big problem for many metal musicians. Faraz expressed to me his disbelief with the metal scene and he questioned his love for metal and could not figure out why he loved it because it caused him nothing but trouble. Pooyan emphasized Faraz's disbelief and said, "We are doing this in Iran!"³⁵² He said this while shaking his head and I understood that these guys have just as much trouble processing the fact that they are criminals as any Westerner.

Arash, who is fortunate to be in the US, receives e-mails all the time from youth in Iran asking for advice, support, and encouragement to combat the hopelessness they feel. He said, "Well, some people are seeing no hope in their, for their future. I mean I'm getting e-mails from these people and I'm trying to just tell them that this is not the way that you should think. Just look forward, make something as a goal or a plan. Take it. Go for it. You know."³⁵³ I imagine this is difficult for him because he knows about the emotions these people are experiencing first-hand and there is not much he can do about it except send them e-mails of hope and encouragement.

Unemployment of the youth in Iran is a big problem and one the Iranian regime has not found a solution for. In Iran youth with less than a secondary education have a better chance of finding a job than someone with a degree. The government has responded with superficial policies like offering free public services and marriage and employment subsidies, but these are treating the symptoms not the root of the problem.³⁵⁴

³⁵² Pooyan Madadi, interview.

³⁵³ Arash, interview.

³⁵⁴ Djavad Salehi-Isfahani. "Growing Up in Iran: Tough times for the Revolution's Children." *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 15.1 (2008): 65. Academic Search Premier. Web. 23 Aug. 2013.

Djavad Salehi-Isfahani wrote in *Growing Up in Iran*:

Iran's over-regulated labor markets constrain employers from taking advantage of rising demand to create jobs for youth. An important reason why firms do not employ more youth is because youth lack the skills they need. Moreover, the jobs for young workers who do have the skills are restricted to those newly created because existing jobs are occupied by older workers and are not open to competition by young workers.³⁵⁵

Despite all the negative feelings and situations that metal musicians in Iran struggle with, they band together and continue on. In my interview with 5grs, Yashar, with much conviction, said:

After thirty one years you will find what you are made of. You can stand in front of the mirror and say to yourself "Hey, I am a musician. Nothing but a musician." I have a lot of different experiences far away from music, I'm just a medical technician. A lot of ups and downs, but this is who I am, this is my life. There is no way out to being a musician for me, it's difficult for me to do something else, I mean, I am a musician this is what I do.³⁵⁶

Everyone in the room affirmed his statement with cheers and I knew he was speaking for everyone. I think as long as these guys are not taken away from each other they will survive. I wish there was a more positive outlook, but their future as musicians is unknown.

Appearances in Iran are very important. Islamic dress is very conservative for men and women and style in Iran is very limited. Clothing in Iran should not be worn that would attract attention but some people bend the rules as much as they can. Meraj said, "If you want to be different you are bringing problems. Yes, you even may go to prison if you look very much different than someone else."³⁵⁷

Meraj is referring to the very noticeable way that most metalheads dress. Metal culture originated in the West and when Iranians use any aspect of this in their appearance it is very noticeable. There are no clothing requirements for men under

³⁵⁵ Ibid. 72.

³⁵⁶ Yashar Mojtahedzadeh, interview.

³⁵⁷ Meraj, interview.

Islamic law, but in the Quran it says that clothing is simply to cover your private areas.³⁵⁸ In Iran this means clothing that makes you stand out from other people is not good and potentially illegal. There are varying degrees of what is considered “flashy” and the combination of flashy, Western style, and metal create a very dangerous combination in Iran. Metalheads in Iran embrace metal culture because it visibly separates them from the Islamic Republic.

Women in Iran are required to wear the hijab in public to protect their modesty. Many women push the boundaries of how the hijab should be worn and it is their form of political resistance. Ten years ago the hijab was heavily regulated in public and morality police arrested and tortured offenders, but today women have banded together and changed the social norm. Women now wear relaxed Islamic dress in many areas of Tehran as well as make-up. This does not mean that women are not harassed anymore about their appearance, because like any social unnorm in Iran if someone is in the wrong place at the wrong time the authorities will confront them.³⁵⁹

Anahid was faced with an interesting dilemma while she lived in Iran because she has a mohawk and a faravahar (a guardian angel in Zoroastrianism) tattooed on the side of her head. She dressed very conservative in public because she could not afford to be harassed by the authorities. She told me she had to be extremely careful, she said, “I had to cover my head entirely. I had to wear a long dress. It had to be in a way that nothing is showing because they may catch me for worshipping Satan and send me to prison.”³⁶⁰

The intensity of the way a metalhead dresses has different levels. For example, black

³⁵⁸ Quran. “7:26.” *Quran.com*. Quran, N.d. Web. 02 Sept. 2013.

³⁵⁹ Pardis Mahdavi. *Passionate Uprisings: Iran's Sexual Revolution*. Stanford: Stanford University P, 2009. 106. Print.

³⁶⁰ Anahid, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 16, 2012.

metal culture is the ultimate in defiance and individuality. Black metalheads wear tight black jeans, boots, and a black t-shirt with their favorite black metal band or a pagan symbol. They have many accessories like spiked belts and gauntlets, pentagrams or upside down cross necklaces. They also apply paint to their face which is known as “corpsepaint.” This paint is applied to make a person look as evil and demonic as possible. I am not familiar with any country that is accepting of black metal culture.

Next is the more traditional metalhead clothing which is boots, jeans, and a black t-shirt, advertising your favorite metal band. Bodily traits include long hair, tattoos, piercings, and long styled beards.

Lastly, it is becoming more common in metal culture in the West to dress very casual and even classy. Many metalcore bands today in America are dressing like this, for example, August Burns Red, The Devil Wears Prada, and Parkway Drive all wear clothing that does not associate them to traditional metal culture at all.

I have not heard of anyone in Iran displaying black metal culture in public, it would be too dangerous. Persian Force represented the black metal genre at the festival but their image, which was more intense than the other bands, was very tame for black metalers. I think the reason for this was because even within the metal community black metalers are on the fringe of the culture.

Traditional metal culture is the category most of the metalheads I met fall under. Every genre of metal has a variation of style taken from traditional metal culture and Iranians use these style variations for two reasons. First, to show that they do not agree with the principles of the Islamic Republic, and second, to be identified by, and be able to identify other metalheads and the genres they are interested in.

Mahdavi interviewed a young Iranian man who was not a metalhead but his comment about what he likes to wear apply to all young people in Iran experimenting with appearance; he said, “Without our looks, well, we might as well just go and die; it’s a way

to entertain ourselves, to make ourselves feel better, and to show that they [the regime] can't touch us."³⁶¹

Some bands like Death-fuse, Credenc, and Mordab dress very casual and it would not occur to anyone that they are metalheads. Navid said, "You see us, we are not... we don't use that kind of stuff, we are just uh... pretty normal. We try to be normal."³⁶²

Dressing very casual could mean two things; first, that they do not want to be identified with metal, or as Sina told me "They are trying to look more normal and try to express their feelings more in their music than just their appearance."³⁶³ Ali agreed and said, "Music in Iran is more important than appearances, metal music included."³⁶⁴

Ali and Morteza told me there is another category of metalheads and that is those who are forced to hide their appearance. They said:

Morteza: Some people because of their job they might not be able to grow their hair or grow a beard.

Ali: A business man may like metal music but he couldn't act like a metal fan.

Morteza: Elements like black t-shirt or long hair are looked at to be more aggressive. You can see people with normal hair and appearance who know metal well, it is not often you see these people.³⁶⁵

This most likely applies more to the older generation who have jobs and careers and not to the youth who have the freedom to drastically change their appearance.

Almost all aspects of metal culture in personal style are banned in Iran. In regards to clothing, blue jeans, and black metal t-shirts are very Western and can potentially get

³⁶¹ Pardis Mahdavi. *Passionate Uprisings*. 128

³⁶² Navid Asadian, interview.

³⁶³ Sina Talebian, interview.

³⁶⁴ Ali Esfahani, interview.

³⁶⁵ Ali Madarshahi and Morteza Shahrami, interview.

you arrested. Elnaz said, “If you wear t-shirts of bands they will catch you.”³⁶⁶ Then Sohrab said, “No, if you just wear a t-shirt and walk the streets you will be ok but you can’t, of course you can’t wear that t-shirt to work or something.”³⁶⁷ This is another good example of the uncertainty that metalheads in Iran must deal with. Wearing a metal t-shirt in public is taking a risk. It is possible a person runs into authorities who will arrest them, or they could ignore you. A metalhead in Tehran must think about many things, like the part of the city they will be in, what time it will be, and is the area known for a police presence.

Styling the body is also banned in Iran. In metal culture beards are styled in hundreds of crazy ways and styling a beard in an un-Islamic fashion could land a person in jail. Acceptable beards in Iran have many different styles, but none of them would attract attention, they are very modest. There are clerical, government, and military style beards that vary slightly but identify a man with a certain group.³⁶⁸

Long hair is a core characteristic of a metalhead, but this hairstyle is banned for males in Iran. In July, 2010 the Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance released a catalog of hairstyles that were permissible for men, unfortunately long hair was not included in the catalog.³⁶⁹

Shahin has very long hair that hangs past his waist. I asked him how he maneuvers in public with his long hair. He told me that he would show me, and he stood up and took

³⁶⁶ Elnaz Alimardani, interview.

³⁶⁷ Sohrab Alimardani, interview.

³⁶⁸ Rana Rahimpour, a journalist for BBC Persia, was recently interviewed about the different styles of beards in Iran and what they signify, she also discusses President Rouhani’s beard and what his style signifies. Here is a link <http://www.theworld.org/2013/08/iran-beards-reforms/>.

³⁶⁹ Anita Singh. “Iran Government Issues Style Guide for Men’s Hair.” *Telegraph.co.uk*. The Telegraph Media Group, 05 Jul. 2010. Web. 03 Sept. 2013. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/7873621/Iran-government-issues-style-guide-for-mens-hair.html>.

his hair and tucked it inside his t-shirt so it looked like he had short hair.

Piercings and tattoos are also banned and are viewed with more scrutiny because they are permanent body modifications. As with music, and clothes, there is no specific law that prohibits tattoos and piercings but the regime uses interpretations of Islamic law to enforce its policy. Here is a part of my interview with Master of Persia:

Jeremy: Right. Umm, how about tattoos?

Mehrad: It's really dangerous, if you put a tattoo on you will have problems.

Meraj: Satanist symbol, just to own...

Jeremy: Can you get tattoos in Iran? Are there tattoo artists?

Shahin: No, no. There is no.

Reza: We don't have any shops.

Zohreh: There is underground.³⁷⁰

The underground tattoo culture is growing in Iran as more Iranian artists are learning the trade.³⁷¹ None of my informants that lived in Iran had a lot of tattoos but there were a few guys that had one or two. Navid said, "It's illegal you know, is illegal places you can go and you have to... you should have a link, you know someone should introduce you to the person."³⁷²

Mahdavi interviewed a young Iranian in a shopping mall about how social norms in Iran were changing and she described him as wearing baggy jeans, a fauxhawk, a tight t-shirt, and he had his eyebrow, nose, and lip pierced.³⁷³ This is so contradictory to what

³⁷⁰ Mehrad Motamedi, Meraj, Shahin Jebelli, Reza Karimi, and Zohreh Alavi, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 16, 2012.

³⁷¹ You can learn more about tattooing in Iran here:
<http://observers.france24.com/content/20130715-needles-hijabs-iranian-tattoo-artist>.

³⁷² Navid Asadian, interview.

³⁷³ Pardis Mahdavi. *Passionate Uprisings*. 123. Print.

my informants told me, but again, young Iranians have learned the boundaries of the public spaces they live in and they wear certain things in certain places or at certain times when the probability of them being harassed is low.

Sometimes metalheads can become stuck in some very bad situations when they dress “metal” and go into public. 5grs told me that they were going to a friend’s house one day and when they arrived at the house there was an active police presence. They had to hide in their cars for almost an hour until the police left so they could get out of their cars and go inside.³⁷⁴

Metalheads are very aware. They are constantly analyzing what they can and cannot wear according to what they are doing and where they are going. As a female, Sanam, the vocalist for 5grs, was much more adamant about this than the guys in the band. She told me that this is on her mind all of the time.³⁷⁵

Arash said, “Sometimes in, in like local places, in like your neighborhood, in your home, in your private places, yes you can wear that but when for example, you cannot go to like university, or a school with that, most of the times ya. And then in the public, ya you might also face a problem, walking in the street, ya.”³⁷⁶

Communication between metalheads in public is an interesting phenomenon. If a person is wearing jeans and a metal t-shirt the connection is easily made but a person cannot always wear what they want so communication takes a more subtle approach. There are hundreds of different symbols that the metal community has adopted, as well as many more by individual bands. Wearing a necklace or some other type of jewelry with a metal symbol is a discreet way of being identified as a metalhead. Pooya and

³⁷⁴ 5grs, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 13, 2012.

³⁷⁵ Sanam Pasha, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 13, 2012.

³⁷⁶ Arash, interview.

Pezhman said during our interview:

Pezhman: You see the chain and the necklace and you show the devil horn and he show it.

Pooya: You can see from these stuff who are the metal fan.

Pezhman: And many times they will come over to you "Are you listening to metal music?" and I say "Yes."

Pooya: With the long hair and the long beard.

Pezhman: Yes, long hair it is one of the signatures of metal fans in Iran and I say "Yes, which band do you like?" and he says "This band and this band." I told him "I have a band and please go to our Facebook page and like it" and he says "Ok! Nice to meet you." In many times we exchange our numbers you know, he gave me and I gave it to him... to have a connection. Because of that we have a lot of connection in Iran's metal fans.³⁷⁷

Pezhman mentioned showing the devil horns as a way of communicating. The devil horns are an international symbol within the metal community and originated from Ronnie James Dio. Today the symbol is called many different things and means many different things but in traditional metal culture the "devil horns" have nothing to do with the devil as Dio explains:

I think you'd have to say that I made it fashionable. I used it so much and all the time and it had become my trademark until the Britney Spears audience decided to do it as well. So it kind of lost its meaning with that. But it was.... I was in Sabbath at the time. It was a symbol that I thought was reflective of what that band was supposed to be all about. It's NOT the devil's sign like we're here with the devil. It's an Italian thing I got from my Grandmother called the "Malocchio." It's to ward off the Evil Eye or to give the Evil Eye, depending on which way you do it. It's just a symbol but it had magical incantations and attitudes to it and I felt it worked very well with Sabbath. So I became very noted for it and then everybody else started to pick up on it and away it went. But I would never say I

³⁷⁷ Pezhman and Pooya Moradi, interview.

take credit for being the first to do it. I say because I did it so much that it became the symbol of rock and roll of some kind.³⁷⁸

The harassment, persecution, and lack of opportunities for musicians causes many metalheads to attempt to leave the country. This can be extremely difficult if a person does not have a lot of money. First of all, military service is mandatory in Iran and past the age of nineteen, if a man has not signed up for military service he is not allowed to receive a passport to leave the country unless he has special permission. This is a problem for many young guys in bands who want to play a concert outside of Iran. A man can buy his way out of service with a bribe, but he must know who to talk to and it costs thousands of dollars. Many young men do not have thousands of dollars to spend so they are essentially trapped in Iran.

Those who do acquire a visa to leave the country have put themselves in a dangerous position because as soon as they leave Iran they are labeled as a security threat.³⁷⁹ When these Iranians return to Iran they are subject to being detained and questioned about what they did while they were gone. This does not happen to everyone and like most government harassment it can happen at any time, or it may never happen.

Sina told me that his brother is in a tough position in regards to his service, and many musicians feel it is worth the sacrifice to be able to leave freely, he said:

My brother's plan was to come here to US and he had admission and everything but he didn't get the visa so he had to stay in Malaysia otherwise he had to go back to Iran and serve in military and who wants to waste two years of their life serving in the military so... It's funny because back then when I was in Iran everyone was trying not to go to military but I think over time they realized that they can't fight it no more and they have to go there, so I think right now four or five or six friend of mine who were playing in different bands they are serving in the military. Cause they just want to get their passports and get over with this madness.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁸ EvilG. "Interview with the Voice of Metal Ronnie James Dio." *Metal-Rules.com*. Metal Rules, 09 Mar. 2001. Web. 03 Sept. 2013. <http://www.metal-rules.com/zine/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=666>.

³⁷⁹ Laudan Nooshin. "Underground, Overground." 489.

³⁸⁰ Sina Talebian, interview.

All of my informants really want to come to the United States, I cannot emphasize this any stronger. While I was in Armenia I had a couple of my informants ask me if I could get them into the US. It was hard for me to deny them this hope, but at the moment there was nothing I could do for them. There are ways for Iranians to come to the US, for example certain professions are provided visas, and students can apply for visas.

There is a more desperate avenue that can be taken like applying for asylum in the US because of persecution for race, nationality, religion, political opinion or membership of a particular social group; some current examples are being gay, Baha'i or Christian. Applying for asylum is not easy and the US takes only a small amount of asylum seekers from around the world every year.

Sina told me a creative avenue to come to the US that his friends attempted, he said, "Oh believe me lots of them tried to get married and it didn't work out well for them, it didn't work out for them. I know two or three different guys that they were actually talking to the same girl to get married and come here to the US and none of them succeeded to get married. Cause, it seems like they charge you for that."³⁸¹

The normal route to coming to the US costs thousands of dollars and many years of waiting. Elnaz told me that the only hope of succeeding in coming to the US is if you know somebody that will vouch for you on your application and even then there is no guarantee. I asked Sina if any of his band mates had applied for a visa to the US and he said, "Not to U.S cause US is hard to apply for. They require you to have like, like a financial background, like at least a house, or like owning a house or something like that. Those guys don't have anyone here except me so... But they are trying to more go to Europe and then maybe, and coming from, coming here from Europe. Cause it's hard to get here from Iran."³⁸²

³⁸¹ Sina Talebian, interview.

³⁸² Sina Talebian, interview.

CHAPTER 10

ANALYSIS: BAND ACTIVITIES: PRACTICING, CONCERTS, AND RECORDING

Bands in Iran have a very tough time finding a place to practice. Practicing in a house only works if the musicians play at a very low volume, and practicing in a studio is risky as well, for the musicians and the owner of the studio. The safest place bands in Iran have found to practice is in the basement. These basements are everywhere, in abandoned buildings, warehouses, homes, and apartment buildings. Bands are forced to practice in these places and have created their own small world. In these places the only people that will ever see these bands perform are the other bands that share the space and a handful of invited friends and family.

Many of my informants told me about how the social environment determines if they can practice or not. Some bands have their space below a very public place during the day so they can only use it at night. Some bands have neighbors that do not appreciate the noise of the band so they can only practice when they are not home. There are many scenarios that bands have to work around, not to mention every band member's personal free time. I asked Faraz if 5grs practiced every day and he laughed and said, "No! This is like dream. It is one of our biggest problems you know. We can't even practice properly. In the best situation we can practice two maybe three times a week... in the best situation."³⁸³ Yashar added, "So many, you know, so many bands have to

³⁸³ Faraz Jabbari, interview.

disband because of this problem. Many bands practice in their home and for a metal band this is a worst case scenario because they must practice very softly. Metal music is loud and to play it properly you need to be able to perfect your sound, and it is very hard to do this when you cannot play your instruments at the proper volume. Iran does not really have suburbs like we have in the US where people own their own house. Tehran is very dense and most people live in condominium style buildings or apartment buildings therefore it makes it difficult to practice in your home.

For many bands they do not have a choice and their home is the only place they have. I asked Credenc if they had a studio or basement to practice in and Shahrokh laughed at me and said, “We wish man! We wish!”³⁸⁴ Navid said, “We don’t have any studio... but we practice in our house, in our houses and uhh, there is an institute, a music institute and just one day a week we can practice there together.”³⁸⁵ I asked Navid if they practice at home also and he told that they do not practice as a band at any band members home. They practice their own parts individually at home and then they come together once a week at this Institute and put everything together.

I asked Sina where Death-fuse practices and he told me, “We had lots of problems finding a place to practice. We all, I mean me and Shahrooz were playing at my house but there was only a place or two of us, and we were five, we couldn’t like get into one room cause everything, we were squish together so...”³⁸⁶

Some musicians have created studios in their homes, like Ali, the guitarist of Mordab. Ali told me that he has professional equipment in his home and has turned a room into a space that his band can practice in and record. If you listen to Mordab’s album *Room*

³⁸⁴ Shahrokh Kafashzadeh, interview.

³⁸⁵ Navid Asadian, interview.

³⁸⁶ Sina Talebian, interview.

No. X you can hear the quality that a dedicated Iranian musician can create in his home and it is very good.

Pooya told me that Nima³⁸⁷, Persian Force's guitarist, has a home outside the city where they have created their own studio and they do all their practicing and recording there.³⁸⁸

Pooyan told me that he was blessed to have a great place to practice. He told me that he is the landlord of a large apartment building so he has access to the basement area and his band practices in this basement.³⁸⁹ Not every band has a basement, but the ones that do enjoy the freedom they experience only in this small underground space.

Only 5grs, Arsames, and TarantisT have a basement that they can crank up their instruments in and when I asked Morteza about the location of Arsames' basement he said, "very far underground"³⁹⁰ with a devious smile. It is hard for metal musicians to censor their sound because playing at maximum volume is a core principle of metal music.

Arash said that like 5grs they also practiced under an apartment building in the center of Tehran two stories underground. Even though they were two stories underground they could only practice at certain times because the noise bothered some of the tenants in the building above.³⁹¹

³⁸⁷ Unfortunately while writing this I discovered from my friends in Persian Force that Nima passed away. He was building a giant treehouse and fell and broke some ribs which punctured his lung and he died from the complications. I only knew Nima for a few days but he was a very fun guy to be around and he liked to joke around even though he was a fairly quiet guy. He was a stellar guitar player and I enjoyed watching him perform onstage. He will be greatly missed by everyone that knew him.

³⁸⁸ Pooya Moradi, interview.

³⁸⁹ Pooyan Madadi, interview.

³⁹⁰ Morteza Shahrami, interview.

³⁹¹ Arash, interview.

Sound is big problem for most bands and being just below the surface they occasionally come into contact with the public and it causes problems. Arash told me he had a lot of problems with his neighbors because his band would be too loud and they would call the cops. He said, “We had a lot of difficulties actually. Some people didn’t like that. Some neighbors were calling the cops. Complaining, yelling at us, and calling the cops. Ya. I mean we had a lot of difficulties.”³⁹²

These encounters with the public can lead to metal musicians having their equipment seized or being arrested by police. The best way for metal musicians to avoid these encounters is to sound proof the room they practice in. This requires a lot of work and money, but it seems to be a common practice. Pouya said, “Nima, our lead guitarist, he told us ‘Ok, I have money and I want to acoustic out my room.’ (Use it as a dead room), his room, and (we can come here and practice our song). He did it, and we have lots of practice in here.”³⁹³

Arash told me about how his band had sound proofed a closet size room with lots of cardboard so that the band could barely fit inside.³⁹⁴

Drums are arguably the loudest instrument when a band plays and I learned from my informants a couple ways they combat this. First, Yashar told me that he bought an electronic drum kit so he can control the volume and they can play quieter if they need too.³⁹⁵

Another option is to stuff the bass drums with pillows. Pouya said, “The drummer have lots of problem because the place and the neighbor’s come ‘Oh turn down your

³⁹² Arash, interview.

³⁹³ Pooya Moradi, interview.

³⁹⁴ Arash, interview.

³⁹⁵ Yashar Mojtahedzadeh, interview.

sound!' you know... for example our real drummer, that I told you, Behtad bring lots of bed stuff. Pillow. Pillow in a drum bass to turn down the sound, you know that problems make us tired."³⁹⁶

A third option is to build a drum set out of wood and cover the drum piece with padding and set it up like a real drum set. I know this sounds crazy but Arsames did this and you can watch them use it in a little documentary they created and posted online.³⁹⁷

Many bands try and rent studio space to practice but it can be very difficult because renting space costs a lot of money and studios generally do not want to rent to metal bands because it could bring trouble. Sina said:

It was hard, it was definitely hard. I remember we were looking for at least like two or three weeks for a studio to practice and everyone was rejecting us and we were offering them more money to practice, like \$40 for an hour or something like that and they didn't accept it. They were like "No, I'm not gonna jeopardize my studio just for a \$40 thing."³⁹⁸

Sina also told me an interesting story about the difficulty of finding a studio and what happened when they actually found one that accepted them. He said:

We went to different studios to make an appointment for practice and they were like "Sorry guys we don't accept metals." So we got rejected by like at least twenty of those and back then when uhh, when the tension was so high because like the government was looking after metal musician and everyone was trying not to let metal musician to come to their studio because they got in trouble and everything so, uhh... I vividly remember the, the studio that we were practicing in and he just called us and was like "I think I am gonna shut it down for a while cause I'm kinda afraid that I might get arrested." We had a gig in Dubai back then and we were like "Shit! We have no place to practice, what to do!" We searched a lot of studios, and we ended up practicing in a studio that was a 4x4 or 5x5 square meter or something like that. I mean I remember like Shahrooz's guitar was in my face while I was playing drum but we kept it alive. Cause I think nothing stop us, it was real hard trying to find, I think there is only, in Tehran there is only like two or three studios that they allow, they allow you to play metal in their studio.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁶ Pooya Moradi, interview.

³⁹⁷ Ali Madarshahi. "Arsames Documentary." *YouTube*. YouTube, 22 Sept. 2013. Web. 23 Sept. 2013. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-lq7GK-nl0>.

³⁹⁸ Sina Talebian, interview.

³⁹⁹ Sina Talebian, interview.

Persian Force told me that they went to a studio five or six times to prepare for this festival and it cost them about 300,000 tomans a visit (about \$25). Here is a piece of my conversation with them:

Nima: Five or six times we went.

Pezhamn: And we pay a lot. About 200,000 or 300,000 toman you know...

Pooya: Yes all of the bands is like this. If the one bands have lots of money and they are working, so they...

Pezhman: If you are a rich guy you can play anything.

Pooya: Yes, in our country say something uhh... "If you pay much you can have ash" Do you know what this means?

Jeremy: Soup? [ash in Farsi translates to soup]

Pezhman: Soup, ya, ya.

Pooya: Yes like "more ash" you know "if you pay more you can have more" you know? That's the problem for practicing but, except the place we must go somewhere that have good accessories to listening to what you are for example, playing.⁴⁰⁰

Studios usually have a variety of instruments and when the studio is rented the renter receives access to those instruments. In Iran though most studios will not allow access to their instruments by metal bands because of their play style. Sina said:

Ya, it's really hard. Even if they let you to play in their studio they always gonna keep the good instruments out of your... they don't let you have access to their best instrument because like, the ones that play metal they have, they tend to play hard and the crash is so high that the instrument might get crush or everything so just before every practice they come and just collect every cymbals and everything. They say "Hey this is my personal cymbal, I'd rather to put it here. You can bring your own ones."⁴⁰¹

⁴⁰⁰Nima, and Pezhman and Pooya Moradi, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 15, 2012.

⁴⁰¹ Sina Talebian, interview.

Despite all the restrictions metal musicians face they still manage to find ways to play live. Sometimes it is an illegal underground concert, sometimes it is in a café or a university, which is quasilegal, and sometimes bands take the arduous route of getting government approval.

Underground concerts are a huge risk that bands take to be heard. Many bands do not even perform in underground concerts because they feel the risks are too great, but some do. Mordab told me that underground shows are extremely popular and many people go to them if they hear about one. They said:

Ali: In small gigs it gets so crowded they have to lock the place down.

Sohrab: Even in the smallest concerts, it is so crowded they have to lock the place down so no one else would enter the place.

Elnaz: Yes, there are underground gigs. There are underground gigs and they get very crowded.⁴⁰²

Arash told me that TarantisT had a lot of underground shows. He said, “We had shows in our basement. Selling tickets also for those private shows. We performed at our own places.”⁴⁰³

Performing legally is much more complicated than an underground show because musicians must receive permission from the Council of Islamic Guidance and Culture. Levine interviewed an Iranian metal musician in “Headbanging against Repressive Regimes,” who had gone through this process and he said:

To receive a license to perform in a concert you should tape all you want to play on a CD then take it to the associated ministry and fill the forms about the information of your band and your songs and sign for accepting the rules of a performance. And then their experts decide about your request in some steps. I guess it was last year that they added a new subject to it, and that is you need to record your band’s performance on a camera and give the video as well. They only took the picture of band members before but now they want to get the

⁴⁰² Ali Esfahani, and Elnaz and Sohrab Alimardani, interview.

⁴⁰³ Arash, interview.

impression of how they play during the concert and how they look like! When you have the license then you need to go to another part of ministry which is entirely isolated and need to let them know about your concert. This is the part that they ask you about your connection with organizations outside of Iran, terrorists, if you have any relatives outside of Iran or if you have changed your name or address before. Even if you pass all the steps it's not certain that you're going to play. Because maybe they change their mind, or another organization prevents your performance even before going up the stage or even during the concert.⁴⁰⁴

Very few metal bands have been given permission to perform live and this causes a lot of problems for struggling metal bands because legally they are not allowed to play for an audience until they have secured permission, but to secure permission they have to have a catalog of material to submit. None of this material can legally be listened to so bands have a very tough time receiving feedback about their work, so the songs they create are floating in this audience-free vacuum. The final and most vexing aspect of this process is that laws about practicing are ambiguous, like most other laws, so bands can be arrested for creating music that they are trying to get government approval on.⁴⁰⁵

Two bands that I interviewed had performed legal concerts inside Iran. The first band was Credenc, who has performed a number of legal concerts. Navid told me that they performed in a festival with different styles of music and they were the only metal band there. They were not allowed to use English lyrics because singing in English is forbidden and since they do sing in English they just played an instrumental set with no vocals.⁴⁰⁶

Arash told me that they performed in a few universities and cultural houses after they received permission from the government. One festival in particular, called Sound of Solidarity, was comprised of mostly classical groups but a friend of theirs had managed to get them permission to play. Unfortunately, even though they were given permission

⁴⁰⁴ Mark LeVine. "Headbanging against Repressive Regimes." 48.

⁴⁰⁵ Laudan Nooshin. "Underground, Overground." 468.

⁴⁰⁶ Navid Asadian, interview.

to play authorities were not going to allow it. Arash said:

They were not going to let us to play. We were the only rock band so... we were supposed to play sometime around nine o'clock, it was eleven-thirty, and we still trying to get on the stage. So we finally took the stage and started playing and all the people that were spreading out around that park, they came into the venue, you know, suddenly they heard metal music, distorted guitars, and they came in, and then Basiji forces they shut the sound off and then they wanted us to leave the stage. And then on the next day, the last day of the festival, we won the gold prize of playing, for music and guitar players in that festival by the Ministry of Tehran. And this guy... Ahmadinejad's assistant, he gave the prize to us. I mean that's kind of surprising you know. You guys were not letting us to play and the next day we are winning a prize because we were cool and we played awesome music.⁴⁰⁷

It is not uncommon to gain permission to perform in a concert and then have the concert shut down by authorities before it even begins. If a concert is shut down usually authorities give no type of explanation, but sometimes they do, as Nooshin discovered after a rock band called O-hum had their concert cancelled in 2002. The concert was supposed to take place at Milad Hall but authorities cancelled the show saying they "could not guarantee the security for such an extraordinary concert with such music and excitement, since all concert attendees would be young energetic boys and girls."⁴⁰⁸

This explanation is rather vague but it seems that according to authorities young people with energy can be extremely dangerous to themselves as well as others if they are in an environment that produces excitement.

I was curious to know how the audience is allowed to respond during these legal concerts and I asked Credenc if the audience acted like an audience at a metal show in the West, with mosh pits and head banging. Shahrokh laughed and said, "No, no. Like this."⁴⁰⁹ He then sat straight up in his chair with his hands folded in his lap and a smile on his face. He was exaggerating with his impression but the message was clear that

⁴⁰⁷ Arash, interview.

⁴⁰⁸ Laudan Nooshin. "Underground, Overground." 478.

⁴⁰⁹ Shahrokh Kafashzadeh, interview.

Iranians must remain in their seats and avoid showing too much emotion. Navid followed up and said, “Ya, just like sit and watch, when you are in a theater or a cinema. You are watching movie.”⁴¹⁰ Sitting used to apply to the musicians as well but today they are allowed to stand.⁴¹¹

5grs told me about how they performed in cafes a few times. Permission from the government was most likely sought after by the café owner because he would not want to jeopardize his café by allowing illegal music to be played. Most likely the owner had some connections with certain Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance officials to allow music to be played in his café. It would have been much harder for 5grs to apply for permission on their own. They played these shows unplugged so it would not attract too much attention, but since they performed more than once eventually word got around. Here is how 5grs described their unplugged shows:

Pooyan: Last year, more than a year, we performed three times in a coffee shop unplugged

Yashar: Café

Pooyan: Café, unplugged, but it is so fucking dangerous. And finally they put a label, they put a label on us...

Jeremy: You have acoustic guitars and acoustic bass or...

Farhaz: Imagine playing metal unplugged

Pooyan: Acoustic bass but we plug it in amplifier, but very low sound.... very low.⁴¹²

Sohrab attended one of their shows in a café and he said that the café was packed

⁴¹⁰ Navid Asadian, interview.

⁴¹¹ Article 19: Global Campaign for Free Expression. “Unveiled: Art and Censorship in Iran.” 45.

⁴¹² Pooyan Madadi, Yashar Mojtahzadeh, and Faraz Jabbari, interview.

with people and they played unplugged so it was not too loud. He told me that 5grs had advertised the show on Facebook and had invited many people to come to the show.⁴¹³

I asked Pooya how he had advertised for the show and he told me that 5grs did not really advertise their shows publicly. They sent out invites through Facebook, e-mail, and personally, with close friends that they trusted. These friends brought friends and that is how they filled the café.⁴¹⁴

Sometimes bands can play at universities without permission from the government: Milad Hall at the University of Tehran, Farabi Hall in Tehran's Art University, and Tehran conservatory.⁴¹⁵ Universities are outside the prying eyes of the morality police to regulate their activities and occasionally metal concerts will take place. This does not mean they are free to perform as they choose, many restrictions still apply, like using drums or having vocals.⁴¹⁶

As I got to know my informants I discovered that some of them had never played in front of an audience before and the Persian Metal Festival was their first time playing live. Persian Force was one of these bands and their performance was remarkable for their first performance ever.

It was hard for me to believe that some of these bands had never performed live. It is essential for a band to play in front of people so they can receive feedback and learn how to make their sound better. I asked the bands if they ever brought people into their practice spaces to listen to them and all of them said that this was a common practice, but that caution must be taken because people filing in and out of your practice sessions

⁴¹³ Sohrab Alimardani, interview.

⁴¹⁴ Pooyan Madadi, interview.

⁴¹⁵ Heather Rastovac. "Contending with Censorship." 79.

⁴¹⁶ Mark LeVine. "Headbanging against Repressive Regimes." 48.

can bring unwanted attention. Shahrokh said, “Yes, you know we have that kind of thing they come over, they listen to us and we talk about that kind of stuff, the sounds, but mostly it’s inside the band. There are not very many people that we can have and count on this part.”⁴¹⁷

Pezhman said that at most they had two or three friends come and watch them occasionally because they were curious about what their friends were doing.⁴¹⁸

Ali said that they would usually restrict access to no more than ten people because they did not want anyone to become suspicious and because the place they practice was so small no more than ten people could fit anyway.⁴¹⁹ Ahmad, the bassist for Arsames, said, “Even that small garage or underground basement we had lots of people coming in and listening to our practice but we try to be careful and we usually tried to limit the amount because we want it to be safe for us.”⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁷ Shahrokh Kafashzadeh, interview.

⁴¹⁸ Pezhman Moradi, interview.

⁴¹⁹ Ali Madarshahi, interview.

⁴²⁰ Ahmad Tokallou, interview by Jeremy Prindle, Yerevan, Armenia, September 17, 2012.

CHAPTER 11

ANALYSIS: THE INFLUENCE OF TECHNOLOGY ON THE IRANIAN METAL MUSIC SCENE

In Iran the doors to the global information superhighway are locked by the Islamic Republic. People in Iran have access to the internet but it is heavily censored by the government. Iranians are very technology savvy and they circumvent government internet filtering by using virtual private networks, or VPNs (a virtual private network hides activity passing through the public network, it is similar to a person who accesses his company's intranet out of the office). Through VPNs Iranians have access to an even more wide open internet than people in the US Arash said, "The doors of information technically is closed by the government, but the doors are a lot wider open than even here, or even Europe."⁴²¹ This is an intriguing paradox, but there are no copyright laws in Iran so Iranians can freely download anything they want.

The internet has clearly affected many aspects of Iranian politics and culture and I wanted to hear from my informants how the internet has affected the metal scene in Iran.

Yashar said, "You cannot imagine! It's had the biggest effect on us!"⁴²² Elnaz said, "How has it not? The internet has affected everything!"⁴²³ Arash said, "The internet just opened the doors, even for my band. I mean, we started on the internet. We got

⁴²¹ Arash, interview.

⁴²² Yashar Mojtahedzadeh, interview.

⁴²³ Elnaz Alimardani, interview.

exposed on the internet and then we got invited to the festivals, to tours, and then it changed our life.” Sina said:

Oh, a lot, a lot... cause back then like 6 or 7 years ago internet wasn't that popular. People were destined to only listen to certain things. The only albums that were available back then like Metallica, Slayer, and all these stuff but... but after like internet got more popular in Iran they got access to different websites downloading different albums, different artists so...⁴²⁴

Three websites have given the metal scene in Iran a mega boost of confidence, and those websites are Myspace, YouTube, and Facebook. Myspace was the first real popular social networking site and bands like Arsames used Myspace to its full potential. Ali said, “I believe that the biggest thing that helped Arsames was Myspace. The early days of Myspace. Before we couldn't make any contact with other countries like America or Europe. We couldn't introduce our music to them. Myspace helped a lot we put our tracks on it in 2006.”⁴²⁵

YouTube became popular about the same time as Myspace and metal bands began making music videos and posting them on YouTube. It seems the first videos of an Iranian metal band that were uploaded to YouTube were by someone with the username Barzakh.⁴²⁶ This person uploaded a bunch of videos on May 6, 2006 by bands called Seven Deadly Sins, Cotalors, Arthimoth, Kahtmayan, and Ahoora. Some of these videos are live underground shows, a couple look to be shot outside Iran at large festivals, and only the Arthimoth video is an actual music video. The Arthimoth video contains very dark imagery with poor sound quality but it is nicely filmed and edited and showed Iranian metalheads what they could achieve.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁴ Sina Talebian, interview.

⁴²⁵ Ali Madarshahi, interview.

⁴²⁶ Here is the link to his YouTube profile and you can view the many videos he has posted about metal music in Iran: <http://www.youtube.com/user/barzakh/videos>.

⁴²⁷ Barzakh. “Arthimoth, Death metal Band from Iran” *Youtube.com*. YouTube, 06 May 2006. Web. 19 Apr. 2012.

YouTube is banned in Iran so it must be accessed using a VPN or proxy server and Pooyan told me that if you go to YouTube in Iran without one of these a picture of the Statue of Liberty comes on the screen with a bunch of people throwing rocks at it!⁴²⁸

Facebook is undoubtedly the most important website for Iranian metalheads. Every Iranian metal band has a band profile page with access to their songs and videos and through Facebook they can communicate with the world. Meraj said, "Facebook is joy for metal people."⁴²⁹

If it was not for Facebook my own research would have been very difficult. I have spent many hours on Facebook discovering new bands, listening to their music, and communicating with my informants. I can stay updated with their lives and see how their bands are progressing. Even though I only got to spend a week with my informants in person, I have spent a lot of time with them on Facebook and I am constantly learning new things from them.

Without the internet metal bands in Iran would have very little communication with anyone outside of Iran. The internet has allowed them the opportunity to receive feedback about their music from people around the world. I asked Ali if he receives a lot of messages about Arsames from different countries and he said:

I had American friends listen to these songs and they couldn't believe it came from Iran. And I said, "Yes, we have metal bands in Iran." One American ask me "Do you have electricity in Iran?" Here the media show a lot of things about you. They show that you have no facility in Iran but you are playing electric guitar?⁴³⁰

This caused a bout of laughter during our interview, but in all seriousness I think this shows how ignorant people are about the country of Iran.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-GeKMyU9Z_A&list=TLGXTbT6Swa24.

⁴²⁸ Pooyan Madadi, interview.

⁴²⁹ Meraj, interview.

⁴³⁰ Ali Madarshahi, interview.

Many people have misconceptions about Iran and metal music in Iran and now that the internet has allowed Iranians to communicate with people around the world they can help clear up many of the misconceptions about their country and the metal scene there. I talked with many of my informants about how their communication with people outside Iran always involves misconceptions about their culture and metal music, but they never take offense. They see it as an opportunity to tell people the truth.

Bands like Master of Persia were one of the first metal bands to leave Iran and begin educating people about the Iranian metal scene in Armenia. Meraj, the lead singer, put together the Persian Metal Festival for two purposes: one, to educate people around the world about the Iranian metal scene, and two, to help Iranian metal bands reach an international audience with their music.

Sina said:

I think it's because of all these activities that other guys like Meraj, and all those guys is doing in Armenia and Georgia. Cause I think music is like international language so the more you have connections in talking to different people and cultures and everything you get to spread your words out better. The things that Meraj, Shahin, and those guys are doing is really helping a lot cause they're like a bridge from Iran to international world.⁴³¹

Faraz told me that Iranian metal bands must seek feedback internationally because they cannot seek feedback in Iran and as musicians it is very difficult for them to create music only for themselves.⁴³² The purpose of playing music is self-expression and recognition, and it is frustrating for them when they cannot express themselves freely and receive feedback from people.

Faraz said, "We cannot communicate with each other anywhere, you know... because we, we... for example wrote a song and we can't publish it anywhere. So just the danger

⁴³¹ Sina Talebian, interview.

⁴³² Faraz Jabbari, interview.

(of using the internet) is the only way to communicate outside..."⁴³³

Metal musicians in Iran have a very tight network because of the internet and websites like Facebook. There are a couple ways that musicians can network and that is through music teachers and Facebook. Here is a piece of my conversation with 5grs:

Faraz: I don't play in the past for like six months I haven't had a band. It is so boring you know.

Jeremy: Right

Faraz: All day I search for a band I can play in and finally one day he called me (motions toward Pooyan) and it is like a dream come true.

Jeremy: I mean how do you... in Iran how do people find each other?

Faraz: Usually I think it's some masters that teach students and I think maybe for example that some of them would want a bass player for or call a teacher and ask "How can I find him?"

Pooyan: But there is another way you can put an advertisement on Facebook and your friends.

Jeremy: Because I mean you guys didn't know each other, you just...

Pooyan: No.

Faraz: I heard his name but I had no image. One day he called me...

Yashar: This is the power of metal music. This community is connected together. If you want to find a member you can easily do this.

Jeremy: Right, so all the bands I met tonight, you guys might not know each other physically, like you've met, but online...

Faraz: We know who it is.

Jeremy: So out of the bands tonight... or the bands that are in the festival how

⁴³³ Faraz Jabbari, interview.

many of those bands did you know before you came here, like you actually...

Pooyan: Most of them... but some of them maybe we don't know face to face but they heard my name, I heard his name, her name... We are connected in

Facebook but maybe we never have not seen each other until tonight.⁴³⁴

Using Facebook to promote themselves, metal bands in Iran connect with the global metal community and are being received warmly. Through Facebook bands accept invitations to festivals outside of Iran in places like U.A.E., Turkey, Armenia, Georgia, and Germany. Metal music promoters are aware of the Iranian metal scene and are inviting bands to their festivals. Most of the invitations have to be declined because it is very expensive to travel internationally, and of course passport and visa issues, which I mentioned before.

Some bands are in a better situation than others and are able to travel. Pooyan said, "Last summer we invited to Dubai to play in... in some festival, just because of internet. We didn't know them they don't know us. They just search Iranian band or something like that, they found us and message me... we confirm and go there."⁴³⁵ Faraz added that all the arrangements they made to come to the Persian Metal Festival were made solely through Facebook.⁴³⁶

The guys in Persian Force told me that one of the ways they promote themselves is through a website called Metal Messiah Radio.⁴³⁷ This website streams live radio DJs from all over the world that play underground metal music from all over the world. One of their more than thirty DJs is DJ Yusef, who is located in Miami, Florida and hosts Middle

⁴³⁴Faraz Jabbari, Pooyan Madadi, and Yashar Mojtahzadeh, interview.

⁴³⁵ Pooyan Madadi, interview.

⁴³⁶ Faraz Jabbari, interview.

⁴³⁷ Pezhman Moradi, interview.

East Mayhem from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Wednesdays.⁴³⁸ DJ Yusef plays metal from bands all over the Middle East that send him their music.

Metal bands in Iran are not allowed to promote themselves inside Iran or sell their music, therefore the only way they can be heard is to put their music on the internet for free. I asked Sina about how bands promote themselves and he said:

The most that we can do is to put our song on iTunes, but that even doesn't work cause then we have to spend like \$80 or \$90 bucks for a month to upload our songs to iTunes. And trust me, \$90 right now if you wanna change it to my currency, it's gonna be like 400,000 or 500,000 rials... That's why we only uploading our songs onto Reverb Nation, Sound Cloud, cause these ones are actually free."⁴³⁹

These websites that Sina mentioned are utilized by almost all my informants and they are also great tools for discovering new bands.

For bands like Credenc, they do not even concern themselves with profiting from their music. Navid said, "It is not important to us."⁴⁴⁰ Shahrokh added, "We can't have shows so we have to find a way for people to you know, hear us, hear our music, then we can have the financial things."⁴⁴¹ It is sad that metal musicians in Iran must give their hard work away with no compensation, but hopefully with more exposure this can change. Sharing their music through these different online mediums, Iranian metal bands are making a name for themselves and becoming connected with bands from other countries.

Metalheads are also using the internet for more than just promotion, they are using it to educate themselves how to be better musicians. Pooya and Pezhman told me how

⁴³⁸ Metal Messiah Radio. "Metal Messiah Radio." *Metalmessiahradio.com*. Metal Messiah Radio, 2012. Web. 23 July 2013. <http://metalmessiahradio.com/community/>.

⁴³⁹ Sina Talebian, interview.

⁴⁴⁰ Navid Asadian, interview.

⁴⁴¹ Shahrokh Kafashzadeh, interview.

many of the metal techniques they have incorporated in their songs they learned from the internet. For example, Pooya had no idea about the proper technique to sing harsh, or growl, as they say in the metal world. In order for him to learn how to effectively use this vocal technique he went online and discovered a pdf file created by Chuck Schuldiner, the lead singer of the death metal band Death (Schuldiner, who passed away due to brain cancer in 2001, is considered the father of the death metal genre and metal musicians around the world look up to him.). Pooya said, “My brother singing harsh depends on that pdf.”⁴⁴²

Pooya also talked about guitar techniques that he did not know how to do until he went online to see how people did them. He said, “If I have a sweep (a sweep is a very difficult fast and fluid technique performed in metal music) for example, learning sweep on an electric guitar, I am going to YouTube and see ‘Ok that is the sweep I am practicing.’ Internet has lots of influence.”⁴⁴³

Another big influence for metal musicians in Iran is *Guitar Pro*, which is a computer program that creates tablature for guitar, bass guitar, and drums, and can edit multiple tracks. I talked about *Guitar Pro* with a few of my informants and they all said it was a very influential tool they used to learn how to play musical instruments. Arash said, “The general idea of how to play music, or guitar, how to play notes, you can learn it from somebody, and then this *Guitar Pro* program was a big influence.”⁴⁴⁴

Another important aspect of *Guitar Pro* is that anybody with the program can create tablature for a song and upload it onto an online database of *Guitar Pro* tablature where anyone can then download it. A person can download a catalog of tablature of their

⁴⁴² Pooya Moradi, interview.

⁴⁴³ Pooya Moradi, interview.

⁴⁴⁴ Arash, interview.

favorite songs and learn how to play them.

There are two major problems that prevent Iranians from gaining access to information on the internet and that is the speed of the internet and government filtering. The internet speeds in Iran are dreadfully slow, which give Iranians a lot of problems when it comes to accessing websites, and downloading and uploading of multimedia files. The OpenNet Initiative, an organization dedicated to investigating global internet filtering and surveillance practices, wrote a profile about the state of the internet in Iran and how it's centralized filtering system is one of the most extensive in the world. In this profile it states that the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MICT) issued an order designed to thwart household access to broadband Internet, forbidding ISPs from providing internet connectivity to households and public internet access points at speeds greater than 128 kb/s.⁴⁴⁵

My informants told me about how difficult it is to download and upload music in Iran and it can take days to download an album from one of their favorite bands. Pooya said, "In good time you have 125 kb/s"⁴⁴⁶ and Navid said, "It's pretty slow we have problem for uploading stuff."⁴⁴⁷

Filtering is the other big problem in Iran as the regime has increased the amount of filtering it does by establishing a centralized filtering system that routes all public internet traffic into its proxy servers. From here strong filtering software monitors specific websites and keywords, who accesses them, as well as blocks certain sites from being viewed. The OpenNet Initiative exposed the Iranian regime's increased filtering of

⁴⁴⁵ OpenNet Initiative. *Internet Filtering in Iran*. OpenNet Initiative, June 2009. 3.

⁴⁴⁶ Pooya Moradi, interview.

⁴⁴⁷ Navid Asadian, interview.

human rights websites, which the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology had previously denied.⁴⁴⁸

Pooya told me how he had been so excited once he arrived in Yerevan because he could access apps on his cell phone that he could not access in Iran. He said:

The first time that I can use the special Facebook icon on my mobile phone is in here. I say “Oh my God, thank you very much!” Because we have to use VPN in our country, or antifilters.⁴⁴⁹

The most popular way to access filtered websites is using a proxy server. It is slightly different than a VPN and much cheaper. When a person uses a proxy they are essentially telling their computer to contact another computer before contact is made with the internet. By doing this the internet will think the first computer is the second computer allowing the user access to the internet under a disguise. The user also is limited to accessing what the proxy server allows, but that is the point, and these proxies generally have no restrictions.

I talked with Credenc about their use of proxy servers and here is what they said:

Jeremy: You have the filtering and the uhh... you guys use like proxies to...

Shahrokh: Ya

Navid: Sometimes proxy's just off and we have a lot of problem with that and uhh... Facebook is forbidden in Iran.

Jeremy: But you can use it with a proxy right?

Navid: Ya but...

Shahrokh: Use a proxy's even slower (laughter)

Navid: It makes the speed more or less. You know.

Jeremy: Interesting, so... cause I don't remember somebody told me that you can... you guys buy proxies, it's like a dollar or something.

⁴⁴⁸ OpenNet Initiative. *Internet Filtering in Iran*. 8.

⁴⁴⁹ Pooya Moradi, interview.

Navid: Ya, you have to buy a proxy.

Jeremy: How long does it last?

Shahrokh: Well it depends.

Jeremy: I mean does it end? Do they disappear? If you buy one does it last forever?

Shahrokh: No

Navid: No, no, you can buy it for a month, for three months, for six months when you just... out of the date...

Shahrokh: Credit

Navid: Out of the credit it just stop working. Then you have to pay again, charge it.⁴⁵⁰

Proxys are sold on the black market and are pretty easy to come by. One of my informants mentioned how someone will get a proxy and send it to all of his friends so they can use it as well. Cnet published an article in June 2009 shortly after the Iranian presidential election, when the regime had blocked access to many important websites like Facebook and Twitter. It also told about how websites were being created to help Iranians access the internet, like proxyssetupforiran.blogspot.com and websites with details on how to create your own proxy server for people to access.⁴⁵¹

Iranians pirate everything they can get their hands on and share it with each other, even charging each other for it, if it is something difficult to find. To most people in the West this would seem very unethical, but it is important to understand that there are no laws against pirating in Iran because of its isolation from global society and business practice. There is no Tower Records or Sam Goody in Iran, there is no access to

⁴⁵⁰ Shahrokh Kafashzadeh and Navid Asadian, interview.

⁴⁵¹ Declan McCullagh. "Iranians Find Ways to Bypass Net Sensors." *Cnet*, 17 Jun. 2009. http://news.cnet.com/8301-13578_3-10267287-38.html.

Amazon or Ebay, if a person wants to get their hands on a Western music CD or DVD they must pirate it or find it on the black market. Pezhman said, “We don’t have any music center like Yerevan to buy Arch Enemy or Obituary, you know, but internet is very powerful in our country because we can to download our bands’ music like Obituary, Amon Amarth, Dimmu Borgir, you know.”⁴⁵²

Sohrab and Elnaz told me about their experience pirating during our interview:

Elnaz: We can get anything now! Because you know we cannot buy music. We don’t have MasterCard, we don’t have Visa. And we cannot buy music...

Sohrab: Ya, we pirate.

Elnaz: We cannot support the musicians. So we have to pirate it, we have to download it.

Sohrab: So... we pirate everything. I mean my hard drive is probably worth a million bucks or so, just counting the albums I downloaded.⁴⁵³

This brings me to a very important quality I learned about Iranians, which is that they will always find a way. With every question I asked them that referred to something they were not allowed to do they responded by telling me exactly how they go about doing it. The last two generations of Iranians do not like having their lives micromanaged and regulated by the government and they will subvert government authority any chance they get. Elnaz said, “Look, Iranians will always find way, let me tell you that. They won’t stop, he won’t stop (referring to Ali). He would smuggle in instruments. Really! Nothing will stop Iranians.”⁴⁵⁴

Ali emphasized Elnaz’s statement by saying, “If I can’t buy instrument I will get a

⁴⁵² Pezhman Moradi, interview.

⁴⁵³ Elnaz and Sohrab Alimardani, interview.

⁴⁵⁴ Elnaz Alimardani, interview.

shovel..."⁴⁵⁵ He then pretended to play the shovel like a guitar which told me that no matter what, he will always be a musician, and nobody will ever be able to stop him from making music.

⁴⁵⁵ Ali Esfahani, interview.

CHAPTER 12

ANALYSIS: THE FUTURE OF THE IRANIAN METAL MUSIC SCENE

Despite all of the opposition metal musicians in Iran face, from the misconceptions of first generation Iranians who do not know a lot about metal music to the Iranian regime that actively suppresses it and persecutes its practitioners, metal music is progressing steadily. Sina told me that metal music has progressed a lot since he became involved seven or eight years ago. He said:

Eight years ago Dream Theater (a progressive metal band from Boston) songs got popular in Iran and everyone was trying to move to progressive metal and trying to learn more about progressive and get better at what they were doing. I don't know, playing drums and everything so... it had a lot to do with the progress in music.⁴⁵⁶

Today in Iran Sina's band, Deathfuse, has been heavily influenced by the metalcore genre that has exploded in the West over the past decade. He told me about how bands like August Burns Red and Parkway Drive (metalcore bands) are being listened to and analyzed by many Iranians. They are gaining inspiration from this new genre of metal in their country and as Sina said, "Those guys (metalcore bands) they affect your music, your mindset, your inspiration. They just change everything."⁴⁵⁷

I asked my informants about the future of the metal scene in Iran and where they see their future as metal musicians and the future of the metal genre in Iran in five years and

⁴⁵⁶ Sina Talebian, interview.

⁴⁵⁷ Sina Talebian, interview.

I received mixed predictions. Some of my informants were skeptical and some of my informants were optimistic. No matter which direction they believed the scene to be headed none of the answers they gave me were given in a confident manner. They all seemed to take a deep breath and ponder this question deeply before saying anything and this really shows the unpredictability of the many factors that have been discussed so far. Shahrokh's response to my question summed up the skeptical view of many of my informants, he said:

I don't know if anything is going to change inside our country. Obviously if it goes on like this I don't see any uhh... bright future, but if we can get out once in a while like this (referring to the festival in Armenia) and do our job and do our live shows and you know, do our music, it can get better. It depends, it really depends on the... everything goes back to the political stuff.⁴⁵⁸

Shahrokh emphasizes the most important thing for all of my informants, which is that unrelenting need for feedback. Playing metal music in your basement is fun and allows you to express yourself, release that aggression, and escape, but it does nothing for the musicians' need to know that they are progressing and becoming better musicians. As I have mentioned, metal is not just sonic and verbal, it is extremely visual and releasing your energy, showing off your techniques, and commanding a stage are huge aspects of metal music. Until metal musicians in Iran can fulfill this aspect of metal music in their journey, as musicians they will never feel any sort of accomplishment.

Arash was also skeptical, he said, "It's a hard question to answer. There is two options. One is if the situation keeps going in the same way, which I hope not, the mood and the passion will be dead maybe... maybe. And the other option is that umm, we are going to tour across the country with big bands."⁴⁵⁹ Other informants of mine said the same thing and I would have to respectfully disagree with the first part of this statement. If there was anything that I learned during this research it was the determination and

⁴⁵⁸ Shahrokh Kafashzadeh, interview.

⁴⁵⁹ Arash, interview.

passion of metal musicians in Iran and I see absolutely no scenario where the passion of metal musicians in Iran dies, absolutely none. The most important thing that I learned from this remark and the others like it is simply the hopelessness that many of them stare in the face every day.

On the bright side, I had informants that felt there was only one direction for the metal scene in Iran to go and that was straight up. Sohrab said:

I think it will progress pretty fine, because uhh... you know, maybe right now things in Iran are kinda messed up in a way right now but the speed of progression is really fast so in five years I think there will be a lot of other bands, a lot more bands playing music as well as other types of music, and uhh... in five years I think it will happen. I mean there might not be shows played in Iran but still bands are getting more and more musicians coming to play and I think it has a bright future.⁴⁶⁰

Pooyan said:

I am very optimistic, very optimistic because just about the power of Iranian metalhead there is nothing they can't do with this kind of attitude. This is raised day by day in Iran. I think they are gonna grow up in five or six years. Not perfectly, not perfectly, for example we will not have concert in stadium or public place but I think it's gonna get better.⁴⁶¹

Pooyan sees the determination in himself and his fellow metalheads that I saw from all of them while I was in Armenia. With guys like him taking a leadership role in the scene and encouraging his fellow metal musicians, I agree that the immediate future will not be perfect, but it will be bright enough to require sunglasses.

At the end of the conversation I had with Master of Persia I could feel the hope that they had to one day be able to express themselves and perform in Iran:

Reza: Hopefully one day comes when we can play metal music in our own country.

Jeremy: Me too, because then I can go to Iran.

Meraj: Ya, of course.

⁴⁶⁰ Sohrab Alimardani, interview.

⁴⁶¹ Pooyan Madadi, interview.

Mehrad: And she (referring to his Armenian girlfriend)...

Jeremy: Can go too.

Mehrad: Can go to Iran with me.

Shahin: If you need a rest I think prison is a very good place for you (laughter).

Mehrad: For us. For all of us.

Anahid: I wish for the day when we can have concert in Iran at Azadi Square and you will be there.

Jeremy: Ya?

Mehrad: With us, on the backstage.

Jeremy: That would be awesome man (laughter).

Shahin: Don't forget us.

Mehrad: Interviewing...

Shahin: Drinking blood together (laughter).

Jeremy: And we will all worship Satan (laughter).

Meraj: Cheers.

The sarcasm at the end of this conversation really had all of us laughing hysterically and while we were laughing I could not help but think about the fact that we are laughing about this but in reality it is a very serious situation; sometimes the best way to deal with a difficult situation is to just have a hard laugh with friends in the same predicament. I got the feeling that we were all subliminally saying to each other, "Hey, we are all in this together and as long as we stick together we will be alright."

I was very honored by the fact that they wanted me to be there with them backstage when they play a concert in Azadi Square. Azadi means "freedom" and I could not think of a more epic place for a metal concert in Tehran, than the biggest square in Tehran.

The most important thing that I was told during any of my interviews was what Reza told me during my interview with Master of Persia, he said, "It's very precious to us and

important that you send this culture, metal culture, abroad, in America, or wherever you go because we are not known. No one knows that Iran has metal music. No one knows of us."⁴⁶² Again I felt honored that Reza was entrusting me with this mission and for all the honor and respect that my informants showed me I hope that I have given them the honor and respect they deserve in my analysis of their situation. I hope this research will inform people of the many talented metal musicians that live in Iran and hopefully they will attain the Iranian and global respect and recognition that they deserve.

⁴⁶² Reza Karimi, interview.

CHAPTER 13

CONCLUSION

Many important issues were uncovered in the analysis of my interviews with Persian metal music bands. Due to the political, religious, and cultural norms in Iran, all music has had a very tumultuous relationship with the Iranian people. Today, the youth of Iran have an insatiable hunger for Western music and popular culture and this creates a lot of conflict in their lives and with their cultural identity. Metal music satisfies this hunger for many young Iranians and their decision to embrace a metal lifestyle is not viewed in a positive manner by traditional Iranian culture or the current ruling regime.

Metal music in Iran is an unknown genre of music and many Iranians have never listened to it or know anything about it. This creates a lot of misconceptions and false judgments about metal music culture and the character of metalheads. It is clear from my interviews that metalheads in Iran are not rebelling from Iranian society in a manner that would disassociate them from society. They want to be part of society, they are proud of their heritage, they just want to be accepted for their decision to be metalheads and they are doing their best to educate Iranians about metal music by setting a positive example about life as a metalhead.

The answer of whether the Iranian regime's interpretation of Shi'i Islam and metal culture can co-exist remains unanswered. There are just too many differing opinions to answer this question in any reasonable manner. I would like to take the optimistic view and say that anything is possible. If a clear distinction could be made on the subject of music between religious and constitutional law that benefits both sides maybe progress

could be made, but as of now there is no distinction, and metalheads find the regime to be very untrustworthy and unpredictable.

The regime, like traditional Iranian culture, carry many misconceptions about metal culture due to their ignorance of it. The regime feels threatened by metal culture and claims that metalheads pose an organized political threat, but through research that has been done in Iran by scholars like Nooshin and Shahabi we know this to be false. One of the main attributes of metal culture is nonconformity and organizing politically as metalheads goes against everything metal music stands for. Another important reason is that metal culture in Iran is once removed from certain aspects of the formation of metal culture in the West. Many of these meanings are not transferable to a country like Iran because the sociocultural base there is totally different.

One of the most important points that needed to be documented was the mistreatment that metalheads in Iran face by the Iranian regime and the violation of their human rights that is taking place as I write. All metalheads in Iran live in a perpetual state of anxiety and fear because of the ambiguous policies of the Iranian regime. All of the metalheads that live in Iran that I talked to have one wish and that is to be left alone, to be able to play music in peace without fear of mistreatment or arrest by authorities.

The metal scene in Iran is very diverse. There are many different genres of metal music that have influenced Iranian metalheads, the most important being thrash metal and death metal. Metal musicians would love to be able to incorporate traditional Persian music in their metal music but they just do not have the proper education in traditional Persian music to give them the confidence to do so. Iranian metalheads are proud of their heritage and culture and for some of them it really pains them that they do not have the opportunity to challenge themselves in this way.

Lyricaly, metal musicians prefer to use English lyrics in their music for a few different reasons. First, English is a harsher language and more jagged than the flowing sound of

Persian. Second, it is easier to translate feelings in English because of the enormous vocabulary of words that can be used to express yourself. Third, using English opens their music up to a wider audience. Bands face criticism by Iranians for using English lyrics because of the nationalist aura that pervades English vs. Persian lyrics in music, but metal musicians in Iran do not care about this. They do not feel that their decision to use English lyrics makes them any less proud of their heritage than any other Iranian, they just want to be recognized on the global metal scene.

Instrument shops in Tehran are common and the majority of them are located on Jomhuri Street; some of these shops even secretly specialize in metal music. An interesting paradox surrounds these shops because it is legal to buy musical instruments, but playing them is essentially illegal.

Some of the problems metal musicians face when it comes to purchasing instruments is that the selection they have to choose from is severely limited due to trade embargos that many countries have with Iran. Since demand for instruments is high, countries like China who do not have a trade embargo with Iran produce very poor quality instruments that can be purchased in Iran. These shops also contain many fake instruments, produced in countries like China that claim to be high-quality brands when they are not. When a metal musician wants to purchase a high-quality brand instrument he must purchase it off the black market for an exorbitant sum or have a connection outside of Iran that is willing to ship the item to them. This can also be very expensive. Metal musicians also tend to play their instruments very hard so metal musicians in Iran have to be more cautious because replacement parts or new instruments can be expensive and difficult to acquire.

The majority of metalheads in Iran are young and from upper-middle-class to middle-class families. This of course is in stark opposition to metalheads in the West who tend to be from low- to middle-class families. Most Iranian metalheads also tend to be highly

educated which is in stark opposition to the West, although this has changed significantly in the past decade. There are also a lot of women metalheads in Iran and despite the current Iranian regime's position on women and music, women are becoming more actively involved in metal bands.

Iranian metalheads are drawn to metal for different reasons but a couple of the most important reasons are the antiviolenace aspects and its ability to be an emotional outlet. Iran is a highly militarized society and the humanist lyrics of many metal bands speak to young Iranians. They feel that global sense of camaraderie and want to be included with humanity, not isolated from it. This isolation creates a lot of psychological problems for young Iranians and some will tell you that the aggressive style of metal music is the only productive outlet for their frustration that works for them.

Metal musicians in Iran are exceptionally talented, determined, and proud individuals. They want to believe that they have a bright future ahead of them, but sadly for most of them this is currently not the case. The oppression they are subject to by the current regime and traditional Iranian society causes severe depression and hopelessness. They need people to care about their situation and take an interest in it. This is a perfect example of why they were so happy to talk to me. The fact that an American cared enough to travel across the world and empathize with them and tell them that he wanted to help inform people about their situation meant a great deal to them.

Metalheads also face many problems with the attire that is common in metal culture. Jeans, t-shirts, and boots are a very Western style of dress and conflict greatly with the Islamic style of dress that is enforced in Iran today. Long hair, piercings, and tattoos are extremely problematic and I heard many stories of guys being arrested and having their long hair forcibly cut. I did not hear any stories about anyone being arrested for piercings and tattoos, and this is because these are not common among metalheads in Iran.

Communication among metalheads in public is usually determined by clothing, jewelry, and hand gestures. For example any metalhead that sees another person wearing jeans and a black t-shirt may have a pretty good idea that they are a metalhead and confirming evidence may be a symbol attached to a piece of jewelry or the traditional “horns” that metalheads will gesture to someone with. If someone shows you their “horns” and you show them back, that is a way of saying “Hi, I am a metalhead too.”

Practicing for metal musicians is a difficult process. There are many problems that metal musicians in Iran face when it comes to finding a safe place to practice. Many metal musicians practice in their homes and are forced to play quietly or loudly only when neighbors are away. Some bands practice in studios, but they can be expensive to rent time in on a regular basis and most studios do not like renting time to metal bands because it could potentially cause the studio to be shut down if the regime discovered this and decided to follow up.

Many of the metal musicians I talked to had never played in front of a live audience before, the Persian Metal Festival was their first time. Despite this lack of experience playing live by the metal musicians I talked to, underground concerts are common in Iran, but very risky. They tend to be small events because if too many people find out about them the probability that authorities will be alerted rises. Many mass arrests have taken place because of raids on secret underground concerts.

The internet in Iran is heavily censored but Iranians are extremely tech savvy and employ virtual private networks (VPNs) to maneuver around the censors. This not only grants them access to the virtually any website, but grants them even greater freedom on the internet than most people in the West experience because there are no restrictions.

The internet has had a massive effect on the metal music scene in Iran. Websites like Myspace, YouTube, and Facebook have given Iranian metal bands the opportunity to communicate with the world and upload their music so people can hear it. The most

important aspect of this is the feedback they receive from people about their music. Since metal musicians in Iran cannot play publicly they rely on feedback from people on the internet.

Metal bands in Iran cannot make money by posting their music online because websites like iTunes, Pandora, and Spotify are based in the West where the trade embargo affects internet business as well. Metal musicians in Iran upload their music to websites like Facebook, YouTube, Soundcloud, and Reverbnation strictly for the love of metal music and the feedback they need to hear so they can improve as musicians.

Another aspect of the internet that has greatly affected the metal scene in Iran is the ability to educate oneself in certain techniques concerning the metal genre. When metal musicians in Iran hear a certain technique being employed by one of their favorite bands and they want to learn how to do it they can go on the internet and learn how to play it. All metal musicians in Iran learned how to play their instruments in two important ways: through self-teaching and internet instruction.

I have an optimistic view that the Iranian regime's interpretation of Shi'i Islam can find a way to co-exist with metal culture and the future of Iranian metal music is bright. I have two main reasons for this viewpoint: first, the musicians that are emerging are extremely talented and they cannot continue to be ignored on the global stage. More and more people are hearing their music everyday on the internet and several bands have been able to leave Iran and come to the US and Europe and make a name for themselves. Second, the sheer determination that drives the metal musicians in Iran is astonishing. When you meet people that have such intense passion for what they do and their desire to learn and improve is greater than their will to live, it really makes it difficult to envision them not succeeding, no matter what the obstacles are in their path.

The opportunities for future research in this subject matter are overwhelming. There are so many different genres of metal music that Iranians are interested in and so many

different aspects of metal culture that Iranians are grabbing hold of and making their own. There are new bands emerging all the time, every few days I am being invited to “like” a new band on Facebook, or I discover one on my own accord. As more bands emerge and musicians become more talented, the scene is going to grow and the religious, political, and cultural conversations are going to change. These changes are very dynamic and are taking place right now. The relationships between these entities need to be continuously re-examined and analyzed because much of what I have wrote about in this thesis not only applies to metal music, but all music in Iran. Rappers, jazz musicians, pop singers and many others are all in the same position in Iran and research into any of these genres is beneficial to understanding that specific genre, as well as the state of music in Iran as a whole.

APPENDIX A

BAND PROFILES

Arsames

Arsames is a Persian death metal band from Mashhad, Iran. Arsames was a king of Persia during the Achaemenid dynasty, but relinquished the throne to swear loyalty to Cyrus the Great. The theme of the band and the subject matter for all of their songs is the ancient Persian Empire and Persian mythology. The band has great pride in their Persian heritage and educate people about the great kings, battles, and history of the ancient Persian Empire. Arsames is the only Iranian metal band that has been able to tour internationally without any major problems from the Iranian government. Arsames are the metal gods of Iran and every metalhead in Iran has the utmost respect for them.

Discography:

Immortal Identity (2010)

Links:

<https://www.facebook.com/METALARSAMES>

<https://twitter.com/ArsamesMetal>

<https://myspace.com/arsamesmetal>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arsames_\(band\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arsames_(band))

<http://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Arsames/3540318791>

<http://www.reverbnation.com/arsames>

http://www.metalstorm.net/bands/band.php?band_id=5712

Videos:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGhNnwA6ZvA>
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_5rMBKNjQA
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t9Y34v2cTsl>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-lq7GK-nl0>

Mordab

Mordab is a progressive death metal band from Tehran, Iran. Mordab in Persian means “swamp,” but Mordab is also a very small town on the Caspian Sea. Mordab is a band dedicated to exposing the social problems that many Iranians struggle with and their lyrics deliver stark and startling imagery. The band has released several albums over the last decade but as of 2012 they have officially disbanded. This is unfortunate because Mordab was one of the most talented bands in Iran.

Discography:

Into the Mordab (2006)
Darker Than Grave (2008)
Room No. X (2011)

Links:

<https://www.facebook.com/mordabband>
<http://www.reverbnation.com/mordab>
http://www.metalstorm.net/bands/band.php?band_id=3524
<http://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Mordab/3540330474>

Videos:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKat2m58DJs>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9K6Va82hC1A>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EKvIkvopy-E>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpG0DaiSyoE>

Master of Persia

Master of Persia is an Eastern folk metal band from Mashhad, Iran. Master of Persia focus on the ancient history and mythology of Iran as well as the ancient religions and philosophies of Iran. Some of the members of Master of Persia were heavily persecuted in Mashhad, Iran and they were forced to flee the country to Armenia. The band has regrouped in Yerevan, Armenia and began an active campaign to present Iranian metal music to the world. They were instrumental in organizing the 2012 and 2013 Persian Metal Festivals and are currently organizing more festivals so bands from Iran can showcase their talents. Master of Persia also is one of a few Iranian bands that features a female vocalist.

Discography:

Older Than History (2011)

Links:

<http://masterofpersia.com/home/>

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Master-OF-Persia/140433375981242>

<http://www.metal-archives.com/band/view/id/3540364283>

<http://www.reverbnation.com/masterofpersia>

Videos:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHzc2sswXuw>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=524eqwtV7mU>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7oJJiRB0wc4>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wdID05yXp0>

Avesta

Avesta is a thrash metal band from Tehran, Iran. The band was formed in 2000 by two best friends that listened to metal music together in high school. Avesta is one of the only Persian metal bands that sing their lyrics exclusively in Persian. Avesta also is one of the only bands that persevered through the process of trying to get one of their albums approved by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (MCIG). They worked with the MCIG for seven years but the opportunity to release their album legally was eventually denied.

Discography:

Yaa Marg Yaa Aazadegi (Liberty or Death) (2010)
Goloolehaaye Baarooty (Gunpowder Bullets) (2011)

Links:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Avesta-Band/178754238804257>
<http://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Avesta/3540366177>
<http://www.reverbnation.com/avestaband>

Videos:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8a-cm2AzvY>

Death-fuse

Death-fuse is a metalcore band from Tehran, Iran. They are one of the only known metalcore bands in Iran and have risen in popularity extremely fast because of their superb talent. The lyrics of their music discuss social problems in Iran and the tough life many young Iranians face. They have had the opportunity to play in a couple different countries, but unfortunately when it came time to travel to Yerevan, Armenia for the 2012 Persian Metal Festival they were arrested at the border of Iran and Armenia, held for a brief period, and sent back to Tehran. This was a devastating blow to the band as well as everyone involved with the festival who was excited about seeing them perform.

Discography:

Before the Story Ends (2012)

Links:

<https://www.facebook.com/deathfuse>

http://www.spirit-of-metal.com/groupe-groupe-Death*Fuse-l-en.html

<https://soundcloud.com/death-fuse>

<http://www.reverbnation.com/deathfuse>

Videos:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fi1gDv81tzE>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ijolBmZN9Ow>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZaiRJPrCjuo>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ge7KIXY_sjs

Scox

Scox is a brutal death metal band from Tehran, Iran. The lyrics of the band are extremely dark and cryptic and the meaning of these lyrics could be interpreted in any number of ways. Scox recently released their first album, *Psychedelic Philosophy*, in 2012 for free on their website. They are dedicated to the awareness and treatment of leprosy victims in Iran, and have set up on their website a way to make donations to the Bababaghy Hospital in exchange for downloading their album.

Discography:

Psychedelic Philosophy (2012)

Links:

<http://www.scox-band.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/ScoXBand>

<http://www.last.fm/music/Scox>

<http://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Scox/3540357019>

Videos:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=748cSTxU2Eo>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BT8solvKto>

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6pwtShx_uZs

5grs

5grs is a thrash metal band from Tehran, Iran. They formed in 2004 and since their formation have been one of the most active bands playing live shows, legal and underground, in Iran. The band focuses its lyrics on inner struggles and social problems in Iran, but also is one of the few bands that dabbles in political criticisms. 5grs also is the only known active metal band living in Iran with a female lead vocalist. 5grs is currently working on a DVD that will feature performances of all of the songs on their upcoming album.

Discography:

Access Denied (2008)

Let's Crush (2011)

Links:

<http://www.5grsband.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/5grsmusic>

<http://www.metal-archives.com/bands/5grs/3540326410>

<http://www.reverbnation.com/5grs>

<http://www.last.fm/music/5grs>

Videos:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6krb-OgECj0>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=348gtd69ia8>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePWgL974Fcs>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZdSSII OgJs>

Persian Force

Persian Force is a symphonic black metal band from Tehran, Iran. The band was formed by twin brothers in 2002 and is still active today, but under a new name, Kmarykan. The reason behind the name change was because the lead guitar player had a tragic accident and fell from a tree while he was building a treehouse. The band felt like they needed to move on and start fresh and memorialize their friend by changing the name of their band. Kmarykan is taken from the ancient Zoroastrian writing known as the Gathas. In the Gathas Ahura Mazda created a paradise for his angels known as Amahraspand and Ahriman created a place for his demons known as Kmarykan.

Discography:

Life in Pledge (2011)

Links:

<http://kmarykanband.wix.com/kmarykan#!music-/c1575>
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Kmarykan/530674783664197>
<https://twitter.com/kmarykan>
http://www.metal-archives.com/bands/Persian_Force/3540352464
<http://www.reverbnation.com/kmarykanband>

Videos:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7tZY1NcMXg>
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YgY6b_jjYsM
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6LWnkMWQTo>

Slave Mark

Slave Mark is a technical death metal band from Tehran, Iran. There is not much information on this band to be found. It appears that they disbanded in 2013. Slave Mark was one of the bands that was arrested at the border of Iran and Armenia and therefore was unable to participate in the Persian Metal Festival in 2012.

Discography:

Volume II (2012)

Links:

<http://www.reverbnation.com/slavemarkband>

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/SLAVE-MARK/523225127711211>

Videos:

none

Credenc

Credenc is a thrash metal band from Shahsavari, Iran. Credenc formed in 2010 and are known for playing a number of live shows in northern Iran and in Yerevan, Armenia. Credenc has not released an album but they are in the process of creating their first album. An interesting fact about Credenc is that they do not have a lead singer, all of the vocals are performed by the drummer.

Discography:

none

Links:

<https://www.facebook.com/credenc>
<http://www.reverbnation.com/credenc>

Videos:

none

APPENDIX B

SONG LYRICS

Arsames

Immortal Identity (2010)

1. Gate of Persia
[Instrumental]

2. Cyrus the Great

Unsuccessful guys in capturing our land
Unsuccessful guys in capturing our blood
Coming with fear and hesitation
Carrying hill of presents on their shoulders

They're staring with protruded eyes
Looking at the sun but they see nothing

Unsuccessful folks in capturing our bravery
Unsuccessful folks in capturing our glory
Coming with fear and hesitation
Carrying hill of presents on their shoulders

Their souls have shrunk in their corpses
Their minds have been torn in pieces
Defeating all their aces
We had on our feet their kisses

Our Cyrus gave them culture
No pain no sigh no torture
To live in peace is our nature
Not killing like a vulture

This is the first kingdom of the world (Persian empire)
The state on the earth as wide as the sun

Unsuccessful guys in capturing our land
Unsuccessful guys in capturing our blood

Coming with fear and hesitation
Carrying hill of presents on their shoulders

They're staring with protruded eyes
Looking at the sun but they see nothing

3. Dooms Day

To make a world without the fire and burning
To stop the sword that use for human killing
To reign the lord who wants just desolation
To born and rise against suffocation

You earth mother awake swallow your son
You earth mother awake swallow
You earth mother awake swallow your son
You earth mother awake swallow... your son

Father's pour tears no one sees
Mother's roar fears no one hears
Ominous curse tearing apart my chest
Evil's verse rolling over my nest

Father's pour tears no one sees
Mother's roar fears no one hears
Ominous curse tearing apart my chest
Evil's verse rolling over my nest

We stepped on the world unaware of vicious cycle
No hope to leave just feeling reputation
No chance to take, I am seeking evolution
We found nothing but total devastation

To make a world without fire and burning
To stop the sword that use for human killing
To reign the lord who wants desolation
To born and rise against suffocation
Father's pour tears no one sees
Mother's roar fears no one hears
Ominous curse tearing apart my chest
Evil's verse rolling over my nest

4. Homo sapiens

Hammering down your head
 Wishing you were be dead
 Suffering infection and violence
 Keeping your mind in silence

Hatred, sterility, conceited, delict
 Carnality, defiant, sacrilege, covetous
 Trait
 Trait of homo sapiens
 Trait trait
 Trait of homo sapiens
 The cosmos never ends
 Nobody defends
 The hell must be you tent
 Welcome to your pent

Open your blinded eyes
 All your hopes die
 Your can't breathe darkness
 Surrounds you by reality
 Death comes to claim you
 Your brain rotten with pain
 Intenerate velocity
 Immersed in pure insanity

Come onnnnnnnn

Hammering down your head
 Wishing you were be dead
 Suffering infection and violence
 Keeping your mind in silence

Hatred, sterility, conceited, delict
 Carnality, defiant, sacrilege...

5. Immortal Identity

Immortal identity
 Immortal Identity

I am the king of power the chosen one
 I am the first instructor of human rights
 I invite all to baptism of love and justice
 Washing away diabolical thoughts of your minds and souls

I am looking for my dreams in heart of darkness
 God will give me forever wings of braveness
 The world full of honest people of mighty God
 Shedding blood is the thing of the past if you decide

But the world is not gonna be
 As it is expected to be
 There will be an endless game
 Between the Lucifer and me
 My troopers will never permit
 Demons to get on their seat
 Paradise is in my hands
 Hell will be under my feet

6. Monotheism

Burn the flame of my inner sight
 I wanna achieve to lighted life
 Monotheism

You shall lead my soul toward
 The pure thought till I confide
 Monotheism

Lord leads you to kill passion
 Evil spreads temptation
 On which side should I believe
 Who's aware it is deceive
 Pervert the creation
 The death and destruction
 How would be situation
 The day of resurrection

[Repeat 1st Verse]

7. Testament of the King

When I bid farewell to the poor life
 Put me in a coffin made of stone
 Place me in my grave
 Do not cover my grave
 Remind yourself that
 There lies my father

And now the great king is dead, and I too
 Shall one day die like him

It is human fate, and it makes no difference
 Whether you are a king
 Or a poor wood-gatherer
 No one remains eternally
 No one remains eternally
 No one remains eternally

[Clean Vocal]

When I bid farewell to the poor life
 Put me in a coffin made of stone
 Place me in my grave
 Do not cover my grave
 Remind yourself that
 There is lies my father

Never forget there is a Philosophy
 Justice forgiveness and generosity

Now leave me alone, as I feel the hour of my
 Death is near
 Leave me alone...

8. Xerxes

Xerxes comes again to kill Persian's pain
 Tyrants call their wages
 Wizard and geomancer
 Demons come to tyrants
 Conspire against the king
 Desperately seek a way
 To destroy our power rings

Be ready to die
 Enemies of human rights
 Be ready to die...

The thunders of rage will encased you in grave
 Evil incantations dead

Don't let them breathe tear them apart
 They will never rise
 Evil incantations dead

Ahura Mazda Hear my pray
 On your judgment day

Xerxes army finally decapitate brutality
 Wisdom will be born here nowhere you find insanity
 My nation will defend their land to last drop of their blood
 Tyranny will be disappeared when my people move like flood

9. Persepolis

Standing antiquity on the ground with dignity
 Mythic territory that make us proud to be Irani

Kingdom of toleration away from carnage

Majestic throne our cultural heritage

Stay tenacious

The mountain of courageousness
 There is no fire to destroy your stone
 Shining place on our land

The diamond of Persia

We never built columns on the blood and genocide
 The symbol of freedom without lashing the masonry

Not to instead of lashing people for masonry
 Not for build the columns on the blood and genocide

There is no fire to destroy your stone
 Shining palace on our land

The diamond of Persia

Mordab

Room No. X (2011)

1. Mirage

[Instrumental]

2. Room No. X

Room number x place of judgment

For my friends in evil purge

Day after day increase of hatred
Throwing out like a dog

Better for them to confess their shits

Like the pigs enjoin their corpse
My friends will gain, ominous fates

Room number x place of remorse

Room number x revival house

For my friends who are unaware
Disaster days they can't believe

They're insane, I'm disappeared

3. Open Your Eyes, Then Close Em'

When break in your emptiness
When you wanna fight with uselessness
Just open your eyes, listen to me
Spit the rules, spread the hate

When can't fix this craziness
When you sink world's turbulence
Just open your eyes, listen to me
Disturb the law, gain happiness

Look at the world, everywhere is dusky

No human, but full of monkey
No reasoning, no love, no affinity

Conscience ending, fatality

You drown in shit, all of us in shit
Children slaughter, rampancy of hate
You're desperate, I'm desperate
Just open your eyes, accept the fate

Beside the wall, someone is dead

Inside the room a boy is jerked
In the garden a girl is rammed

Stabs her eyes, till be shed

Bath of blood, houses on fire
 Apocalypse in road, end of desire
 So, just open your eyes, listen to me
 Spit the rules, jump in fire

Ignore my word, back to your mind
 You'll understand that I'm right
 Just open your eyes, listen to me
 Spit the rules, my friend of fright

4. Rebel's Cry

Rebel's Cry is started
 For mother and father
 For faded childhood
 Now his lover is dead
 Friends are gone before
 Liberty is not anymore
 Angel's prayer, no result
 Rebek is shutting for faults

Deny me, I'm suffer
 Punish me, I'm pagan
 But hold me in your hand

Virtual world brings down
 Not return to fountain
 Light dreams as dreams
 Become change to nightmares
 He is right, souls are tainted
 Reconstructs sources
 Rebel is crying for gone years
 That time he had mercies

Rebel is yelling for sister
 His wounded poor sister
 Who is down for a night
 She had to say yes

I'm sorry about time
 Everything may crime
 Touch her skin, you will feel
 She is warm, he pissed off

5. Suicide and Redemption

Sometimes we wanna look inside
 Sometimes we wanna lose our pride

When misery overcomes
 No war, no choice, but to die
 Now, I'm watching my bloody vein

It reminds me vermilion
 My dropping blood on the bed
 Searching redemption in vain

Always we wanna start
 Sometimes we wanna be lost
 Riot in my mind, like scar
 I see the pain my side

I relieve my wounds with pain
 Plugged in gore, tide with chain
 Sleeping to die, strain at ceiling

Such a pretty sense I'm dying

Now I'm

HERE AFTER I RETURN

6. Cursed Palace

I don't know where can I start
 From the pain or my blinded sight
 Bullet and knife in heads n' hearts
 Destruction which takes me apart
 I don't know who are you, a killer?
 Or a damn ache distributor
 Such a paralyzed poor chancellor
 I've been trapped, I'm a failer

Disaster, hatred ... welcome to death
 Slaughter, torture ... welcome to hate
 Scourge, darkness ... welcome to rape
 Shotgun, rifle.... welcome to hell

Loneliness is gripping my neck
 Morning breeze take me to deck
 Can't fix me I'm despaired

Look around, everybody is sick
 Massacre cycle is recycling
 Humble killers, end of feeling
 I'm dazzled to this chaos
 To this fuckin' cursed palace
 WELCOME TO DEATH
 WELCOME TO HATE
 WELCOME TO RAPE
 WELCOME TO HELL

7. The More I...

The more I think about universe
 More I sink in depression
 The more I look at root of world

No more getting passion
 Nonsense eyes staring at sky
 Empty words fills brains n' hearts

Alone n' sad man's ecstasy
 Inside the hell will die
 The more I have search in myself
 More I gain nihilism
 The more I see other islands
 More I find imperialism

Vacant promise spread in air
 Pride n' prejudice are fading
 Fuck this world where we're living
 Fuck it totally

Believe in me I'm not bullshit mind
 Trust me not be loser
 If you want to hold dignity
 Come to me, come closer
 PRIDE WILL DIE
 PRIDE WILL DIE
 PRIDE WILL DIE

THE MORE I.....

8. War

From first day until the end
 War has spoken about death

Innocent hearts, such roses
 Are overturned in the river
 Virtuous spirits in way of home
 Turns in blood they see their doom
 Criminal minds are so glad
 To confuse social rules

Stop the war
 Stop the war
 Oh you have to hide
 Let them die

LOOK at her eyes, you can see
 Fear of the noise, vagrancy
 What is her sin? She must be

In battlefield, conspiracy

Brutal countries, as demons
 Have eaten lands, no remorse
 Millionaires rule in earth
 You have my words, you're like horse

STOP THE WAR
 STOP THE WAR
 OH YOU HAVE TO HIDE
 LET THEM DIE

9. Cold Infection

You are sacrificed, in her arms, no way
 You are hypnotized, with her eyes, no way
 Cold infection inside you is crawling
 Black cycle is infanticide it's better

I wanna be free of my cells, no way
 It was a mistake, creators, no way
 Straight to death, your present no sense
 Cheers to heaven, good life, its better

I'm damaged, you can't stop me
 I'm gonna die, you can shoot me
 I'm so tired
 Don't you worry about me, no way
 Scape the words of their eyes no way
 Cold infection inside me, is crawling
 Don't you worry, about me, I'M YOU....

10. 3000 Years

We claimed for more 3000 years
 We have to reign on this shit earth
 Nobody tells us stop your bullshits
 Fuck history, fuck all these years

We're addicted to make up faces
 We're intervening to all world's cases
 Nobody tells us stop your acts
 Fuck history, fuck all these years

3000 years, I hate
 3000 years, I fuck it

We've been denied all of these years
 Nobody cares about us these years
 I remember no pure memory
 Shame on this world, shame on these days
 My beauty left me alone
 She told me I'm stupid clown

For no reason I've been punishing
 Don't write my name on my stone

3000 years, I HATE IT
 3000 years, I FUCK IT

11. Empty Room

[Instrumental]

Mordab

Darker Than Grave (2008)

1. Ocean of Loneliness

Like a fire in my soul
 Guts me like a black hole
 Ferocity and conviction
 I will be crushed like a toad
 "Man rooham ya ghobaaar"?
 My ashes in the wind so far
 Vortex of loneliness

This world, in me, in war

2. Darker Than Grave

My... life was a catastrophe
 Scorned... to face the world's strophe
 Succumbed... from the moment of birth to grave
 Chosen... from the ominous life's wave
 Affliction... from the zygotes of amour
 Elusive... from this world-made whores
 Buried... my body's scrapes... every day
 I don't know why the other people do not come to pay

Asphyxiation
 Emasculation
 Eradication
 Molestation

"Man... ye parandam, ye... boofe koor"
 "Leh shode too in... ger... daabe zoor"
 "Harchi khoob kardam... bad deedam man"
 From the infected sperms of human
 This world, does not worth... than a shit
 "Gozaran omre maast... mese jet"
 Buried my soul but I...
 Don't know why the other people do not come to
 Don't know why the other people do not come to
 Never ever never wanna pay

Desolation
 Degeneration
 Tribulation
 Flagellation
 Indoctrination
 Liquidation
 Mutilation
 Demolition

Pain... collections... I... have borne... in this dark obscene asylum of earth
 My only anxiety and freeze is my altered state in no one's land of death

Life... attrition in my brain... exacerbates my pain... vain... insane
 Life... attrition in my brain... exacerbates my pain... vain... insane
 Life... attrition in my brain... exacerbates my pain... vain... insane
 Life... attrition in my brain... exacerbates my pain... vain... insane

3. Psychotic Depression

From deep inside of my broken heart
 I move these words... like a shade and light
 I'm sure i will find you at last
 Far above... the green hill from the past

I lived alone... all four seasons
 Loving me was... only reason
 You'll kiss my soul... will be one, together
 Then we'll kiss the earth... will be none, together

I lived alone... all four seasons
 Loving me was... only reason
 You'll kiss my soul... will be one, together
 Then we'll kiss the earth... will be none, together

4. World of Vacuum

All this world... with all its worth
 From east to west... from south to north
 With all its seas... uncounted trees
 Lands of marsh... kinfolks of free
 Eternal winds... and infernal sins
 Storm in deserts... for a thousand mins
 With space omission, in atom orbital
 Planet earth becomes a golf ball

Who you are, what you do, what you want, go around
 Tiny one, dusty bun, king of none, none of none... none
 Hate and love, sex and drugs, junky nuts, suicide
 Catatonic homicide, king of none, none of none... none
 World's atom, or vacuum, $e=mc^2$
 Digitally 010101... 1
 Solar system, quasars, supernovas, Milky Way
 Every day is getting closer to m31... 1

Who am I, what's inside, when I die, hateful life
 Headless shadows, furious space, eyeless face, human race... race
 Deep inside, suicide, nigritude, emptiness, soul of mess
 "Va in safeeh mardome mozheke koore bee hes... hes"
 "In manam, khasteam, basteam, kooram"
 "Bee taboot tu in keyhan zende be gooram... ram"
 World's atom, or vacuum, $e=mc^2$
 Digitally 010101... 1

Innocents, are six feet under

Cannibals, breed as thunder
 Inner bride, I used to live with
 Inner cry, deletion with leave

5. Frantic Dream of Earth

Now you're in the grave, in my embrace
 Seeping brain is out of your rotten face
 Where's your mania, chronic dysphoria
 Are sucked by soil, are sainted with my grace

You feel my waves, from my inner core
 Sounds of whispering, augment it more and more
 Epitome from within, deep from stricken heart
 Stank me with your sins, crimson me with your gore

Vicious homicide everywhere, vortex of wrath
 Oblivious to conscience and misleading human path

Why?!

Polluted my sky with my blood
 Enraged my rivers to flood
 Poisoned my jungles and seas
 Be sure will be frozen on your knees

Technology digs, your grave by your own (hands)
 If not my suicide, from the core up to the zone
 What the hell have you done? Just disgraced me to sun
 But no place to hide, and there is nowhere to run
 Now come through myself, I summon your essence
 And I will absorb you all, the last where to fence
 I will forgive you for sins, I will forgive you for lies
 (You) would come in my soul, so open your eyes

6. Ascension

[Instrumental]

5grs

Let's Crush (2011)

1. Let's Crush

It's like a hardware store
 But everything looks rusty and failed
 And people are the screws and bolts
 Who shouldn't grow
 Women under the black veils
 Become like ugly crows

A thin light flashes
 I can hear a murmur

If I sleep and you sleep
 The whole town would sleep
 If I wake and you wake
 The whole world will shake
 We are a harmed heap
 Let's crush the disease
 Let's crush the weep

We can throw the ironclad from our behavior
 And crush the violence and guile
 We can grow and fire the veil
 And live like a free bird
 Women could sing a song again

A thin light flashes
 I can hear a murmur

If I sleep and you sleep
 The whole town would sleep
 If I wake and you wake
 The whole world will shake
 We are a harmed heap
 Let's crush the disease
 We are a harmed heap
 Let's crush the weep

Some of the friends are lost
 Maybe they are dead
 Some of the Friends are battered
 Or raped inside prisons

If I sleep and you sleep
 The whole town would sleep
 If I wake and you wake
 The whole world will shake
 We are a harmed heap
 Let's crush the disease
 Let's crush the weep

Let's crush
Let's crush

2. The Last Time

It's a cold endless wet night
With the town full of grudges
I was walking inside pages
Of the book of revolution
When a call waked me up
Saying a friend was harmed

Green ribbon on my hand
Is the green thrill of freedom
Though spite is tightening my throat
Like a cold mountain of reasons

Is this the last time
That I can see him alive
Is this the last time
He tastes this pain

The hospital pictures a mare
When you see punished guys there
And the smell of ulcerous blood
That floats on demurrer air

Green ribbon on my hand
Is the green thrill of freedom
Though clots are tightening my throat
Like the cold mountain of reasons

Is this the last time
That I can see him alive
Is this the last time
That he tastes this pain
Is this the last time
That I can see him alive
Is this the last time
That he tastes this pain

The sky is bruised
And the shadows of thoughts
Have become black
Who would win the combat?

The green ribbon on my hand

Is the green thrill of freedom
 Though clots are tightening my throat
 Like the cold mountain of reasons

Is this the last time
 That I can see him alive
 Is this the last time
 That he tastes this pain

3. Winter's Knock

Whiteness covered the town
 Icy dreams floating by
 Cold feelings crashing now
 Snow is falling
 Fading sun leaves the ground

Winter knocks on
 Dying life
 Winter knocks on
 Empty talk
 I am shocked cause
 Winter knocks
 Winter knocks
 And winter knocks

Vocal flies through my soul
 Singer fills all my thoughts
 Sad angle freezes me
 Dried emotions
 Rising high and
 Open the door
 Open the door

Winter knocks on
 Dying life
 Winter knocks on
 Empty talk
 I am shocked cause
 Winter knocks
 Winter knocks
 And winter knocks

Winter knocks on
 Dying life
 Winter knocks on
 Empty talk

I am shocked cause
 Winter knocks
 Winter knocks
 And winter knocks
 Winter knocks on
 Dying life
 Winter knocks on
 Empty talk
 I am shocked cause
 Winter knocks
 Winter knocks
 And winter knocks

4. 5grs Chair

When the world respire faster
 Than my soul can keep the pace
 There are dreams that wait to hold me
 Hold me warmly in their embrace

When the street sounds are all muted
 And the only thing in the air
 Is the breeze of my cigar
 And the lilt of a metal song

Then I know that I am home
 Safe and warm
 In 5grs' chair

I am a tramp of a reign
 When I am Adam in their Eden
 But the king of my dominion
 When I'm there in 5grs' chair
 5grs' chair

When the world gets spinning faster
 While the pine boughs bend and sway
 Blue jay, Buzzard, cat and others
 Fill the yard and play their parts

5. He Drinks to Forget

Sneaking to the bed
 Drunk as always
 Shivering inside the head
 Digging a deep grave

It's how he ends the day
 As the nightmares come near
 He drinks to forget
 He's an alcoholic guy
 He drinks to forget
 The falsehood god
 He drinks to forget
 Nothing's left to love
 He drinks to forget
 He's an alcoholic guy

Covering with the smoke
 His sick mind chokes
 Flash backing, make his spirit old
 The river of the blood
 Flows through the store
 As the singer reaches, reaches out the door

He drinks to forget
 He's an alcoholic guy
 He drinks to forget
 The falsehood god
 He drinks to forget
 Nothing's left to love
 He drinks to forget
 He's an alcoholic guy

Creep and slip,
 Into the a new life
 Closing his eyes
 The guy is going to die

He drinks to forget
 He's an alcoholic guy
 He drinks to forget
 The falsehood god
 He drinks to forget
 Nothing's left to love
 He drinks to forget
 His an alcoholic guy
 He drinks to forget
 He's an alcoholic guy
 He drinks to forget
 The falsehood god
 He drinks to forget
 Nothing's left to love
 He drinks to forget
 He's an alcoholic guy

He drinks to forget
 He drinks to forget
 He drinks to forget
 He drinks to forget

6. Like a Silkworm

A full glass and an empty one
 Map of loneliness with a gun
 Hopeless words on a white paper
 Cartridges of the black old pencil
 Memorize of the cold days
 Nothing seems to be ok

All of them make me cry
 I should become a butterfly

Chorus:

Like a silkworm
 I hide inside cocoon
 Like a silkworm
 This is my doom
 Like a silkworm
 I hide inside cocoon
 Like a silkworm
 This is my doom

The sound of solitude guitar
 Harmonic sack, Dunhill cigar
 Like a wizard inside the smoke
 Mesmerizing stuffs as she pokes
 Her pokes dancing around
 Her magic covers the ground

All of them make me cry
 I should become a butterfly

Like a silkworm
 I hide inside cocoon
 Like a silkworm
 This is my doom
 Like a silkworm
 I hide inside cocoon
 Like a silkworm
 This is my doom

All of these make me cry
 I should become a butterfly

Like a silkworm
 I hide inside cocoon
 Like a silkworm
 This is my doom
 Like a silkworm
 I hide inside cocoon
 Like a silkworm
 This is my doom

7. Hide Yourself

Out on the streets
 Poor boys and girls
 Trying to find their own ways
 Wearing the veil of government
 Tired of all of the assignments
 Funky inner city suburb
 Mind the way they step off the curb
 Funky inner city suburb
 Mind the way they step off the curb

Doesn't matter if the sun is up
 Doesn't matter if the day is on
 Wherever you are
 Hide yourself with a guard
 Hide yourself with a guard
 Wherever you are

Out on the streets
 I feel a pain
 Poor boys and girls
 Wanna breathe again
 Urban fringe fake gate estate
 Discussing my friend's interest rate

Doesn't matter if the sun is up
 Doesn't matter if the day's gone
 Wherever you are
 Hide yourself with a guard
 Hide yourself with a guard
 Wherever you are

Doesn't matter if the sun is up
 Doesn't matter if the day's gone
 Where ever you are
 Hide yourself with a guard
 Hide yourself with a guard

Wherever you are

8. Leaving My Town

I keep my city's picture
 To be sure that
 I won't homesick
 I'll write my family letters
 As you know better
 I am not coming home anymore

Time paints the skyline down
 Is not yours and isn't mine
 I'm leaving my town
 All have seen the signs
 Have to fly high
 I'm leaving my town

The sun is shining but
 The light is lying cause
 Darkness is fighting
 Through the clouds
 I won't forget
 That cold Decembers
 Of my town
 When people died

Time paints the skyline down
 Is not yours and isn't mine
 I'm leaving my town
 You have seen the signs
 Have to fly high
 I'm leaving my town
 I'm leaving my town

Our life like illusion
 Of regrets
 Sadness and confusion
 All of the bad luck like a burden
 Has grown
 In heaviness they only sadden
 It's time
 It's time
 It's time

Time paints the skyline down
 Is not yours and isn't mine

I'm leaving my town
 You have seen the signs
 Have to fly high
 I'm leaving my town
 I'm leaving my town

9. Paint Us Green

Yesterday has gone away
 Has gone away, has gone away
 Has gone away
 Little memories are now awake
 As the steps of summertime
 Walk on grime

Years walked fast
 Revolution drove the past
 Years walked fast
 Revolution drove the past

Come and hug the waiting people
 Cause you're the one
 Paint us green
 Color happy face
 Of nights and days
 Cause you are the one
 Paint us green

Running out from the diary
 Cases that came and made us shrink
 Darkness and sadness that were
 Sync with stars
 Came and swim
 Came and stick

Years walked fast
 Revolution drove the past
 Years walked fast
 Revolution drove the past

Come and hug the waiting people
 Cause you're the one
 Paint us green
 Color happy face
 Of nights and days
 Cause you are the one
 Paint us green

Snow falls,
 Icy dreams and
 Memories like
 White doves
 Softly shaped with day light

Years walked fast
 Revolution drove the past
 Years walked fast
 Revolution drove the past

Come and hug the waiting people
 Cause you're the one
 Paint us green
 Color happy face
 Of nights and days
 Cause you are the one
 Paint us green
 Paint us green
 Paint us green
 Paint us green

10. It's Time to Change
 Father's land is full of cranks
 Thousand walkers at the street against
 Bruised and battered hate the reign
 Blowout rants

Step by step revolution gleams
 Sound of youngers rise and streams
 Memories of freedom flash to
 Vanished dream

Open your eyes
 Don't afraid from the guys
 Raise all the lies
 Under truth you're wise listen

Pistol shots have rung and killed
 The people's thrill
 It's time to change
 Government and corps could join
 Common ground
 It's time to change
 Brothers now it's time to change
 Brothers now it's time to change
 Years are gone

We girls have grown
 En your steer, you all the raven skates
 Time is up it's many years
 Leave this town

Open your eyes
 Don't afraid from the guys
 Raise all the lies
 Under truth you're wise listen

Pistol shots have rung and killed
 The people's thrill
 It's time to change
 Government and corps could join
 Common ground
 It's time to change
 Brothers now it's time to change
 Brothers now it's time to change

Spring knew
 Soon a day would come and dirty
 Lies threw
 Endless dreams will come true

Pistol shots have rung and killed
 The people's thrill
 It's time to change
 Government and corps could join
 Common ground
 It's time to change
 Brothers now it's time to change
 Brothers now it's time to change

Pistol shots have rung and killed
 The people's thrill
 It's time to change
 Government and corps could join
 Through common ground
 It's time to change
 Brothers now it's time to change
 Brothers now it's time to change

Death-fuse

Before the Story Ends (2012)

1. Dark Passenger Within

[Instrumental]

2. Times of Desperation

Fragile, his dreams are failed again
 Faced another failure, it's time to break the cycle
 Looking for a closure
 Desperation devours any sign of existence
 Vacancy at the corner of his eyes
 A neglected child
 Calling me again and again
 Calling me
 Lies at the bottom of desperation
 Laid beneath his broken heart
 Sinking like a helpless, he's deeper fallen, broken angel
 There's no turning back now
 Salvation in his sorrow
 Everything seems more clear to, clear to me now
 Hope is a sweet dream, broken by the weight of the world
 Anger is a child of desperation, claws its way to perfection
 Followed by deceit, brings us down to our knees
 Oh god
 He will never believe again
 Times of desperation
 These times of desperation
 Fragile, his dreams are failed again
 Faced another failure, it's time to break the cycle
 Vacancy, in his kingdom, nothingness reigns
 A neglected child, calling me again
 Lies at the bottom of desperation
 Laid beneath his broken heart
 Sinking like a helpless, he's deeper fallen, broken angel
 I've been counting out the days
 Hope you not afraid
 You gave me life
 I promise to never leave you
 Do you remember me?
 This whole time it was me,
 My own fear,
 My own nightmare
 I'm the dark passenger within
 Hope is a sweet dream, broken by the weight of the world
 Anger is a child of desperation, claws its way to perfection
 Followed by deceit, brings us down to our knees
 Oh god

3. Buried Beneath Years of Isolation

By your sight I've been awakened
Behind these eyes
Lies the story of my (restless heart)
Lived in sorrow
For so long I can't recall your warm embrace
This distance between us
Can't wash away all hope inside, hope inside
I'm fighting my own war now behold,
My story is unlike any you've been told
I shall pray, move and fight
Never felt grief, never felt sorrow
Suddenly patient has faded into lonely nights
Come take my hand come break this land
(Land of darkness, land of distance)
Haunted by this endless story
On this darkest night
Come take my hand
(Land of darkness, land of distance)
With you by my side
Every hour, every second of this fight
Feel the hope rising over my life
With you
Every second of this life
Filled with endless memories
My life, my life is turning to an end
All that I ever was is here
In this shining eyes, shining eyes
Take away my pain
Heal this broken heart
This wounded heart no longer
Can bear this circumstances
Feeling striving through my heart
Buried beneath years of isolation
Rain upon this endless misery
Take me out of darkness
Take away my pain
Suddenly patient has faded into lonely nights
Come break this land
(Land of darkness, land of distance)
Haunted by this endless story
On this darkest night
Come take my hand
With you by my side
Every hour, every second of this fight
Feel the hope rising over my life
With you

Every second of this life
 Filled with endless memories
 By your sight I've been awakened
 Behind these eyes

4. Awake the Fallen

It's time to awake the fallen
 World spinning around my head
 Nightmares, nightmares turning to reality
 Dark sky, dusk dismantled, dying sun, dying sun
 Is it the afterlife?
 The after life
 I searched my mind to find a shelter for my misery
 I've been left alone
 Looking around, no one's by my side
 All these years I've been chained, chained to my grave
 Time to dig out the grave
 These hollow bones will become, your worst nightmares
 Let me out
 Will become your worst
 Next time remind me to leave this frail world
 On my own feet all the time
 Taking for granted, I've been given empty promises
 Once I've put my trust in you, let me out of myself
 Out of my shell
 Once I've heard you, you'll be in the hours of darkness
 Once I've put my trust in you, let me out of this prison
 Let me out of this walls
 When the time comes I'll burst into flames, burst into flames
 Now you summoned the beast
 Nowhere to run, nowhere to hide
 I hate to bring you down
 For what must be a good weaken fishing
 Cry for help, tell me why
 Why did you perish me?
 Why?!
 Why did you take my life?
 Why?!
 This time I'm coming for your thrown
 A flaring light before me
 A passing blindness
 Blood streaming through my fist
 Sweat conceals my dread
 Once I've put my trust in you, let me out of myself
 Out of my shell
 Once I've heard you, you'll be in the hours of darkness

Once I've put my trust in you, let me out of this prison
 Let me out of this walls
 When the time comes I'll burst into flames, burst into flames
 For I was falling and now, and now I have fallen
 This is the end
 End of your deceitful world
 Don't hold back

5. Meaningless Frame

I'm standing here
 Eyes full of tears
 Heart full of hope
 Yearning for a breath to take
 Reminiscing all my life
 As the future knocks on my door
 So many brothers to bid farewell

So many memorable days
 To leave behind
 With every panorama, I traverse from
 Old scars starting to bleed

Right before my eyes
 Here comes the hemorrhage
 Can't take this any longer, not anymore
 Leaving this homeland is the hardest thing I've ever done
 Putting the brave face on,
 Cause it's no time to cry

I'm lost but the time,
 Time will come to march back home
 Home is calling
 Home is calling
 This heart is falling
 To home I'll return
 To take a breath that was once stolen

Pain, this meaningless frame
 Pain, this endless chain

I'll get rid of this meaningless frame
 I'm a weary soul drawn out of light
 I've been born to get to this point
 Fighting for a better life,
 Bleeding for another destiny
 Gives me the strength to carry on

So many memorable days to leave behind
 So many brothers to bid farewell
 With every panorama, I traverse from
 Old scars starting to bleed
 Bleed

This heart is falling
 To home I'll return
 To take a breath that was once stolen
 Home is calling
 This heart is falling

6. Frail Life

What have I done?
 Have I done, again I've done!
 Now I lost the way to turn back home
 I see them coming to bring me down
 Not now

I opened my eyes
 These memories are hard to forget
 How it feels to be lost
 In the middle of this relentless sea
 In waves all I seek is home
 Memories of another life
 Tearing this heart apart
 Are hunting me again

I'm the elder god, whispered in my ears
 I'm the elder god, I'm your savior
 Whispered in my ears, from this misery
 All hope is gone

Deep in the sea, deep in the sorrow
 All hope is gone, I fear nothing

Take my hand
 Tired of this, this rotten frail life
 Sinking I am sinking
 Breaking I am breaking
 All before me, all these memories
 Now I lost the way back
 What have I done?
 Have I done, again I've done!

Not now, not this way

Not now, not by myself, not by myself
Not now!

I opened my eyes
These memories are hard to forget
How it feels to be lost
In the middle of this relentless sea
Take this hopeless hands
Take me out of misery
Into the world of dead
Save Me!

7. Into the Light

[Instrumental]

8. Lacerated Soul

Born in blood
Sentiments are all gone
As he kills he remembers
Flashes coming through his mind
Have to put this puzzles together

A lone wolf in the middle of the night
A monster behind a mask
A body free of soul, he kills to save life
His last trend to humanity, his last alibi
Feelings striving to surface
This wound is too deep to recover
Could he find a remedy
A cure for his lacerated soul
A hope to return
Return the child that was once gone

The question still remains
Will he be human again?
Darkness is defined by light
There is a light somewhere, I can feel it
Somewhere along the way, I'm sure of it
Otherwise we should all pray to hell

He's feeling alive again
Sound of gasping feed upon his soul
It's the night of the hunter
Tools of slaughter calling him

Like a lullaby to child's ear
 It's the night, night of the hunter
 The hunter

Welcome to my show
 You can choose the ending
 Sadly it ends the same anyways
 You're my trophy from this cruel world
 I have the perfect place for you
 Don't worry you won't be alone
 Victims will be waiting for you
 Take a look around
 I'm gonna walk you through this
 The darkness passing on
 Passing the gates of hell

He's feeling alive again
 Sound of gasping feed upon his soul
 It's the night of the hunter
 Tools of slaughter calling him
 Like a lullaby to child's ear
 It's the night, night of the hunter
 The hunter

9. Darkened Hearts

Thus there's no escape
 I lost my love, my will to live
 My second chance to reign over me
 March of madness in my head
 Moving back and force
 Spinning round and round
 Nothing seems right
 Nothing seems wrong

Why don't I feel paranoid
 Stories in my head are in constant motion
 One after another
 Dying soul to broken heart all around us
 No ones to say a word

Feelings of indifference, crushed our bravery
 Sometimes the best part is falling
 Falling into the sea of nothingness

We need the rain to wash away our faults
 (Our vicious minds)

To bring us back
 Our stolen innocence
 We beg the wind to take away our sins
 (Our vicious minds)
 To bring us back
 Our stolen innocence
 (Our blackened hearts)

Forsaken hearts
 Memories of another life gives me the strength to carry on
 Unbroken thoughts
 Gives me the strength to return
 Return to the place
 To the place where I left you behind
 Sometimes the best part is falling
 Falling into the sea of nothingness

We need the rain to wash away our faults
 (Our vicious minds)
 To bring us back
 Our stolen innocence
 We beg the wind to take away our sins
 (Our vicious minds)
 To bring us back
 Our stolen innocence
 (Our blackened hearts)

10. Before the Story Ends

Before the story ends
 Before this page starts to turn
 We need to leave our mark, leave our mark
 On this world
 It all started with the ride
 Ride of destiny
 We put our faith in tomorrow

With only a sparkle in sight
 Could it be?
 All those winding roads behind us
 (Moments of doubt)
 While eyes of failure gazing at us
 (Waiting for us to fall)
 We stayed true to our dreams
 To fly high, fly high
 This brotherhood shall never die

And now we stand here
With so much upon us
We long to search for more
Knowing there is more to reach
But the fire inside keeps us warm

On this ending chapter
There's still more to tell
But it's time for farewell
Even though you won't be
Won't be hearing from us
Our story shall go on
Our trails on the sands
That's what we leave behind

Lesson learnt in time was to cherish
Each moment as your last
Go for your dreams no matter how far

This story ends with us
The end
This story ends with us
This is the end

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