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Popular Music and Memory Construction in Iranian Diasporic Contexts *

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> Memory is inventive. Memory is a performance. Memory invites itself, and is hard to turn away … Memories are what make it hard for you to sleep. Memories procreate. And the uninvited memories always seem to the point.[1]
>
> *Susan Sontag*

This article examines links between popular music and the construction of cultural memory in selected Iranian diasporic contexts. It draws on Philip V. Bohlman's argument that music 'functions powerfully to facilitate both remembering and forgetting … As a means of negotiating between past and present, then, music allows us both to enter into history and to exit from it, or, more aptly, in Eva Hoffman's ironic turn of phrase, to "exit into history".'[2] In this article I suggest that popular music, in particular, serves as an effective indicator of the ways diasporic communities construct and engage with history, as well as a powerful force in the negotiation of collective memory and movements 'into' and 'out of' history. Music, memory, history and identity emerge here as fluid and mobile, in constant flux as they bear diverse and unpredictable traces of their antecedents.

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[1] Susan Sontag, *Where the Stress Falls* (London: Random House, 2002) 28.

[2] Philip V. Bohlman, 'The Remembrance of Things Past: Music, Race, and the End of History in Modern Europe,' *Music and the Racial Imagination*, ed. Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 646–47. Bohlman cites Hoffman, *Exit into History: A Journey through the New Eastern Europe* (New York: Viking, 1993).

The article is based on research conducted between 2004 and 2011, which may be broadly described as ethnomusicological. Bruno Nettl defines ethnomusicology as 'the study of the world's musical cultures from a comparative perspective, and the anthropological study of music,' while Stephen Blum suggests that ethnomusicologists 'are concerned with musical interpretations of history and with historical interpretations of music and musical life.'[3] The findings presented here are based on intensive study of popular musical cultures and subcultures in Iran and among communities and individuals identifying as Iranian American or Iranian Australian. My comparative perspective takes into account the fluid and overlapping nature of these musical cultures, as today's musicians and their audiences migrate, tour internationally and communicate online. The musical cultures of Iran and its diaspora represent a global network, but one that is diverse and conditioned by local contexts. My anthropological approach entailed extensive periods of fieldwork in Iran and Australia. I conducted shorter periods of fieldwork in North America, mostly in Los Angeles.

Ethnomusicological fieldwork methods included spending time with communities and individuals, becoming familiar with the patterns of their lives, observing, recording and analysing music in its sociocultural contexts. As well as these, I attended a diverse range of concerts, weddings, parties and religious gatherings, invited research participants to complete questionnaires and conducted interviews in person and by email and *Facebook*. Because a great deal of musical activity and related communication takes place online, I also conducted research on the internet. This was especially useful for the North American context, with which I am less directly familiar than the Iranian and Australian contexts. Several research participants whom I first met in Iran have since moved into the diaspora, especially to North America and Australia. I have been able to follow shifts in these migrants' modes of remembrance and attitudes towards Iranian history and identity, as well as their musical preferences. While participants in my research have been keen to share their views, some prefer not to be quoted directly. Therefore, much of the information I have drawn from participants is presented in this article in a generalised and anonymous form. Because my fieldwork in Iran and Australia has been more intensive than that in North America, it is possible that the subjective views of history and diasporic experience represented here are slightly more illustrative of the former contexts.

The nature of diasporic cultures as extensive and diverse as Iran's cannot be easily generalised. Thus, the information presented here is limited and illustrative, rather than representative. Because of the limits of my research and for reasons of space, I have not included examples from the large and significant Iranian diasporic communities in Europe, South East Asia and in Iran's neighbours, such as the United Arab Emirates and Turkey. Rather, I focus on examples of popular music in California, New York, Toronto, Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. North America, especially Los Angeles, which is home to the world's largest Iranian diasporic community, has been seen as a centre for Iranian popular culture since the 1979 revolution. There has been considerable study of Iranian cultural life in the United States. By contrast, Iranian diasporic communities in Australia are relatively small and have established

[3] Bruno Nettl, *Encounters in Ethnomusicology: a Memoir* (Warren: Harmonie Park Press, 2002) 3; Stephen Blum, 'Prologue: Ethnomusicologists and Modern Music History,' *Ethnomusicology and Modern Music History*, ed. Stephen Blum, Philip V. Bohlman and Daniel M. Neuman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991) 1.

themselves more recently. There are few studies of the cultural lives of these communities. My study includes diverse musical genres, described respectively by the musicians themselves or their audiences as dance pop, folk rock, 'comedy rock and blues,' 'Persian rock,' 'folk punk,' 'psychedelic dance punk,' 'indie acoustic rock,' 'world music,' sung poetry and spoken word, rap and 'acoustic spiritual indie folk.' My research participants—musicians and their audiences—include members of the Islamic, Baha'i, Christian, Zoroastrian and Jewish faiths, who observe religious practices to varying degrees, as well as people without religious affiliation. They include men and women across four generations, migrants, students, refugees and asylum seekers. Their times of emigration from Iran range from before the 1979 revolution to 2011. The diverse views articulated by these participants support my argument that popular music plays significant roles in the ways memories are constructed in diasporic contexts and that these roles vary according to local conditions, which are always in flux. Music is both a useful model for thinking about diasporic memory and a productive indicator of shifts in that memory. While art music also plays significant roles in the Iranian diaspora, popular music is more widespread and arguably more dynamic, thus relating more closely to the fluctuations of diasporic affiliation and the negotiation of cultural memory.

Walter Benjamin ascribes a primary role to music in evoking his memory of a lake where he skated as a child:

> All these pictures I have preserved. But none would bring back New Lake and a few hours of my childhood so vividly as to hear once more the bars of music to which my feet, heavy with their skates after a lone excursion across the bustling ice, touched the familiar planks and stumbled past the chocolate-dispensing machines, and past the more splendid one with a hen laying candy-filled eggs, through the doorway behind which glowed the anthracite stove, to the bench where you now savored for a while the weight of the metal blades strapped to your feet, which did not yet reach the ground, before resolving to unbuckle them.[4]

In its close relation to motion, music leads mind and body to move in remembrance, as it calls up strings of memories or as it recalls a forgotten situation or stance. Music is a means of activating memory, with its links to many times and places, its transportability and repeatability, its capacity for shared ownership and improvisation. As it links movements, times and places, music also enacts and embodies memory. Like memory, music may seek to transform perceived chaos into order or perceived order into chaos. Music is conditioned by the times and circumstances of its composition, as well as by the sites of its subsequent performances. While the meanings around pieces of music shift along with their changing contexts, they retain links to remembered and forgotten moments of composition and improvisation.

Memory—along with its counterpart, forgetting—is the principal form of luggage carried by migrants, especially those who emigrate permanently. Memory is necessarily unstable, as it interacts with its changing temporal and spatial environments and, thus, with various forms of counter-memory. Each memory articulation demands the neglect of some contextual information, as well as interaction with other remembered material. Memories jostle each other for airspace, as one act of remembrance demands another of forgetting. However, forgetting

[4] Walter Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle,' *Selected Writings*, *Volume 2, 1927–1934*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, et al., ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999) 610–11.

is not erasure, just as silence is not absence of sound, but rather a resonating space, teeming with the ineffable. Music can serve as a means of escaping or making sense of silences and detachments. In his essay on Franz Kafka, for example, Benjamin suggests that 'music and singing are an expression or at least a token of escape, a token of hope.'[5] He goes on to cite Kafka's 'Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk,' in which the 'staccato' whistling of Josephine the mouse is described: 'Something of our poor, brief childhood is in it, something of lost happiness which can never be found again, but also something of active present-day life, of its small gaieties, unaccountable and yet real and unquenchable.'[6] When neither the past nor the present can be satisfactorily accounted for with available language, music offers a medium of imagined continuity, even in the face of real discontinuity.

History and cultural memory may be seen as forms of territory that are repeatedly exited, entered and disputed. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari metaphorically link the ritornello or refrain to the crossing of territorial thresholds or deterritorialisation. In Deleuze and Guattari's terms, the refrain reassures the occupier of territory, consolidates the act of territorialisation and alters the borders between territories. Hamid Naficy also links notions of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation with the performance of identity. In the context of what he calls 'accented cinema,' accented films and their exilic subjects:

> cross many borders and engage in many deterritorialising and reterritorialising journeys, which take several forms, including home-seeking journeys, journeys of homelessness, and homecoming journeys. However these journeys are not just physical and territorial but are also deeply psychological and philosophical. Among the most important are journeys of identity, in the course of which old identities are sometimes shed and new ones refashioned. In the best of the accented films, identity is not a fixed essence but a process of becoming, even a performance of identity.[7]

Like accented films, the diverse 'accented' songs of the Iranian diaspora—and those who perform, listen or dance to them—engage in endless journeys of identity. In the words of Deleuze and Guattari, they orient themselves (and as some observers suggest, some in the Iranian diaspora may also 'self-Orientalise'), they marshal forces and venture from home 'on the thread of a tune.'[8]

Any cultural context and its collective memory may be understood as 'a congeries of inner tensions,' as Stephen Blum suggests, citing Perry Miller.[9] Blum argues that musical practice can illuminate the elements of such a congeries:

> Inasmuch as every musician is 'an agent who participates in more than one social group' (Blum 1975: 208-9) and is thus 'strangely composite' (Turino 1990: 401, citing Gramsci), musical performance enables participants to discover and renew the

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[5] Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka,' *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana Press, 1992) 114.

[6] Franz Kafka, 'Josephine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk,' quoted in Benjamin, 'Franz Kafka,' 114–15.

[7] Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001) 6.

[8] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Continuum, 1988) 311.

[9] Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956) 1, quoted in Stephen Blum, 'Conclusion: Music in an Age of Cultural Confrontation,' *Music-cultures in Contact: Convergences and Collisions*, ed. Margaret J. Kartomi and Stephen Blum (Sydney: Currency Press, 1994) 252.

> connections between multiple aspects of experience. The identities of musicians are far more complex, and more flexible, than one might suppose from most non-musical representations of 'ethnicity,' 'nation,' 'race' and 'culture.'[10]

The diverse sounds reproduced by musicians, deriving from sites across various temporal and spatial distances, demonstrate the complexity and flexibility of identity with immediacy and brevity. Blum goes on to suggest that every culture is a 'site of encounters,' and that the 'transactions through which individuals and groups reproduce cultural knowledge' should be examined.[11] Music plays a crucial role in the process of encounter and the reproduction of cultural knowledge, as Bohlman argues:

> The historiography of music and culture begins with the moment of encounter. Intensifying encounter is the awareness of difference, and that awareness engenders wonder and awe, which, however, lie precariously close to fear and danger. Music marks the moment of encounter, for it stands out as the form of communication that is at once most familiar and most incomprehensible. Even more than language, music is the key to understanding and to the power that will turn initial encounter into prolonged dominance.[12]

The encounters experienced by emigrants from Iran and their descendants are as complex and diverse as the individuals concerned and their range of memories and personal silences. However, as Bohlman points out, they share 'the awareness of difference' and its balance of wonder and fear. The music that diasporic subjects choose to hear and perform, and the ways that music is heard and performed, both condition and reflect the power relations of diasporic contexts. Indeed, as Simon Frith suggests, music 'articulates in itself an understanding of both group relations and individuality.'[13] The examples of Iranian diasporic music considered in this article are just a few of the many forms evolving in this extensive and diverse diaspora, but they articulate something of the nature of both group relations and individuality among those who remember and reimagine Iran.

To appreciate the conditions that have shaped the Iranian diasporic context in which today's music is played and circulated, it is useful to consider briefly the history of Iran in living memory. The final dynasty in Iran's centuries of monarchy began in 1925, when Reza Khan declared himself Shah and founded the Pahlavi dynasty. Reza Shah promoted a form of secular nationalism that entailed enforced development programs, trade relations with Germany and harsh restrictions on religious and traditional practices. This was interrupted by World War II and the 1941 occupation by British and Soviet forces. The United Kingdom and Russia had a long prior history of competitive economic and military activity in Iran. The Allies replaced Reza Shah with his young son, Mohammad Reza, in 1941. Under Mohammad Reza Shah's rule, the United States came to replace Britain and the USSR as the dominant foreign power in Iran. His reign was interrupted in 1953, when he fled Iran briefly, in the face

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[10] Blum, 'Conclusion,' 252, citing Thomas Turino, 'Structure, Context, and Strategy in Musical Ethnography,' *Ethnomusicology* 34.3 (Fall 1990).

[11] Blum, 'Conclusion,' 255.

[12] Bohlman, 'Music and Culture: Historiographies of Disjuncture,' *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Martin Clayton, Trevor Herbert and Richard Middleton (New York/London: Routledge, 2003) 46–7.

[13] Simon Frith, 'Music and Identity,' *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. S. Hall and P. du Gay (London: Sage, 1996) 111.

of popular discontent and support for the elected Prime Minister Mossadeq's program of oil nationalisation. However, in a coup supported by the United States and Britain, in August 1953, Mossadeq was removed from power and the Shah was reinstated. The sense of betrayal and resentment of the roles of the United States and Britain was widespread in Iran's population. From this time, with the support of the United States, Mohammad Reza Shah increased his personal power and his regime became dictatorial, enforcing his version of Westernisation with surveillance and violence. This regime was finally overthrown in 1979 by a popular movement, led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and supported by a range of anti-imperialist groups. The overthrow came to be claimed as an Islamic Revolution and resulted in the foundation of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mehdi Semati usefully divides the history of postrevolutionary Iran into four periods: the Iran-Iraq war from 1979 to 1988, the reconstruction from 1989 to 1997, the reform period from 1997 to 2005 and, finally, the current post-reform era that has followed the 2005 election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as Iranian president.[14] The political situation in each of these periods has directly affected musical practices in Iran and the diaspora. During the war, partly due to the newly dominant form of Islamic sensibility and partly because of the high casualty rate at the front and widespread grief at the loss and physical and mental impairment of many men and boys, it was generally considered unseemly to perform or listen to popular music in Iran and it was illegal to produce it commercially. This did not mean that popular music disappeared in Iran, as some continued to listen to it in private, but it was no longer ubiquitous, as it had been in the 1970s. It was during the war that most popular musicians emigrated, primarily to Los Angeles, where, although new music was produced, the dominant product remained the Persian-language love song, set to a 6/8 rhythm.

Over the period of reconstruction, from 1989 to 1997, Iran's mood and that of the diaspora lifted gradually. In Iran, the devastating effects of the war and revolution were ongoing, disillusionment and loss of hope were widespread and the Islamic government's ban on pop music remained in force. Los Angeles consolidated its position as the Persian pop capital. As some musicians and other Iranian migrants established themselves financially and achieved levels of social success, the *losanjelesi* pop industry thrived. The music reached Iran on the black market and, in private, it remained the dominant celebratory musical form there too. However, differences between people who stayed in Iran and those who left increased with time. For some who stayed, relations with those in the diaspora were marked by feelings of pride in their resilience through the war years or resentment of the emigrants' fortunes and perceived ignorance of the hardship that had been endured in Iran. Among those who left, relations were marked by feelings of guilt, or pride in their achievements, or a sense of responsibility to contribute to the welfare of those left behind. While *losanjelesi* pop changed very little superficially, it bears some subtle marks of such conflicting emotions and desires.

With the 1997 election of Hojatoleslam Mohammad Khatami as president of Iran, some aspects of cultural life changed and a period of reform began. Albeit through a laborious bureaucratic process and within a government-controlled framework, it became possible

[14] Mehdi Semati, 'Introduction,' *Media, Culture and Society in Iran: Living with Globalization and the Islamic State*, ed. Mehdi Semati (London/New York: Routledge, 2008) 4–5. For an insightful account of this period from a musical perspective, see Ramin Sadighi and Sohrab Mahdavi, 'The Song does not Remain the Same,' *Arts & Opinion* 8.5 (2009), www.artsandopinion.com, accessed 4 August 2010.

for some popular music to be legally and commercially produced in Iran. New technologies and affluence, in sections of Iran and the diaspora, enabled closer communication and contact between those who stayed in Iran and those who had left. These two categories grew more fluid, as it became easier and safer for some Iranians to move between Iran and their diasporic homes. In the diaspora, many saw or felt their positions in relation to contemporary Iran shift gradually from the irrevocability of 'exile' to the ostensibly more connected notion of 'diaspora,' or even the inclusiveness of 'transnationalism.' Within Iran, Laudan Nooshin suggests that, along with a thaw in international relations, 'the diaspora network, the emergence of a cosmopolitan youth culture, and … the Internet, have all served to link Iranian youth into a transnational cultural network.'[15] Thus, new music in Iran is conditioned by music around the world. As elsewhere, Iran's popular culture is shaped by globalisation. However, the effects of globalisation there have characteristics unique to Iran's postrevolutionary history. Many of today's young musicians grew up during the war years, with limited access to global popular culture. The popular music to which some were more likely to have had access was found in their parents' record collections from the 1960s and 1970s. Pink Floyd and Bob Dylan, among many others, are often cited as childhood influences by rock musicians now in their twenties, musicians who began to write and perform their own music in Iran's reform period.

How did the new music emerging from Iran affect Iranian pop in the diaspora? On a commercial level, it could be argued that it had little effect. *Losanjelesi* pop remained dominant, the nostalgic favourite, and the required form at every Iranian wedding, even weddings of second-generation Iranian Americans or Australians to non-Iranian spouses.[16] However, it could be argued that the status of different musical forms shifted slightly. *Losanjelesi* pop may be the most widespread form of music in the Iranian diaspora, but it has paradoxically never enjoyed a high status, as even many of the musicians themselves engage in self-mockery.[17] Although they regularly dance with apparent pleasure to this music at community events, some people in Iran and the diaspora denounce it as 'shallow,' 'formulaic,' 'indulgent,' 'superficial,' 'meaningless' or 'boring.'[18] By contrast, much of the new music emerging from Iran was seen as 'meaningful,' articulating something of the complex situation in Iran, nuanced and even 'exotic,' reflecting the layers and levels of detachment from Iran felt by some in the diaspora.[19] Respect for those who produced music under the harsh conditions of the Islamic Republic, rather than in the perceived luxury-laden context of Los Angeles, marked these attitudes. A profound respect for the work of the battler (in Australian terms), the hard worker who persists against all odds, who defies unjust laws and uses his or her

[15] Laudan Nooshin, 'The Language of Rock: Iranian Youth, Popular Music, and National Identity,' *Media, Culture and Society in Iran*, ed. Mehdi Semati, 85.

[16] In my interviews with Iranian Australians who have married non-Iranians, all have told of the impossibility of excluding *losanjelesi* pop from their wedding receptions. Even those who initially attempted to do so tell how they eventually gave in to the pressures of family expectations and the notion that a marriage is not quite valid if the guests, especially the Iranian-born parents, have not danced to a version of the traditional wedding song, *Mobarak Bad*, usually played today in a *losanjelesi* pop form.

[17] Personal communication, Farzaneh Hemmasi, Homayoun Khosravi and others.

[18] Personal communication from research participants in Los Angeles (2010), Tehran (2003–10), and Melbourne (2006–11).

[19] Personal communication from research participants in Los Angeles (2010), Tehran (2006–10) and Melbourne (2011).

limited power for good, is present in many aspects of Iranian culture, including the dominant Shi'a Islamic faith, revolutionary thought and historiography, classical Persian poetry and the values promoted in popular Iranian theatre and cinema. Most young Iranian musicians would resist the heroic implications of their association with these traditions, claiming to do no more than indulge their musical desires, but their reception in the diaspora has been marked by such attitudes. This is especially evident in responses in Western media to bands that have recently emerged from Iran and begun to tour internationally. The use of the word 'underground' has been much debated in recent years, as several musicians have rejected the term's connotations.

Musicians in Iran today negotiate their possibilities for performance and dissemination of their work in a newly complex environment that Semati calls the post-reform era. Since the 2005 presidential election, and especially since the 2009 election and its violent aftermath, the mood has changed again. It is more difficult to gain official authorisation for the performance and recording of popular music, such that few musicians bother applying. Disillusionment has returned; new forms of anger and fear are tempered by new levels of defiance and even a post-reform-era humour, which mocks authority figures in ways not seen before, across broader sections of the Iranian population. These conditions are reflected in popular music produced in Iran, which regularly reaches the diaspora, primarily through the internet and secondarily through emigration. Generally speaking, rock and pop musicians have tended to emerge from more affluent contexts and have more opportunities to leave Iran. Rappers and some metal musicians have emerged from less privileged sections of Iranian society and fewer of them have emigrated. However, their music travels and affects that of fellow rappers and others in the diaspora. Of course, there are many exceptions to these generalisations. While it is easier for those with wealth and connections outside Iran to emigrate, life inside Iran is also easier for those with wealth and connections than for those who have no means of evading the restrictions of the law, poverty and other pressures. Thus, not every rock and pop musician chooses to leave, even in this post-reform era. Electronic rock musician Maral, who has spent time outside Iran, but chose to return, explains: 'I used to think if I left Iran and went to live in some other country, I'd be really successful and I would find a way to do what I want to do. But I changed my mind. You know, I found that I'm always inspired by Iran.'[20] However, while Maral and others stay in Iran, producing music in their bedrooms or basements, they are much more widely known in the diaspora than in Iran itself. Transnational collaboration is also a real possibility, which is increasingly taken up by Iranian musicians today.

All the developments outlined above affect the nature of Iranian diasporic life and cultural production. With particular reference to Los Angeles, Hamid Naficy suggests that:

> the popular subculture that exiles produce within mainstream American culture provides a measure of authority and guidance for the exiles and their children. However, it also provides a means for the expression of resistive, subversive, and oppositional ideas. All told, exilic/ethnic pop subculture performs the dual and seemingly contradictory

[20] Maral Afsharian, quoted in Jason Rezaian, 'Electro-rocker Makes Waves in Homeland while Building Fan-base Abroad,' *Rolling Stone (Middle East)*, 5 Dec. 2010, www.rollingstoneme.com/index. php?option=com_content&view=article&id=130, accessed 1 July 2011.

> functions of helping the exiles to preserve a distinct cultural, ethnic, and local identity at the same time that it guides their transformation from ambivalent outsiders into productive citizens and consummate consumers.[21]

Losanjelesi popular culture has played the roles identified by Naficy, especially in the 1980s and 1990s. More recently, some have seen this popular subculture as hegemonic in itself. This perception has led to new 'resistive, subversive, and oppositional ideas,' directed against the dominance of *losanjelesi* pop music. For example, in 2007, Esfand Pourmand celebrated the 'death' of its perceived hegemony:

> It's been long coming and it's with great joy that we are seeing a decline in the popularity of the so called Persian/LA pop scene. And there is a direct correlation with the outpour of incredible material coming out of the Iran's Alternative scene … We've seen the popularity of our alternative artists increase with the output of quality and meaningful material, now this could take shape in Farsi, English, rock, folk, or another form. What is important is that we are starting to see the power of our youth and what we are capable of. We have taken the first step, we are starting to find our voice and have captured the attention of our youth away from all the silly and trivial forms of music known as the Persian/LA pop scene.[22]

Pourmand refers primarily to the alternative scene inside Iran, but since 2007 many of the alternative musicians concerned have emigrated and are now active in North America. While such subversion, diversification and transnational collaboration are celebrated, many old conflicts and inequalities remain in Iranian diasporic cultural life. Of course, this is true of any transnational context. With reference to analyses of Asian American diasporic life more generally, Su Zheng notes that:

> The discovery of transnationalism in diasporic cultural identity has brought a sense of emancipation from the normalising processes of immigration, a temporary break from exclusive domestic racial politics and minority discourse, and an intellectual justification for the state of exile and homelessness. But at the same time, it has also produced an 'overly celebratory brand of contemporary Western transnational theory.'[23]

Indeed, everyday power relations between and within Iranian diasporic cultures and communities continue to bear the traces of Iran's remembered and forgotten histories. These traces are not invariably seen as worthy of celebration and, arguably, are most evident in popular music.

The most popular forms of Iranian music represent effective media for nostalgia and the modes of forgetting that nostalgia demands; occasionally they can also articulate more extreme historical reconstructions. For example, Neda Maghbouleh observes how, drawing largely on their reception of their Iranian-born parents' memories, some young Californians use the music of Iran's all-time most successful pop star, Googoosh, to reimagine pre-revolutionary Iran as

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[21] Hamid Naficy, 'Identity Politics and Iranian Exile Music Videos,' *Music, Popular Culture, Identities*, ed. Richard Young (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi, 2002) 250.

[22] Esfand Pourmand, 'The Iranian Alternative Scene has Killed the Persian/LA Pop star,' *Zir Zamin Iranian Alternative Music Magazine*, www.zirzamin.se/index.html, accessed 30 Sep. 2007.

[23] Su Zheng, *Claiming Diaspora: Music, Transnationalism, and Cultural Politics in Asian/Chinese America* (New York: OUP, 2010) 28. Zheng cites Karen Kelsky, 'Intimate Ideologies: Transnational Theory and Japan's "Yellow Cabs",' *Public Culture* 6 (1994): 465–78 at 466.

the epitome of sophistication and 'the good life' in ways of which the United States could only dream.[24] By contrast, most historians note the violence, corruption, state surveillance and gap between rich and poor that characterised the period of Googoosh's reign as queen of pop in Iran. On a different level, there are a few contemporary pop stars who directly or indirectly endorse forms of Iranian or 'Persian' nationalism, including a form that embraces what Reza Zia-Ebrahimi calls 'the "Aryan" discourse.'[25] Zia-Ebrahimi cites an unsubtle 2009 pop song, *Ariyayi nezhad* ('The Aryan race'), by California-based singers Shakila and Shahryar.[26]

There are various reasons for the choice of Los Angeles as preferred destination for Iranian pop musicians, before and after the 1979 revolution. Self-described fusion singer Mamak Khadem, who migrated as a teenager in 1977, comments that, along with California's weather and topography, television played a role.[27] In 1970s Iran, United States television programs were popular, especially 'Charlie's Angels,' 'The Six Million Dollar Man' and 'Columbo.'[28] It was known that these were shot in Los Angeles, a city which, in many minds, represented glamour, affluence and a relaxed, easygoing atmosphere. While European capitals may have been more appealing to some art musicians, Los Angeles appealed to those with a taste for flamboyance or social class mobility. Back in Tehran, popular music had represented a somewhat disreputable but effective means of moving from poverty to relative affluence, from the margins of society into minor forms of stardom. Tehran's music hall, music theatre and nightclub scenes, along with its popular film industry, had brought fame to singers from humble backgrounds, such as *kucheh-bazari* (literally 'of the alleyway and bazaar') singers Susan, originally from the province of Kurdistan, and Aghasi, originally from Iran's south coast.[29] While very popular within their scene in Tehran, Susan and Aghasi's form of music was held in contempt by some Iranians. However, along with a few of its performers, this music also migrated successfully to Los Angeles, finding a new home in nightclubs there. *Kucheh-bazari* music even gained a measure of respectability, as it represented, for some, traditional Iranian values as imagined by the homesick and nostalgic. Today in Los Angeles, recordings of *kucheh-bazari* hits continue to sell well in Iranian music shops. However, hierarchies of respectability for Iranian pop singers remain. Those who earned their living performing in supposedly seedy nightclubs when they arrived in the United States are still seen by some as socially inferior to those who performed

[24] Neda Maghbouleh, '"Inherited Nostalgia" among Second-generation Iranian Americans: A Case Study at a Southern California University,' *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 31.2 (2010): 199–218. For an analysis of Googoosh's success, see Gay Breyley, 'Hope, Fear and Dance Dance Dance: Popular Music in 1960s Iran,' *Musicology Australia* 32.2 (2010), 203–26.

[25] Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, 'Self-Orientalization and Dislocation: The Uses and Abuses of the "Aryan" Discourse in Iran,' *Iranian Studies* 44.4 (2011): 445–72. The discussion is beyond the scope of this article, but Zia-Ebrahimi provides a useful analysis of a discourse that has conditioned some Iranian attitudes to 'self' and 'other' over the past century.

[26] *Bia2 Music Video—Shakila and Shahryar*, *Ariay ee nejad*, www.bia2.com/video/Shakila-and-Shahryar/Ariay-ee-nejad, accessed 1 July 2011. As Zia-Ebrahimi notes, supporting his argument that the 'Aryan' discourse emerged in the context of Iran's twentieth-century relations with Europe, the lyrics to this pop song come from poems by Mostafa Sarkhosh, published in Tehran in 1964, not from Iran's tenth-century epic poet Ferdowsi, as claimed on the website.

[27] Kurt Anderson, 'Mamak Khadem gives a tour of Tehrangeles,' *Studio 360*, 13 Mar. 2009 (WNYC Podcast, accessed May 2010).

[28] Links between Iran and Los Angeles date from long before 1979. For example, the prolific television director Reza Badiyi, whose credits include *The Six Million Dollar Man* and many other popular shows, migrated from Iran in 1955.

[29] See Breyley, 'Hope, Fear and Dance Dance Dance,' 212–14.

only in concert halls. Of course, very few migrant musicians were in the position to choose their venues or even their musical style in the early days. Some performers of Western and Persian art music, including former members of leading Iranian orchestras, found themselves unable to enter the competitive United States art music scene and were obliged to collaborate with pop musicians.[30] Most art musicians had to overcome a certain level of pride to take this step.

Kucheh-bazari music was always characterised by the humour of the powerless, the lower social classes mocking the powerful, wealthy and 'beautiful.' While it can be argued that *losanjelesi* pop is the musical descendant of *kucheh-bazari*, such humour has largely disappeared, as *losanjelesi* pop musicians themselves have moved into the realm of the powerful, wealthy and beautiful. However, elements of such humour, along with the reclaiming of terms that were formerly derogatory, have emerged in the pop music produced by younger generations. For example, Los Angeles pop singer Asa Soltan Rahmati has reclaimed the derogatory term *gherti*. In the mid-twentieth century in Tehran, *gherti* was usually applied to men, implying they were 'lightweight, silly, irresponsible, happy, gay [in both senses of "happy" and "homosexual"]' and, in the context of dance and *motrebi* lyrics, 'suggestive, flirtatious.'[31] Today, the term is most often applied to bubbly young women perceived as excessively frivolous or 'superficial,' whose greatest interest is their appearance. Asa's work can be seen at *youtube.com/ghertikhanoom*; *ghertikhanoom* could be translated as 'Lady Gherti.' On her *Facebook* site, Asa describes herself as 'Gherti 4 Life.' Asa's injection of humour and new nuances into *losanjelesi* pop arguably invigorates the form and contributes to its survival.

Asa also stretches the boundaries of her self-ascribed *gherti* genre in ways that have divided listeners, especially when she ventures into the realm of memory construction. As John Frow points out, 'genres create effects of reality and truth that are central to the ways the world is understood.'[32] The 'ways the world is understood' include the ways diasporic groups construct their shared histories and collective memory. The style of most of Asa's songs and music videos is, like the old *motrebi* songs, suggestive, sexy and witty, contributing to her genre's 'effects of reality' and her 'understood' identity as 'Iranian,' *losanjelesi* and *gherti*. However, her song *LA River* combines her form of *gherti* sexiness with a personal narrative that constitutes an entry into Iranian diasporic history, an intervention into cultural memory that disrupts the ways others understand and represent that history.[33] Asa fled southern Iran with her family as a child, during the Iran-Iraq war. In *LA River* she tells the story of 'just a girl in a little desert town.' The lyrics present a seemingly childlike understanding of the fleeing family's situation: 'bombs started dropping and there's gold in the West.' In the refrain Asa sings 'Run, run … The LA river's paved in gold.'[34] The song's articulation of fear and desire, of self-interest in a desperate situation, no doubt reflects the experiences and sentiments of many others who

[30] Interview with Homayoun Khosravi and Partow Pourafar, Los Angeles, 2010. Cellist Khosravi was in this position and went on to work with leading pop stars, including Googoosh, after Googoosh's move to North America.

[31] Interview with Jamal and Anthony Shay, Los Angeles, 2010.

[32] John Frow, '"Reproducibles, Rubrics, and Everything You Need": Genre Theory Today,' *PMLA* 2.5 (2007): 1632.

[33] *Asa Soltan—LA River*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=6VsOz_QmKFw&feature=related, accessed 7 Oct. 2011.

[34] As a comment on the song's *Youtube* site points out, 'paved' may not be the appropriate word for a river, but this 'error' arguably contributes to the 'unsophisticated,' hence 'sincere,' effect of the lyrics.

fled the war or similar situations in other parts of the world. It is arguably a natural response to personal danger to seek safety and also natural to seek a life of comfort. However, in most public forms of collective 'Iranian' memory, the war has a profound association with notions of honour, duty, love of country and, most of all, sacrifice. As Ramin Sadighi and Sohrab Mahdavi point out, the war was 'an all-consuming, genuinely national effort. Even those who opposed the new revolutionary order were determined to defend the country from the outside threat.'[35] The eight-year war devastated both Iran and Iraq and changed lives irrevocably. Young boys went to fight, casualties were very high and chemical and other weapons left a significant population of veterans and their families suffering ongoing effects. Sadighi and Mahdavi also note that, unlike Iranian cinema, 'Iranian music has yet to deal with the effects of the calamitous war … on Iranian society.'[36] A contribution to this history in the *gherti* pop genre, from a self-interested, Los Angeles-based, '1.5-generation,' *gherti* perspective, is therefore problematic for some.[37] In the *LA River* video, images of Asa in her bedroom are juxtaposed with footage of the war. This mode of remembrance (and forgetting) has attracted many online comments, the top two (those 'liked' by the greatest number of viewers) reading: '*bebin lotfan dige nakhoon!!!aberoomoono bordi!!!!!vayyyyy*' [Look, please just don't sing! You've shamed us! Aagh] and 'please remove the war clips out of ur whore video you are disrespecting the blood of our martyrs.' However, other comments include: 'I totally get this video … Long live Iran and our beloved Martyres<333' and even 'The world needs more gherti's [sic].'[38] This diversity of response reflects the range of possibilities for Iranian diasporic pop music and memory construction.

Another singer-songwriter now resident in California and contributing to Iranian diasporic memory construction is folk rock musician Mohsen Namjoo.[39] Namjoo's intellectual style is far removed from Asa's *gherti* genre, but his songs are also controversial. While Asa spent her formative years in Los Angeles (after a childhood in Hamburg, Germany), Namjoo spent his in Iran during the war. As Asa contributes the narrative of a child who left Iran after the revolution, Namjoo's song '*60s Decade* (in the Iranian calendar, the 1360s correspond approximately with the 1980s) enters into the history of those who stayed, whose childhood was ended abruptly by war and postrevolutionary sensibilities. Namjoo's lyrics tell a bitter coming-of-age tale, in which the questioning child is crushed by violence, authorities and neighbours, as he undergoes an education in absurdity. In contrast with Asa's lyrics, Namjoo's songs demonstrate his understanding of Islam and its texts, as well as his insider knowledge of and sharp satirical approach to contemporary Iran. Touraj Daryaee contends that 'Namjoo's music is more in sync with Iran than any political leader or writer today, or the expatriate artistic production.'[40] Of course, Namjoo himself is now part of the 'expatriate artistic production,' illustrating the fluidity and mobility of the categories of Iran and diaspora. Namjoo's work

[35] Sadighi and Mahdavi, 'The Song does not Remain the Same.'

[36] Sadighi and Mahdavi, 'The Song does not Remain the Same.'

[37] In Diaspora studies, the term '1.5 generation' refers to those who were born in their parents' country of birth, but migrated as infants and grew up in the diaspora.

[38] *Asa Soltan—LA River*, www.youtube.com.

[39] See www.mohsennamjoo.com, accessed 7 Oct. 2011.

[40] Touraj Daryaee, 'Mohsen Namjoo: A New Music and Poetry for Modern Iran,' *Huffington Post*, 10 Dec. 2010.

is highly innovative, musically and lyrically, as he combines elements of Persian art music, traditional recitation and western folk and rock in unconventional ways. As well as setting classical Persian poetry to music, Namjoo uses his own wry word play and metaphor in his texts. Lines such as 'See how they have made hypocrisy fashionable' in his song *Gozar* are echoed thematically in much of the popular music that has emerged in Namjoo's wake in Iran. As he performs with the perceived authority that comes from having spent most of his life in Iran, Namjoo contributes a history of the present to his diasporic audience. His song *Aghayede Nue Kanti* ('Neo-Kantian Ideology') includes these lines:

> Neo-Kantian ideas are for me, Normandy poppies for you
> Indulgence and impatience are for me, 15-centimetre love for you
> Macaroni and tamarind paste are for us
> The Street of Martyrs is for us …
> Cleverness and cunning are ours
> Leftover food is our lot
> Bootlegged copies of *The Godfather* are ours
> An unwanted generation is our lot
> Embarrassment by the government is our lot …
> The loser national team is our lot
> Constructive criticism is our lot
> Tomorrow, maybe, is ours …

Although—or perhaps, because—songs in this vein refer to the Islamic Republic rather than the diaspora, Namjoo is one of the most popular performers in the diaspora. This popularity crosses boundaries that otherwise might divide diasporic music listeners, including boundaries of age and, more importantly, the period of time away from Iran. With his music, Namjoo evokes a collective memory that counters diasporic Iranian stereotypes such as the *losanjelesi* and *gherti*. For many diasporic listeners, he facilitates a form of communal commiseration, as well as the pleasure of mutual recognition, thus instigating a sense of unity in a shared 'exit from history.'

Like Namjoo, the original members of 'Persian blues/rock/jazz' band Kiosk grew up in Iran and began playing together there in 2004.[41] The current six members are based in California and Toronto. Kiosk's humour is gentler than Namjoo's, but central to the versions of history and memory represented in their songs. Vocalist and songwriter Arash Sobhani sings of corruption, disillusionment, fading dreams and lost ideals. Some of his satirical narratives are universally relevant, as in the song *Love and Death in the Age of Facebook*. Others are specific to the paradoxes of Iranian diasporic memory. The song *Zoghal e Khoob* presents a narrative of paradox, 'deterritorialising and reterritorialising journeys' and 'a performance of identity,' in Naficy's words:

> We were young and had a thousand dreams
> Long hair and buffed up self-esteems
> Chasing rainbows, we set out to roam

[41] See www.kioskthebband.com, accessed 18 Feb. 2011.

Said goodbye and never made it back home
Pledging liberty and justice for all
Civilized discourse beyond the wall
Love and peace, and a new brotherhood,
Utopia, a care-free lovers' world …
One concocted snake oil and love potions
Another sold his soul, to stock options
Joy got depressed and flew over the Cuckoo's nest
Blossom withered, and was put to rest
Liberty talked too much, was sent to jail
Hope was buried, to no avail
Faith became doubtful and turned agnostic
Achilles healed, his blood is still toxic
Oath denied everything and ran away
Desire hasn't been heard of to this day
Why did we have such a fruitless fate?
Why did the Sun burn us with hate?
Into this abyss all of us were tossed
Bad company we kept, good friends we lost …[42]

This narrative may be read as a universal tale of growing up and venturing out from home and youthful certainties. However, in the context of Persian-language popular music, it resonates with the particular histories and memories of Iran and its diaspora. It may be read as the tale of Iran's young revolutionaries of 1978 and 1979, or of Iran's idealistic emigrants, two overlapping narratives. Along with the music of Asa, Namjoo and others, Kiosk presents an alternative entry into Iranian diasporic history from the once dominant *losanjelesi* pop.

New York is also home to a broad range of Iranian diasporic music. Independent rock groups, especially those that formed during Iran's reform period and emigrated during the post-reform period, have made a particular mark. These bands include Hypernova, the Yellow Dogs and 127.[43] While Asa gives the term *gherti* new life, 127 has rearranged other derogatory terms and experimented with different popular musical forms, from different eras. 127 formed in Tehran in 2001 and has consisted of up to six members over the years. The band's 2008 'folk punk' album *Khal Punk* reclaims the pejorative term *khal*, a word with even more complex meanings than *gherti*.[44] In Iran, the musicians with the lowest social status, those who perform traditional 6/8 dance music with simple melodies and colloquial lyrics, at weddings and similar events, are known as *motreb*, another derogatory term.[45] Today, there are only small numbers of elderly *motreb* still active. In the past, *motreb* themselves referred to their musical gatherings as *khaltur*. Among other things, the word *khal* can imply vulgar, cheap and nasty,

[42] Kiosk provides this English translation on the band's official website, www.kiosktheband.com/Kiosk_official_website/Lyrics_(English_Translation).html, accessed 11 Aug. 2011.

[43] See www.hypernova.com, www.theyellowdogsband.com and www.127band.com, accessed 1 July 2011.

[44] 127 Band, *Khal Punk*, www.cdbaby.com/cd/127band, accessed 1 July 2011.

[45] See Sasan Fatemi, 'Music, Festivity, and Gender in Iran from the Qajar to the Early Pahlavi Period,' *Iranian Studies* 38.3 (2005): 399–416.

entertaining but in poor taste; it can refer to new *losanjelesi* pop as well as old *motrebi* music. 127 lyricist Sohrab Mohebbi explains:

> The project 'Khal Punk' started when we tried to make some music inspired by the old Iranian genre, 'Roo Houzi' [literally 'on the pool,' improvisatory comic musical theatre, performed on covered pools in the courtyards of private homes]. I think in terms of appearance and social stance and also the lyrical context, the genre is so closer to rock'n toll [sic]. The Roo Houzi musicians were all called Motrebs, they entertained people yet they were considered outcasts in a sense. Like people wouldn't give them wives and all and I think still musicians are treated more or less the same in Iran.[46]

127 reclaims not only the term *khal*, but also elements of *motrebi* music. Some tracks on *Khal Punk* are musically based on traditional *ruhowzi* pieces. A retouched picture of Susan and Aghasi in their heyday graces the album cover. 127's humour, not so much self-deprecating as celebrating the forgotten and despised, and deflating the perceived snobbery and self-Orientalisation of some compatriots, has introduced a new element to diasporic Iranian music, arguably one that could only have emerged from reform-era Iran. The band's turn to *ruhowzi* for inspiration facilitates communal remembering and forgetting by drawing attention to social relations in Iranian contexts. With its genre rearrangements, 127 invites its listeners to reflect on what has and what has not changed, while they are amused and entertained.

While the United States remains a very popular destination for Iranian emigrants, especially popular musicians, Canada has become perhaps an even more sought after destination in recent decades. In 2006, over 95 000 migrants from Iran were living in Canada, with more than half of these in and around the city of Toronto. Musical activity in Toronto is diverse, as the city is home to leading figures in pop, rock, progressive metal and fusion, including Googoosh and composer, producer and metal guitarist Agah Bahari, as well as the rock group Soul Nidus and the self-described world music band Blurred Vision. Toronto has also been a centre for Iranian music production, especially through the transnational Bamahang Productions, which promotes music from Iran and the diaspora. Soul Nidus describes itself as an 'indie acoustic rock trio, hailing from Canada.'[47] Two members are migrants from Iran and the group is often described or claimed by others as Iranian Canadian, but the members prefer not to emphasise their Iranian links. In an interview with *ZirZamin Iranian Alternative Music Magazine*, Iran is not mentioned, and Ehsan Ashrafi observes:

> We never jumped on any trend or used politics or our backgrounds to go forward. I personally think that's a bit desperate … We always believed that whatever we become must be because of our music and nothing else.[48]

Soul Nidus' repertoire consists largely of romantically themed songs, with predominantly hopeful rather than lamenting tones. The band promotes forms of community activism by 'non-musical' means or through the music of others. For example, group members use their

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[46] Nassir Mashkouri, 'A Short Interview with Sohrab Mohebbi, from the Alternative Band "127",' *ZirZamin Iranian Alternative Music Magazine* (2007), http://zirzamin.se/?q=node/188, accessed 1 July 2011. For more detail on *ruhowzi*, see Fatemi, 'Music, Festivity, and Gender in Iran,' 408–11.

[47] See www.facebook.com/soulnidus?sk=info, accessed 1 July 2011. See also www.soulnidus.com.

[48] 'An Interview with Ehsan Ashrafi from Soul Nidus,' *ZirZamin Iranian Alternative Music Magazine* (2011), http://zirzamin.se/?q=node/1016, accessed 1 July 2011.

online sites to post such videos as those campaigning against hunger and famine. In return for free song downloads, the group invites it fans 'to donate a small amount (whatever you're capable of) to a charity of your choice.' Soul Nidus' approach to identity, by foregrounding the universal, is a model that appeals to many fans in the Iranian diaspora.

Like Soul Nidus, Blurred Vision is a Toronto area band fronted by two Iranian-born brothers. Blurred Vision describes its genre as 'rock, progressive, pop.'[49] The group has embraced its Iranian links more explicitly than Soul Nidus, singing texts from Persian poetry in its early years. Unlike Soul Nidus, Blurred Vision explicitly espouses political activism through its music. In the wake of the 2009 presidential election and its aftermath, the group joined Roger Waters from Pink Floyd to perform a version of 'Another Brick in the Wall.'[50] Blurred Vision's 2011 single *Democracy* has a more general focus:

> bombs, guns, daughters and sons, fighting for empty promises …
> fear takes a hold of you and everything that you do
> all you'd known to be true it fell away to lies
> lies well disguised, minds all hypnotised
> terror is what you hear, war won't make it disappear
> leaders teach us everything we shouldn't be
> come on all ya people, this is no democracy …[51]

In a different way from Soul Nidus, Blurred Vision also asserts a universal identity. On its *Facebook* page, the band claims that 'Blurred Vision began with the hopes and intentions of using music to break down the "walls" that separate us from one another.'[52] Using the medium of English-language anthemic pop, in a fluid North American context, Blurred Vision contributes to the body of Iranian diasporic histories of the present.

Iranian diasporic communities in Australia are much smaller than those in North America, but they are growing steadily and they are musically active. As in North America, dance parties are a significant component of musical life. Sydney has the most active Iranian, or Persian, party and restaurant scene in Australia, with some restaurants providing live music and dance floors. The live music is largely drawn from the *losanjelesi* pop repertoire, but sometimes includes new music composed in Australia. DJs have arguably taken on the most visible roles in the dance scene, acting as anthologisers, or selectors of diverse but complementary pieces of music. As such, and in line with developments in the broader dance party scene and in some sections of Australian society, DJs play a role in the celebration of diversity and in interactions between Iranian Australians and people from other backgrounds. For example, a series of large-scale dance parties was launched in Sydney in 2011, with the title 'East West Sydney' and self-description of 'Persian dance parties.' DJs are mainly drawn from the Iranian diaspora, in and outside Australia, but also include people without Iranian affiliations. The music they select includes new and old Persian-language material, as well as a range of international dance pop. Each DJ has his or her own style and method of creating a 'memory soundtrack.' Some

[49] www.facebook.com/BlurredVisionMusic, accessed 1 July 2011.
[50] See www.blurredvisionmusic.com/heyayatollah, accessed 1 July 2011.
[51] www.vibedeck.com/blurredvision, accessed 14 Oct. 2011.
[52] www.facebook.com/BlurredVisionMusic?sk=info, accessed 14 Oct. 2011.

focus on Iran's region—from Central Asia to the Mediterranean, while others mix Iran-based hip hop with North American rap. In this context, diversity and cross-cultural collaboration are 'sexy,' as an online post by a member of the organising team suggests:

> Thank you to an amazing line-up of local and international talent that graced the stage at the very first East West Sydney. Thank you to Saman Santori for doing the most difficult task of the night: warming up the crow[d] and opening the event, thank you to DjFarid Hakimi for his amazing set and the fact that he uses vinyl makes him even more cool, thank you to Mc Aj for pumping the audience and showing us what crowd control is all about, thank you to Dat Tabrizi for his very special appearance on stage, it was an honour, thank you to Nina Las Vegas for doing her thing, and let us say there is nothing sexier than an Armenian/Egyptian/Aussie DJ playing Arash on her set, and thank you to our headline act and the star of the party, DJ Taba (Vahid Tabatabaei), we now know why they call you 'Ostaad' [Master/Maestro].[53]

While celebrating the international, this organiser also pays tribute to what he sees as Iranian—or Persian, the preferred adjective in the dance party scene:

> You guys made it a beautiful night. We had the best crowd ever. Beautiful, best dressed, and that Persian Civility we always talk about, was on display all night. Now, we cant wait for EastWest-2 :).[54]

The modes of remembering and forgetting facilitated by Sydney's East West dance parties differ from those considered above. It is impossible to generalise, but they arguably tend towards a more hopeful, future-oriented outlook, albeit one that some see as self-interested or materialistic (like Asa's), combined with a slightly romanticised view of the distant Iranian past.

While the musical mixes of Sydney's dance parties may reflect romanticisation of Persian pasts and Australian futures, there is other Iranian diasporic music in Australia that does not romanticise either. While the dance parties emphasise unity in diversity, other musical forms remember isolation, indifference, loneliness and injustice. In Brisbane, rappers Vafa and Shahrooz rap to remember and to forget their heartaches in both Iran and Australia.[55] In Melbourne, industrial rock group Cold Divide, featuring Afshin Nikouseresht, articulates disillusionment and anger. Back in Sydney, poet Mohsen Soltany remembers the four years he spent in Australian immigration detention, before finally being recognised as a refugee and released. Soltany has released two albums of sung poetry and spoken word, *Mohsen* and *Australian Dream* (sticky label), on which he plays santur. Both albums address Australia's history of detention of asylum seekers arriving by boat. Soltany's piece *SIEV-X* refers to the so-called 'suspected illegal entry vessel X'—an overloaded boat carrying asylum seekers to Australia that sank before arrival, resulting in the loss of 353 lives, mostly women and children:[56]

> They were devoured by the beasts of the sea
> Instead of the beasts of our land …

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[53] Post by Oziran Metropolis, www.facebook.com/East.West.Sydney, accessed 15 Oct. 2011.
[54] Post by Oziran Metropolis, www.facebook.com/East.West.Sydney, accessed 15 Oct. 2011.
[55] See Gay Breyley, '"Sacred Curses": Persian-Australian Rap Narratives,' *Life Writing* 5.1 (2008): 29–46.
[56] See *SIEVX.com*, http://sievx.com, accessed 3 Oct. 2004.

> I wondered, if we had come here as unwanted livestock,
> If there had been just one sheep on the SIEV-X,
> Would people see the truth about asylum seekers?
> I wondered if they could imagine children as lambs,
> Would they then shed tears?
> If only the press had cared as much for them as those sheep …[57]

With this and other pieces, Soltany's music negotiates between past and present, allowing—or compelling—us to enter into history, in Bohlman's words.

As Benjamin notes, one who has 'begun to open the fan of memory never comes to the end of its segments.'[58] Iranian diasporic memory construction is as complex and unending as the popular music and other media that facilitate it. It entails journeys of identity, of attachment and detachment, into and out of history. As Simon During points out, 'Many individuals are seriously attached to at least some of the identities given to them as members of a particular family, ethnicity, nation and/or gender, and want these not to be fluid but stable.'[59] However, as we have seen, stability is often elusive. Popular music serves as a means of imagining stability and articulating fluidity. It does this in the context of 'transnational family,' as outlined by Zlatko Skrbiš:

> The idea of transnational family implies dynamics, flux and change, yet it is also embedded in unyielding and stable structures that impact upon the experiences of family members. These structures are represented by the institutions of the host society, the restrictions imposed by geography, international politics and law, technologies that enable communication and travel and the strength of ties with family members back home or in other places.[60]

The dynamics and flux of the extended transnational family that is the Iranian diaspora are most evident in its musical practices. These practices are extremely diverse in their local variations, but they consistently facilitate remembering and forgetting, the making and breaking of connections, and the entering and exiting into history.

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[57] Australian Dream, www.stickylabel.com.au/2010/11/australian-dream.html, accessed 31 Oct. 2011.

[58] Benjamin, 'A Berlin Chronicle' 597.

[59] Simon During, *Cultural Studies: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2005) 152.

[60] Zlatko Skrbiš, 'Transnational Families: Theorising Migration, Emotions and Belonging,' *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 29.3 (2008): 231.