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A Sonic Tale of Two Cities: Memory, Trauma, and Auditory Scars in Tehran and Abadan-Khorramshahr

Armaghan Fakhraeirad, Laudan Nooshin, and Anna Rezaie

Introduction[1]

> "Attention, attention! The siren you hear is the danger signal. Red alert! Leave at once and repair to your shelters!" I wonder at what point in my life, and after how many years, the echo of the red siren – like a screeching violin that plays mercilessly all over one's body – would cease in my mind. I cannot separate the eight years of war from that shrill voice that several times a day, at the most unexpected hours would intrude into our lives. Three levels of danger had been established, but I never managed to differentiate between the red (danger), yellow (possibility of danger) and white (danger has stopped) sirens.... And those sleepless nights! ... I would take two pillows, a few candles and my book to a small hall that separated the children's bedroom from ours.... If a sound can be preserved in the same manner as a leaf or a butterfly, I would say that within the pages of my *Pride and Prejudice*, that most polyphonic of all novels, and my *Daisy Miller* is hidden like an autumn leaf the sound of the red siren.[2]

In her autobiographical account of life in post-revolutionary Iran, *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Azar Nafisi powerfully evokes the image of a sound preserved like a dried flower between the pages of a book. But this is not just any sound, but the more-than-sounds of sirens, bombs, and other sonic experiences during the missile strikes on Tehran in the later stages of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88). Her detailed account speaks both to the profound entanglement of sound, affect, and memory, and to sound's in-

1. The authors would like to thank the many people who have shared their experiences with us or helped in other ways, including members of the Sonic Tehran Network. Unless requested otherwise, all discussants in this chapter are anonymized. Unless otherwise stated, translations from Persian to English in this chapter are by the current authors.

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2. Azar Nafisi, *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books* (New York: Random House, 2008), 185, 187–188.

tense somatic *materiality* that is experienced through the entire body; it is such entanglement and materiality that forms the central focus of this chapter. In a later passage, Nafisi relates that, "It was not just the very loud noise – if one could call it a noise – of the explosion: more than the sound, we *felt* the explosion, like the fall of a massive weight on the house. The house shook, and the glass trembled in the window frames."[3] She also describes the sonic aftermath of missile attacks: phones ringing as family and friends checked up on one another; reassuring sounds of familiar voices, a stark contrast to the threatening sirens, announcements, and explosions; and the eerie silences of the city as many sought safety by leaving what Nafisi describes as a "ghost town."

Nafisi's memoir offers a useful entry point to thinking about the relationship between space and sound, a topic that has remained relatively unexplored in relation to Iran, notwithstanding the significant growth in both sound studies and urban studies in recent years. Lying at their intersection, this chapter asks what a shift away from the dominant visual-centric paradigms to a more focussed attention on sound might reveal about city spaces. But sound is a slippery creature and its study presents many methodological challenges. While there are recordings (mediations in themselves) of some of the sonic events described below, the sounds alone don't reveal their particular meanings and significance to people. For this it is necessary to access memories which, like Nafisi's leaf, may be withered or disintegrated. To remember is of course in itself a creative and constructive act, particularly when such memories may be decades old.[4] The very nature of sound, its fleeting ephemerality and resistance to fixity, renders it inconducive to historical research, and yet, this is arguably what makes it so interesting, the paradox of studying sound lying in its simultaneous impermanence and centrality to people's lives, often taken for granted and only noticed or articulated at times of crisis. What is particularly striking about Nafisi's account, and encountered repeatedly through her book, is how deeply and intensely the sonic is etched into the author's emotive memory. This sound/memory/affect nexus has been explored in the literature, but going beyond ephemerality we might also invoke the physicality of soundwaves as they impact on spaces, buildings, bodies, shaping and changing them. Where do historical sounds and their material residues go? Might it be possible to detect resonances continuing to reverberate in spaces today, rather like the primordial cosmic aftereffects of the Big Bang? Was this what Iranian poet Forugh Farrokhzād (1934–1967) imagined in her well-known verse "Only Sound Remains"? Thinking about sound's materiality as impacting on the environment long after sound itself has faded brings to mind the following description of urban memory in the novel *Invisible Cities* by Italo Calvino:

> As this wave from memories flows in, the city soaks it up like a sponge and expands.... The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like

3. Ibid., 207. Emphasis in original.

4. For further discucssion in relation to music, see for instance Caroline Bithell, "The Past in Music: Introduction," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 15:1 (2006): 3–16.

> the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.[5]

Like tracing the lines of a hand, this chapter seeks to uncover the meanings of urban sound in two of Iran's major cities, the capital Tehran and the southern "twin" cities of Abadan and Khorramshahr, focused on one critical and transformative period of recent history: the Iran-Iraq War. Drawing on archival materials, oral narratives, sonic memories, and personal conversations, we explore how these cities were connected through sound. Theoretically, we are interested in questions of space and power, with a primary focus on public space. Drawing on Stephen Feld's notion of "acoustemology," we are interested in sound "as a modality of knowing and being in the world."[6] Unlike the other chapters of this book, therefore, this discussion is very much located within the field of sound studies, with music forming part of a wider sonic ecology, folded within it rather than being privileged. Aside from our broader interest in sound per se, this "dissolving the boundaries between music and sound,"[7] also allows us to sidestep the question of which sonic manifestations should be considered "music," a central issue in debates over Islamic propriety.

This chapter aims to contribute to the broader study of sensory experience during times of conflict, with a particular focus on sound and listening. In music studies, this discussion dates back to the ground-breaking work of Urbain and O'Connell and Castelo-Branco,[8] as well as the growing body of writings that followed.[9] To date, however,

5. Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (London: Vintage, 1997), 9.

6. Mahsa Pakravan, "Soundscape, Sonic Experience, and Sonic Memory in Iran: Jewish and Muslim Cultural Identity in Udlajan, Tehran" (PhD thesis, University of Alberta, 2016), 46. Pakravan's writings on the sounds of the Udlajan area of Tehran are one of the few examples of extended work on urban sound in Iran. See also idem, "Soundscape and Sonic Memory: Dynamics of Jewish and Muslim Day-to-day Sonic Interactions in Udlajan, Tehran," *Sound Studies* 3:2 (2017): 134–151. More recent work on urban sound in Iran includes Hadi Bastani and Navid Soltani, "Listening In/For Ekbatan. An Experimental Acoustemology," *Openwork* 1:1 (2023); and Ali Mousavi, "Beautiful Rotten Tehran – A Multi-Sensory Artistic Research on Contemporary Urban Design in Tehran (Parids Phase 11)" (PhD Thesis, Aalto University, 2023).

7. Georgina Born, "On Nonhuman Sound – Sound as Relation," in *Sound Objects*, ed. James A. Steintrager and Rey Chow (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), 190.

8. Oliver Urbain, *Music and Conflict Transformation: Harmonies and Dissonances in Geopolitics* (London & New York: I. B. Tauris, 2008); John Morgan O'Connell and Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco, eds., *Music and Conflict* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

9. For instance Jonathan Pieslak, *Sound Targets: American Soldiers and Music in the Iraq War* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009); Steve Goodman, *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and the Ecology of Fear* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010); Martin Daughtry, *Listening to War: Sound, Music, Trauma, and Survival in Wartime Iraq* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Jim Sykes, "Ontologies and Acoustic Endurance: Rethinking Wartime Sound and Listening," *Sound Studies* 4:1 (2018): 35–60; James E. K. Parker, "Sonic Lawfare: On the Jurisprudence of Weaponised Sound,"

there has been little engagement with this topic in the context of Iran, despite the fact that the country has, over the past 120 years, experienced much civil conflict – including two revolutions, occupation during World War II, two coup d'états – as well as the eight-year war with Iraq, all of which have served to shape and re-shape the nation.[10] Much of the literature on these events has focused on history, politics, and economics from a largely top-down perspective, offering relatively little documentation of everyday lived experiences during these turbulent times. While we are mindful of the dangers of fetishizing certain "crisis moments" of history, and attendant themes such as violence and trauma, which have become fashionable scholarly topics in contrast to more mundane sonic experiences of everyday life, it is nevertheless the case that such moments offer a rich source due to sound's heightened importance at such times and its strong presence in people's lives. Still within living memory for many Iranians, the 1980s and the war period were regularly invoked in discussion, despite often being difficult to talk (or ask) about. As Abigail Wood observes in her work on civilian sonic experiences of escalated conflict between Israel and Hamas forces in 2012 and 2014, war is "marked above all by sound ... wartime reconfigures the everyday auditory landscape."[11] Wood describes the various sonic impacts of conflict, going well beyond the sirens, rocket explosions, and military planes, to include "the tone of conversation shifts, [as does] the choice of songs played on the radio ... and unexpected silences [that] quieten urban spaces, as planned public events are cancelled."[12] Advocating for a reorientation "from a focus on soundscapes imagined as a landscape of discrete, short-lived sounds in the zones of war, and from civilians as passive receptors of these sounds, to a focus on listening and sounding as active practices ingrained in bodies and time,"[13] Wood notes that "more than just making the ears prick, wartime sounds are implicated in an assemblage of bodily action: stimulating the body to move, prompting vocal responses and serving as a focal point for the articulation of collective experience."[14] And, of course, conflict often demands other kinds of bodily action such as forced displacement, as described below.

Any discussion of human sonic experiences needs to engage with the "sound-space

Sound Studies 5:1 (2019): 72–96; Gavin Williams, ed., *Hearing the Crimean War: Wartime Sounds and the Unmaking of Sense* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

10. One exception is Amir Moosavi, "Sonic Triggers and Fiery Pools: The Senses at War in Hossein Mortezaeian Abkenar's *Scorpion*," in *Losing Our Minds, Coming to Our Senses: Sensory Readings of Persian Literature and Culture*, ed. Amir Moosavi and Mehdi Khorrami (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2021), 171–194. Moosavi explores the central role of sound and other senses in Hoseyn Mortezāian Ābkenār's 2006 novel *Aqrab ru-ye pellehhā-ye rāh-āhan-e Andimeshk, yā, az in qatār khun michekeh, qorbān!* (The Scorpion on the Steps of the Andimeshk Railway Station, or, There's Blood Dripping from this Train, Sir!). For other publications that examine cultural dimensions of the Iran-Iraq war, see footnotes 2 and 4 of Moosavi's chapter.

11. Abigail Wood, "'I thought it was a song but it turned out to be a siren': Civilian Listening During Wartime in Israel," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 30:2 (2021): 186.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid., 186.

nexus" and the shaping of such experiences,[15] not just by particular spaces, places, and circumstances, but by the co-presence of other listening bodies. Further, we acknowledge the need to problematize the idea of sound as a reified object towards an understanding of all sound as relational, not as isolated sonic events.[16] As well as situating this work within the larger body of scholarship on what has become known as "bellicphonics,"[17] we draw in particular on the notion of "auditory scars" as conceptualized by Amanda M. Black and Andrea F. Bohlman in the context of US race relations and understood as the "results of acts of silencing past and present."[18] Tehran has experienced many acts of silencing in its history, but here we explore the concept of auditory scars from a slightly different perspective, as a potentially fruitful way of thinking about the painful sounds of a nation's past that continue to resonate into the present day. We ask what it means to listen to, and necessarily to imagine, a historical space in which people have experienced violence, trauma, and displacement as a result of war and other acts of hostility. We also touch on questions of "postmemory," described by Marianne Hirsch as "the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right,"[19] each of the authors and many of the interlocutors of this chapter standing in such a relation to the events and sounds discussed below.

So why focus on Tehran and Abadan-Khorramshahr? Separated by a distance of almost 1,000 kilometers, from the early years of oil extraction, the national capital and the "oil capital" (Abadan) and its surrounding areas have been connected by way of a largely invisible umbilical cord, lubricated by the political economy of oil and gas, and with profound social, cultural, and political consequences for the entire nation. Here we focus on the sonic ramifications of this relationship at one particular historical moment.

Following the discovery of oil at Masjed Soleyman in 1908, Abadan and Khorramshahr became transformed from small littoral villages into two of the most economically important cities of Iran; by the 1930s, the oil refinery at Abadan was the largest in the world. There is much that could be said about the sounds of Abadan, including of oil extraction and refinement and of the oil crisis of the early 1950s and the 1953 coup d'etat. Here, we focus on Abadan-Khorramshahr during the Iran-Iraq War, while also cognizant that this period cannot be detached from the longer durée of history and of earlier events that led to the 1979 Revolution and the war that followed.

15. Pakravan, "Soundscape, Sonic Experience, and Sonic Memory in Iran," 45.

16. Born, "On Nonhuman Sound," 187.

17. Daughtry, *Listening to War*.

18. Amanda M. Black and Andrea F. Bohlman, "Resounding the Campus: Pedagogy, Race, and the Environment," *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 8:1 (2017): 9.

19. See https://cup.columbia.edu/author-interviews/hirsch-generation-postmemory. Accessed 18 July 2021.

The sounds of conflict have been a constant and recurring aspect of Tehran's soundscape from its early years as capital under the Qajar dynasty (from 1786), and with increased intensity around moments of political unrest. As the location of the royal court, Tehran was also the focus of musical activity and later (particularly from the 1920s), with the establishment of modern institutions of education, administration, broadcasting, performance, and so on, became the most important center for music-making in the country. This is part of a wider political and cultural dominance of Tehran that has remained largely unchallenged. With the decline of the Qajars and transition to Pahlavi rule (1925–1979), Tehran experienced significant expansion. Reza Shah Pahlavi, a military leader who assumed power in a coup d'etat in 1921, envisioned a capital city that was modern, Western-facing, and secular. Crucially for our discussion, such changes were intimately connected with sites of oil extraction far from the capital: from the 1920s, the newly developing modernities and associated changes to lifeways and mobilities were largely fuelled by oil and gas, both economically and literally. Not only did the revenues create an increasingly bloated state bureaucracy that was mainly located in Tehran but also paid for the required expansion of the capital, which in turn brought new sounds, not least in the accents, languages, and other sonics such as musical traditions, from the many migrants who came to Tehran in search of work.[20] The dependence of the British economy on Iranian oil after World War II,[21] led to the oil crisis of 1951–53, including the oil workers' strikes and the 1953 coup d'état, as Iran sought to gain control over its natural resources. Arguably, the 1979 Revolution and the eight-year war with Iraq that followed, can only fully be understood as direct consequences both of the coup and foreign involvement in Iran more generally. Like the unseen (and generally unheard by humans) reservoirs of hydrocarbons beneath the earth's surface, so the events below have been profoundly shaped by the strategic political economy of oil. In myriad ways, oil, and crucially the quest for oil, has seeped into every area of Iranian life such that the sounds discussed – of shelling, sirens, refugees, and so on – can arguably be understood ultimately as the sonic manifestations of oil.

This chapter focuses on civilian sonic experiences of war, following the work of writers who have advocated a broad approach that encompasses not just the sounds of conflict itself, but wider impacts on everyday life.[22] One might also consider the consequences of political and social change resulting from war (in the case of Iran, for instance, tighter restrictions on music-making as a result of the empowerment of more conservative government factions) and crucially how these continue to resonate into

20. For the most comprehensive English language history of Tehran (up to the 1990s) see Ali Madanipour, *Tehran: The Making of a Metropolis* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998).

21. "From the 1920s into the 1940s, Britain's standard of living was supported by oil from Iran. British cars, trucks, and buses ran on cheap Iranian oil. Factories throughout Britain were fuelled by oil from Iran. The Royal Navy, which projected British power all over the world, powered its ships with Iranian oil." https://www.cbsnews.com/news/bp-and-iran-the-forgotten-history/. Accessed 12 August 2021.

22. See, for instance, Sykes, "Ontologies and Acoustic Endurance."

"post-conflict" situations. We are intensely aware both of the impossibility of writing about all of the sounds of the 1980s war period, and that such sounds cannot be understood in isolation from one another but only as part of a wider sonic "ecosystem," including regimes of sonic power.

Abadan-Khorramshahr: Early Days in the Frontline of the War

> This is Abadan. National Oil Radio. The voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Abadani Muslim brothers and sisters, your town is in serious danger of falling. The enemy's tanks are just 500 meters away from the bridges of stations 7 and 12. Be prepared with all your forces and equipped with guns, Molotov cocktails, and grenades. Be ready for a noble defense of your town, Abadan. (Radio announcement, 10 October 1980. *Bazm-o Razm* documentary film, 0:34:28; translation from the English subtitles)[23]

On 22 September 1980, Iran was invaded by neighboring Iraq. Taking advantage of Iran's focus on internal affairs following the February 1979 Revolution, Iraq was backed by several countries, including a number of Arab nations as well as the United States and the UK, who hoped to destabilize the post-revolutionary regime.[24] The announcement above, made by war journalist and National Oil Radio station presenter, Gholām Rezā Rahbar, was broadcast just as the siege of Abadan was beginning. Khorramshahr was captured by Iraqi forces on 25 October, after which the city was surrounded and access to connecting roads cut off. Thus began the fall of two of the most culturally diverse and economically significant cities in Iran. In this and the following section, we are interested in the sonic manifestations of war for the civilian populations of Abadan and Khorramshahr, cities which bore the brunt of hostilities. We explore several auditory moments of the war, drawing on personal testimonies and archival materials such as documentary films and novels.

There is now a substantial literature on the ways in which civilian populations experience sound during periods of conflict, including beyond the direct sounds of violence. In his work on the Sri Lankan civil war, for instance, Jim Sykes has argued for an understanding of:

> the sounds of war as the ubiquity of whispers, the sounds of rape, the spreading of rumours, strategic speaking, silence following a hartal, the spatial displacement of the sounds of everyday life, Sinhala Buddhist and Tamil Hindu offerings of sound as protection and Sinhala Buddhist uses of sound to move

23. Vahid Hosseini, *Feast of War* (*Bazm-o Razm*). Documentary, 2018. https://www.docunight.com/all/videos/fight-feast . Accessed 20 September 2021.

24. Nigel Ashton and Bryan Gibson, eds., *The Iran-Iraq War: New International Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

> ghosts from rebel graveyards. While these kinds of wartime sound and audition were disruptive and caused by the disruptions of war, they structured Sri Lankan wartime endurance....[25]

In the discussion that follows, we consider both the direct sounds of war, its wider impact on everyday sonics, and the longer-term resonances that continue today, including in people's memories. We begin in the province of Khuzistan, where the war started and which was the main site of conflict for its duration, but we also explore the experiences of those who were displaced, seeking refuge in other cities such as Tehran, which was largely unaffected directly by the violence until it became the target of missile strikes from 1984 onwards.

Initially, no one expected the war to last more than a few days, as a former refugee explained:

> We didn't know it would be like this. We thought we would leave our homes for a week and the war would be over.... In living memory, no one had seen a war like this.... It didn't even occur to us that it would last this long.[26]

There is a wealth of sources for the sounds of this time, including news footage and documentary and features films, as well as descriptions in newspaper reports and novels. Less information is available from personal testimonies.[27] Sounds of various kinds featured heavily in local reports of the early days of the war, as Fazlollāh Sāberi, a producer at Radio Abadan, recalls:

> People didn't know that when they hear the sound of Katyusha bullets, they need to get down and lie on the ground. That is why the number of casualties increased in the early days.... We sounded the first siren, the so-called red siren [on the radio]. However, we never sounded the white siren as we were at the border, so it was continual war.[28]

Over time, people became accustomed to the sounds, to the extent of being able to recognize different weapons as mentioned in numerous interviews and noted by Ahmad Mahmud in his novel *Zamin-e sukhteh* (The Scorched Earth), a fictional account of the early days of the war based on the author's first-hand experiences in Ahvaz (anoth-

25. Sykes, "Ontologies and Acoustic Endurance," 40.

26. Radio Marz podcast series, Episode 24, "Jangzadeh", 94:58–95:10. Released October 2020. https://open.spotify.com/episode/6XPAlcvMMGK9lZt8e4YDIi?si=J9HHTs9eT6e1OxCTJQ0MA&utm_source=whatsapp&nd=1. Accessed 3 October 2021.

27. But see, for instance, personal testimonies in the Radio Marz episode (see footnote 26).

28. "The story of a radio station that became the voice of the Abadan resistance: An interview with the author of the book *Ferekāns 1160*," 2019. http://oral-history.ir/?page=post&id=8887/ (accessed 10 September 2021). There were three different sirens: "yellow" indicated the possibility of an attack; "red" that an attack was immanent; and "white" marked the end of enemy hostilities.

er major city close to the war zone, to the northeast of Abadan-Khorramshahr): "The sound of a fighter-bomber which is flying somewhere far away attracts people's attention. Everybody is looking at the sky. Now, everybody can recognize the home air force as well as the sound of Tupolev and MiG."[29] The opening of the documentary film *War Immigrants* by Hushang Āzādivar (1981) depicts the first moments of the war and is saturated with sound:[30] the opening begins with the whistling of a rocket approaching the ground and the resulting explosion; this leads into the first main scene, presented from the perspective of a driver desperately trying to escape the city; we see a street filled with men running towards the Khorramshahr Bridge and we hear the continuous sounds of gunfire intertwined with the hum of voices, occasional shouts, motorcycle engines, ambulance sirens, and car horns. The absence of a narrative voiceover allows the audience to become fully immersed in the dense layers of sound. Similarly, sound is central to Mahmud's vivid depiction of anxiety and uncertainty as people receive news of Iraq's intention to invade, from word of mouth or official sources, including Iraqi radio broadcasts. In one scene we hear people in the streets discussing the presence of Iraqi forces at the border,[31] and another quite shocking passage of the bombing of Ahvaz Airport gives a clear sense of the multisensory "fearscape" through detailed descriptions of sound and smell:

> In the afternoon, the enemy's artillery is extinguished. The only muffled sound is the cannonball itself, which is occasionally heard from a distance. The smell of smoke is everywhere. Heavy dust is in the air. People are running out of houses and everything is chaotic. Everyone is in a hurry. The noise of cars, motorcycles, ambulances and fire engines can be heard far and near. It is rumored that the Karkheh Dam has been opened and the water of the dam has been released.[32]

Radio played a crucial role at this time and many people kept their sets on continuously, awaiting updates. Just as Abigail Wood identified the sound of public radios in Tel Aviv during the escalated armed conflict as "collective sounding and listening practices, which created and sustained a sense of auditory sphere,"[33] so Mahmud describes such an "auditory sphere" in Ahvaz:

> All of the people have turned on their radios. The revolutionary hymns and military marches broadcast have filled the entire city. For some seconds these songs paused and the radio announcer shared news that the schools are

29. Ahmad Mahmud, *Zamin-e sukhteh* (Tehran: Mo'in, 1981), 61.

30. Hushang Azadivar, *Mohājerin-e jang* (War immgrants). Documentary, 1981. http://www.doctv.ir/program/156384. Accessed 20 August 2021.

31. Mahmud, *Zamin-e sukhteh*, 11–15.

32. Ibid., 49–50.

33. Wood, "'I thought it was a song but it turned out to be a siren,'" 195.

> suspended; however, even before this many students stopped going to school in order to make Molotov cocktails.[34]

Beyond its role as a source of news or siren alerts, or even providing the comfort of a shared listening experience, Sāberi argues that radio became the heartbeat of the city at this time.[35] In particular, during the ten-month siege of Khorramshahr (November 1980–September 1981), people listened to the radio as a way of believing that they could still live their day-to-day lives. According to Sāberi, the radio was "the sound of resistance and endurance" and seemed to say "we are alive, the city is alive, and we still have hope."[36] Here, it is clear that the sounds of the radio served to "structure wartime endurance."[37] The significance of broadcast media, and radio in particular, to the sonic ecosystem of the war is considered further below.

Unlike Abadan, which Iraqi forces were unable to fully capture, Khorramshahr was almost entirely destroyed and its residents fled to other cities such as Shiraz, Isfahan, and Tehran. Yet, even after the war escalated and people were forcibly displaced, many left their homes assuming that they would soon return. From this brief consideration of the sounds of wartime Abadan-Khorramshahr, we now move on to discuss the sounds of displacement, in particular for those who found themselves in Tehran.

From Abadan-Khorramshahr to Tehran: The Sounds of Internal Displacement

As well as documentary films, a number of feature films focus on the Iran-Iraq War. Indeed, there is a whole genre little known outside Iran, often referred to as "Sacred Defense" films, including government-sponsored productions, that focus on the war.[38] Some of these also tell the stories of those who fled in search of safety, becoming internally displaced and many never returning to their home towns.[39] People were dispersed across the country, reliant on family or friends for shelter and often obliged to move several times as the war dragged on. Many war refugees – or *jangzadeh* (warstruck), as they became known – moved to Tehran, which was already in a state of rapid expansion,

34. Mahmud, *Zamin-e sukhteh*, 25.

35. Fazlollāh Sāberi, *Ferekāns-e 1160: Injā Ābādān, sedā-ye moqāvemat va istādegi* (Tehran: Sureh-ye Mehr, 2018), 11.

36. Ibid., 72.

37. Sykes, "Ontologies and Acoustic Endurance," 40.

38. Pedram Khosronejad, ed., *Iranian Sacred Defence Cinema: Religion, Martyrdom and National Identity* (Canon Pyon: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2012); Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, volume 4, *The Globalizing Era, 1984–2010* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 5–41; and Agnès Devictor, *Images, combattants et martyrs: la guerre Iran-Irak vue par le cinéma iranien* (Paris: Karthala, 2015).

39. One of the best known of these films outside Iran is *Bashu, The Little Stranger* (*Bāshu, gharibeh-ye kuchak*, Bahram Beyzai, 1985). For a discucssion of sound in this film, see Laudan Nooshin, "Windows onto Other Worlds: Music and the Negotiation of Otherness in Iranian Cinema," *Music and the Moving Image* 12:3 (2019): 25–57.

exacerbated by rural to urban migration following the revolution as well as by the arrival of refugees from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. Many refugees from the south had never left Khuzistan before, let alone traveled to the capital. Sound was an important part of the war migrant experience; indeed, many reported initially feeling disoriented by the different sounds of Tehran, not just in the absence of conflict but in its everyday sonics, and in turn migrants impacted on the sounds of the city.[40] War migrants were often regarded with suspicion and generally felt unwelcome. At a time of great austerity, with the war following close on the events of 1979, some held the refugees responsible for food shortages and the ubiquitous queues. An accent (as well as dark skin) would often trigger reactions, as a former migrant recalled:

> One day when my mother was in a line to buy food, someone realized that she is a southerner because of her accent and started blaming her for abandoning her city and moving to Tehran. Some other people joined him and started complaining about the immigrant crisis in Tehran. My mother left the line in tears and gave up buying the food. After that day, she decided to wear her chador and cover part of her face so as not to be recognized as an immigrant. (female, aged fifty-five, personal correspondence, May 2021)

As well as language or accent, others have noted other sonic manifestations of difference, for instance in the Ashura street processions held during the holy month of Muharram, which for the first time in 1980s Tehran were heard with the sounds of southern rhythmic patterns and instruments such as *sinj* and *dammam* in areas which housed refugees. These rituals also functioned as a gathering place for southerners; one of the authors' grandmothers, for instance, loved to attend these religious mourning ceremonies so as to remember her life before the war and feeling a strong sense of regional identity through the music.

While the war impacted all Iranians – whether in the loss of family and friends, witnessing the return of the wounded and other soldiers from the front, food rationing, and so on – still it was the case that people living in cities such as Tehran and Shiraz that were more distant from the front did not fully realize the devastating impact of the war on civilian lives until they themselves experienced missile attacks, as described below. The sonic disjunction between the war experience of the south and other cities is invoked in the poem "Esmā'il" by poet and novelist Reza Baraheni (originally published 1981):

> The sirens of the ambulances are heard, Khuzistan!
> To rediscover your depth, we plant a young man in every corner of your soil
> Now, you are our earth
> Now you are our graveyard

40. In reality, this was simply an extension of ongoing sonic change that had been part of the expansion of Tehran since the late nineteenth century, with migrants bringing new sounds of voices, music and everyday practices.

Now you are our death-
And the war to be continued
Now you are our young
Now you are our youth
But the sound of your young death does not reach the north of Tehran
The bomb does not fall in the north of Tehran, and if it does, they only watch it
The sound of death does not reach Sāhebqarāniyeh, Farmāniyeh, Za'farāniyeh and Darband.[41]

Tehran's Hotel International

An interesting and rare account of war refugee life in Tehran is offered by the podcast series *Radio Nist* in an episode focused on the Hotel International, a large up-market privately-owned establishment, often cited as the first "modern" hotel of Tehran.[42] The building started life as an educational institution and became a hotel in the early 1960s, also serving as a venue for concerts and other events, the imposing, shiny, black grand piano reportedly being one of the first things seen on entering the lobby.[43] Soon after the 1979 Revolution, the building was occupied by students from Tehran's Science and Technology University, but within a short time was requisitioned by the new Foundation of the Oppressed (Bonyād-e Mostaz'afān) for use as accommodation for national sports competitions. Once the war started, the navy rented the building in order to house the families of their workers fleeing from the south. Discussants who were children at the time describe their excitement in exploring the hotel, including clambering over the grand piano "with our feet up and down to make it sound; we didn't know what it was and how valuable it was."[44] But conditions were hard for those who had abandoned their homes and left everything behind, including jobs, many as respected professionals. As

41. Rezā Barāheni, *Esma'il* (Tehran: Morgh-e Amin, 1987), 61–62. Translation by Armaghan Fakhraeirad. Parts of the poem can be accessed in English at https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/اسماعیل_(شعر) and https://www.asymptotejournal.com/poetry/reza-baraheni-ismael/. Accessed 10 July 2021. Sāhebqarāniyeh, Farmāniyeh, Za'farāniyeh and Darband are relatively affluent areas of north Tehran.

42. Radio Nist (podcast series), Episode 17, "Hotel International". Released 19 February 2021. Available at: https://open.spotify.com/episode/3obEeTbtZwdhxt4mlbr1X4

The description of the episode is as follows: "From the Dāneshsarā to the five-star hotel, somewhere at the intersection of Kurosh-e Kabir or Dr. Shariati streets today with Dāriush Street or Rasālat Street or the current Shahid Soleymāni Street. Tehran International Hotel has been an integral part of this region for half a century. Where it later became the residence of war victims in the south of the country. The fate of this hotel is one of the saddest stories told by Radio Nist." https://radionist-com.translate.goog/episods/?_x_tr_sl=fa&_x_tr_tl=en&_x_tr_hl=en&_x_tr_pto=nui,sc&_x_tr_sch=http Accessed 19 August 2021.

43. 17:06.

44. 26:31.

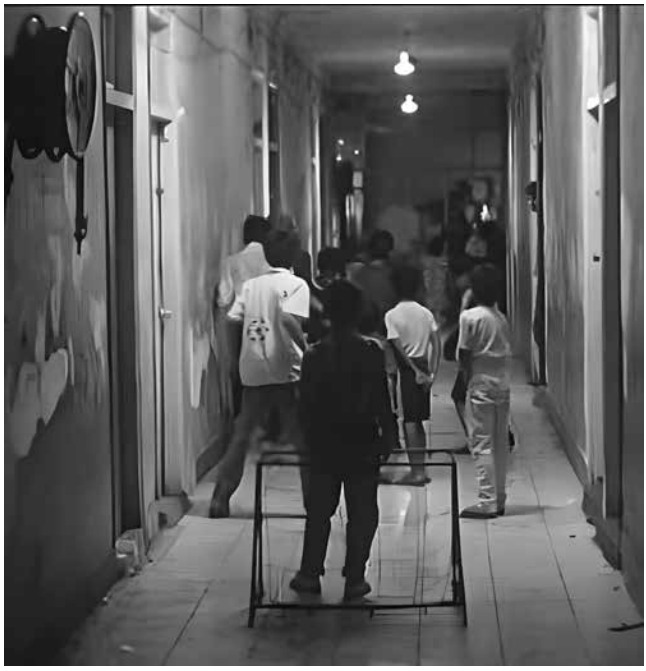


Figure 1. Children playing in the corridors of Tehran's Hotel International (Figures 1, 2 and 3 are from the "Radio Nist" Telegram channel. Sources are not stated.)

refugees, these people now found themselves "Othered" and labeled as "*ghorbatihā*"[45] or "*hotelihā*." Film director Abdorrezā Monjazi, who visited the hotel while searching for locations to shoot a film about war refugees (*Ābādānihā*), described the atmosphere:

> When you entered this space, it had its own special feel, the sounds of children, screams, laughter, groups of people next to the staircase, a few women with their Arab clothing, a few women sitting together cleaning rice or lentils in the corridor, one coming, one going, children playing on bicycles or playing football with a goal in the middle of the corridor ... 10 or 15 old men sitting and smoking their pipes in the garden, confused [*sargardān*], stranded [*belātaklif*] and traumatized by the war [*ranj dideh az jang*] ... 90% of them had probably never traveled to Tehran before. They weren't used to the cold. The kind of cold in the south is different.... Abadan was an advanced city, it had fancy clubs and cinemas, it had aspects of civilization that weren't

45. A derogatory term meaning "stranger,", "alien," or "foreigner," usually referring to migrants to the city from villages or small towns.

> even in Tehran … they had to get used to experiencing a very different kind of weather, geography, clothing, language, coming and going. It was very different.[46]

There are other interesting indications of the sounds of the hotel environment, including music, in the Radio Nist podcast. For instance, one woman recalls the song "Mihan ey Mihan" ("Homeland, oh Homeland"), sung by Mohammad Rezā Shajariān, that people would listen to on cassette or radio.[47]

Figure 2. People celebrating the liberation of Khorramshahr outside Tehran's Hotel International.

A particularly important historical moment was the liberation of Khorramshahr on 24 May 1982 (3 Khordad 1361) after 576 days of occupation by Iraqi forces. The following announcement was made on Radio Iran and broadcast across the nation: "Dear listeners, pay attention! Dear listeners, pay attention! Bloody City (Khuninshahr), City of Blood, has been liberated."[48] This announcement was one of the most iconic broadcasts of the war and sparked much celebration across Iran, after three years of conflict and mourning. As in other cities, the streets of Tehran filled with people dancing, ululating, and shouting happily, and it was a particularly joyful moment for the refugees who would finally be able to return home. All day, cars and trucks sounded their horns, people shook hands in the street, and many held up newspapers with the headline:

46. Radio Nist 34:22–36:06.

47. 26:47.

48. Khorramshahr gained the moniker *Khuninshahr* (lit: "city of blood") after its capture. For more information on the broadcast, see https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/محمود_کریمی_علویجه (Accessed 12 September 2021).

"Khorramshahr Has Been Liberated." Radio Nist reports on ear-witness accounts of the celebrations just outside Tehran's Hotel International, for instance:

> The women were in the middle of the street ululating and playing *senj* [cymbals] ... *tabl* and *dohol* [drums] and maybe 20 people were leaning out of windows celebrating joyously. There were chocolates with red wrapping and Danish pastries.... I saw it myself. In their happiness, they would stop the cars one by one and stick flowers in the windscreen wipers and ask drivers to turn on their wipers and indicators before moving on.[49]

The liberation of Khorramshahr and the sounds of collective happiness on the streets are an important part of the sonic memory of the war period and are intertwined in the national consciousness. The sound of the radio announcement in particular lives on in the memories of those who experienced it.[50] Coming after several years of revolution, war, and the associated violence, anxiety, loss, and trauma, many describe this as the first national public celebration after the revolution. One of the most well-known songs of the war era, "Mammad Nabudi," an arrangement of a folk melody from the south usually sung during the holy month of Muharram, was broadcast on radio and television in a performance by the Khorramshahri religious singer Gholāmali Koveytipur and became a soundtrack to the celebrations.[51] But hopes of an end to the war were dashed when Iraq's proposed ceasfire was rejected by Ayatollah Khomeini who, boosted by Iran's recent advances, vowed to continue until Saddam was removed from power. The war thus dragged on for another six years, with much loss of life on both sides and with Iraq increasingly bolstered by additional Western military support. The rejection of the 1982 ceasefire was devastating to the displaced people who had fully expected the war to end. As such, memories of the celebrations are inseparable from those of the traumatic realizations of not (yet or maybe ever) being able to return home.

The liberation of Khorramshahr was a crucial turning point in the war: while support at home had hitherto focused on resisting the aggressor enemy, the decision to extend the war created much division, within the government and among the populace. Meanwhile, living conditions deteriorated in the hotel, as it became increasingly over-crowded with the arrival of more refugees and fell into a general state of disrepair,

49. Arash Saket (Radio Nist), 28:01–28:37. For further examples of the celebrations that followed the news of the liberation of Khorramshahr, see https://www.parsine.com/fa/news/623833/ویدیو%7C-20%شادی-مردم-تهران-پس-از-آزادی-خرمشهر&and%20; and see also https://defapress.ir/fa/news/347544/زدگان-را-فتح-کرد-طعم-شیرین-شادی-دور-از-خانه%E2%80%8Cخبری-که-قلب-جنگ

50. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcEbEjMZoug for the sound of the original announcement of the liberation of Khorramshahr, set to footage of the war and street celebrations. Accessed 12 September 2021.

51. See https://www.aparat.com/v/Hiat2. Accessed 17 July 2021). For further discussion of this song, see the following BBC Persian Service item by Kāveh Meshkāt (from 9:33) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wt2jgLcPJvU&feature=youtube.

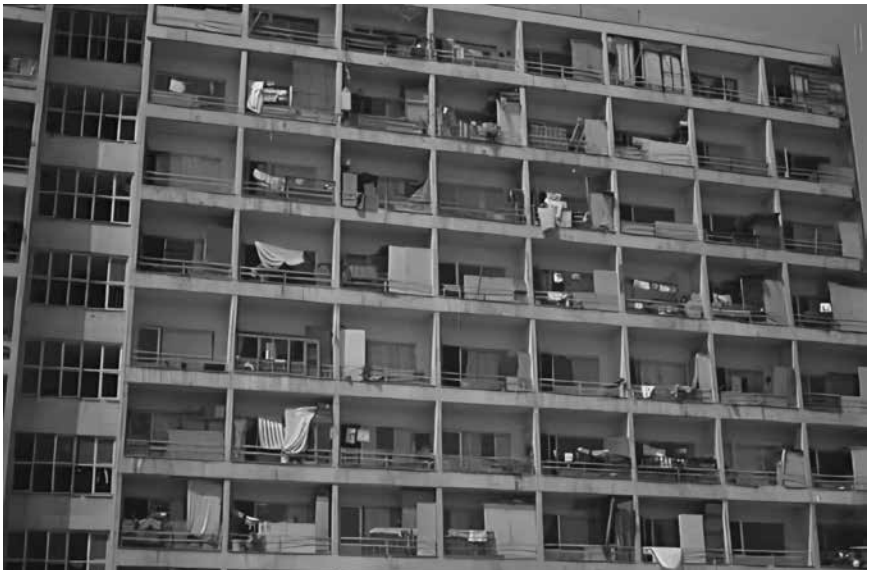


Figure 3. Hotel International in the 1980s

particularly after its management passed to the Foundation for War Refugees (Bonyād-e Jangzadehhā) in 1984. But there were also happy memories, with sounds leaking from the description of writer and theater director Hāmun Qābchi, who lived there as a child:

> We didn't just have bad memories, we had good memories too.... the hotel was full of noise and the sounds of different rooms, with their stories, their conflicts, their happiness.... In one room there would be a wedding, in another a funeral, elsewhere there would be news of a war martyr. If a family didn't have a television, they would share with one that did.... I remember a middle-aged woman who had lost her entire family in the war bombing; she had a color television and it was a real blessing for us that we were able to watch the cartoons that were broadcast at that time in color.[52]

After the war ended in 1988, the hotel continued to house refugees, but there was increasing pressure to repurpose the building, and the last residents left in 1993.

It is clear from the accounts above that sound, memory and affect are tightly interwoven in people's experiences. While we have considered some of the sounds of the hotel in its role as a sanctuary for refugees, we might also think about this physical site as a sonic "palimpsest," with the sounds of different eras overwritten but still somehow legible/audible. With the hotel's demolition in 1997, we are left with an ostensibly "silent" space (now replaced by a shopping arcade), one that allows us to imagine the vari-

52. Radio Nist 39:30–40:18.

ous sounds continuing to reverberate through the decades: from the building's original use as a school to its subsequent life as a five-star hotel (ca. 1963–1979), its short time occupied by students directly after the revolution, and finally (1980–1993) as a space resonating with the accents, music, and everyday sounds of refugees. Returning to the idea of "auditory scars," we might perhaps think of these sonic echoes as scars, just as the demolished hotel itself leaves a scar on the skin of Tehran.

Tehran's Everyday Wartime Sounds

Having considered the sonic experiences of war refugees in Tehran, and their impact on the sounds of the city, we now move on to consider other sounds of war in the capital at this time. Day-to-day life in post-revolutionary Iran had already undergone dramatic change in the eighteen months between the revolution of February 1979 and the start of the war in September 1980. Such changes were particularly audible and visible in the public domain as a result of the "Islamization" of public space that also infiltrated many aspects of private life. With the start of the conflict, war propaganda was added to these, as seen in murals, billboards, television programs, and so on.

Similar to the situation described by Wood, while civilians in Tehran were relatively distant from the fighting, war was a constant presence in their lives as described above, with family members drafted into the military, war wounded returning from the front, and an awareness of living at the center of political decision making. As we have argued, people's experiences of sound are entirely relational and can only be understood as they interact with other sounds as part of a wider sonic ecology. Reflecting on the broader sonics of Tehran at this time, Abbās Kāzemi, for instance, writes about the long queues outside shops, which "became an important and inevitable part of the life experience,"[53] a routine ritual that also served to entertain people at a time when more usual entertainment activities were suspended. Queues were also an opportunity for people to discuss daily events and communicate with neighbors. In addition to the sounds of queuing, there were associated auditory experiences, such as the announcement of coupon numbers on television and radio (informing people when to queue for different commodities and a main motivation for many to listen to the news), as well as widely circulating queue-related jokes.

Several of those we talked to recalled the almost continual sound of military marches in public space, a way of ensuring that the war was uppermost in people's minds, even in places distant from the war zone. Prominent film director Rakhshan Banietemad, who has dealt with the aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War in several of her films (and in particular the impact on women as carers of the war wounded),[54] recalls:

53. Abbās Kāzemi, *Amr-e ruzmarreh dar jāme'eh-ye pasâenqelābi* (Tehran: Farhang-e Javid, 2016), 67.

54. See for instance her feature films *Bānu-ye Ordibehesht* (The May Lady, 1998) and *Gilāneh* (2005).

> I remember at the time of the war, what could be heard in the space [*fazā*] of the city pretty much continually was the sound of war marches which were broadcast from places like mosques, and even during school breaks in playgrounds. It was as if we continually needed to be reminded of the war. People living far from the border area war zones were not directly caught up [*dargir*] in the war, other than – for somewhere like Tehran, where I was living at the time – during the two main periods of bombing [*mushak bārān*].[55]

Another discussant related the following:

> In school, every morning we would shout "death to Saddam Hussein," "death to America," "death to Israel," before going into class. That was the soundtrack of our schools and I absolutely despised that. To the point that later on when I was a little older, I think I was in my last year of high school, and I could hear a school nearby broadcasting over their loudspeakers and it was so loud that it dominated the entire neighborhood. I was so frustrated because I was trying to study, so I went into the school. It was a small elementary school for boys and I told the head teacher or the person who was shouting into the microphone that they should turn it down and all the little boys turned around and looked at me in shock. I think that was something out of the ordinary that I did, but I was literally tired of this sound that dominated the neighborhood for a good portion of the day, every day.[56]

Such sonic control of public space continued and extended some of the practices that had started soon after the revolution and which became intensified during the war years and were also contested in various ways. Parvin described the contrast with the sonic environment of her home:

> At the same time, growing up as a young child and as a teenager, in the home the soundtrack was completely different. My father used to have a small radio and we listened to Radio Israel, Radio Iraq, the BBC, whatever we could get reception for. My father thought that these kind of stations actually told the truth about the war, or otherwise we couldn't get accurate information about what was going on in the battlefields. My father was sent to the front as a civil engineer at an early stage of the war and he got shot, and for the remainder of that war we were all very curious about what was going on and we always followed everything.... Also, during the days of the revolution, one of the things my parents did was to go to music stores and buy as many cassettes as possible, because they knew that these would be unobtainable. So the entire collection of the Beatles, you name it, the Bee Gees, all of these things that were very popular during the 1970s and we would listen to them well into

55. Personal correspondence, 12 August 2021.
56. Parvin, female, aged 48, personal correspondence, 15 September 2021.

> the 1990s; we would still listen to music from the 70s that my parents had collected before this music was banned. That was the music of our lives, and as years passed by the music became more and more passé, but we would still hold onto it as a little window of hope, if you will.[57]

Banietemad notes how semi-public spaces such as cars were used to contest or escape the totalizing sounds of the state emanating from public loudspeakers or national broadcasters:

> I remember at the time of war, people with the radio on in their cars, quite often reporting news of the war and the front, or military marches. And on the other hand, some people who listened to various kinds of music in their cars. And I remember whenever I stopped at traffic lights, the contrast between these sounds caught my attention, as if one car wanted to engage with the reality of every moment of the war through the sounds of the radio; and on the other side some who wanted to escape from this reality and usually the sound of music was of loud, happy [pop] music. And I felt these two different spaces from the cars around me, these contrasting sounds of happy music and military marches at the same time. And, well, it was at the traffic lights that I became aware of it, but if you imagine all the cars traveling around the city, you could hear these two situations as someone living with the reality of the time and a very large group trying to escape from it.[58]

Music broadcast on radio and television at this time was mainly limited to military music and revolutionary anthems, including performances by (usually teenage) boy choirs singing elegies to orchestral accompaniment. Such groups fitted well into the post-revolutionary wartime culture and one of the most popular, Children of Abadeh (Bachehā-ye Abādeh, based in the town of Abadeh) became well-known nationally through its performance of the song "The Story of Father" ("Qesseh-ye Bābā"),[59] composed by Ahmad Tavakkoli, who had formed the group in 1977. As Tavakkoli describes in the documentary series *Razm-e Āhang*, his inspiration was a conversation with a pupil who had lost his father in the war. He relates that he asked the boy if he ever saw his father in his dreams, to which the boy replied, "Yes, I just saw him a couple of nights ago. I was going to embrace him."[60] The song describes the strong emotions of a son missing his father and attempting to have conversations with him through dreams. It ends with a message from the father about the war, drawing parallels with the battle of Karbala and the death of Imam Husayn, a story often invoked during the war as means of help-

57. Ibid.

58. Rakhshan Banietemad, personal correspondence, 12 August 2021.

59. See https://www.mehrnews.com/news/2408479/گروه-سرود-بچه-های-آباده-کجا-هستند. Accessed 15 September 2021.

60. Paya Ahmadi. *Razm-e Ahang (Qesseh-ye Bābā)*. Documentary series. Mostanad TV, 2017. http://www.doctv.ir/program/154355. 0:09:22.

ing people come to terms with their loss. A number of scholars have discussed the use of Karbala symbolism in cultural production at this time, including as a form of state propaganda.[61] Such anthems also served as a means of collective mourning and were circulated among soldiers at the front, and Children of Abadeh was even invited to perform for troops in Ahvaz.[62] This genre of war song has been largely neglected in the literature, despite the fact that it was a constant feature of the wartime "mediascape" of Iran.

While the traumatic effects of the war were not experienced equally by all, government-promoted cultural productions aimed to generate a collective grief for the war dead, who were hailed as martyrs. Such productions ranged from public funerals and amplified *nowheh* (lamentations), to the naming of streets, mass media programs, music for children, war songs, and documentary films. Kāzemi notes how even the content of children's cartoons was largely about the loss of a parent, in his view aiming to prepare for a "fatherless society."[63] As one discussant, Narges, described: "there was a song that was broadcast on TV a lot between the cartoons. I hated it. Whenever I heard it, I went to my room and burst into tears. It was such torture. It did not let me forget that I had lost my father."[64] Narges's father was not killed at the front but died of a heart attack in 1984 when she was five years old, ultimately her family believes due to the stress of displacement from Khorramshahr because of the war.

As already noted, many of the sounds of public space during the Iran-Iraq War served as a form of sonic control, and in particular the management of public (and even private) affect. From war marches and lamentations to sirens (see below) and radio and television broadcasts, sound served to manipulate public sentiment and arguably to break down the sense of self. But there was also agency, as described above by Parvin. An important aspect of life in 1980s Iran was the revitalization of Iranian classical music (*musiqi-ye asil* or *musiqi-ye sonnati*), somewhat unexpected given the circumstances, but which was closely connected to the return-to-roots revival of national consciousness that was an important part of the broad movement that led to the revolution and that shared much with anti-colonial liberation struggles elsewhere. Of particular interest was how this music took on a new kind of social relevance and for the first time gained a mass audience, spearheaded by prominent musicians such as the singers Mohammad Rezā Shajariān and Shahrām Nāzeri and instrumentalist/composers Mohammad Rezā Lotfi and Hossein Alizādeh.[65] This also led to a large number of people learning musical

61. See for instance Roxanne Varzi, *Warring Souls: Youth, Media, and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

62. *Razm-e Āhang* 0:24:48. According to the film, the choir was also invited to meet Khomeini at his home in Jamārān, purportedly the only time that a musical instrument was allowed into the house (*Razm-e Āhang* 0:21:45).

63. Kāzemi, *Amr-e ruzmarreh*, 100.

64. Narges, female, aged 42, personal correspondence, June 2021.

65. See Laudan Nooshin, "Two Revivalist Moments in Iranian Classical Music," in *The Oxford Handbook of Musical Revival*, ed. Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 277–299.

instruments for the first time. Whilst restrictions on concert performances and government control of broadcasting meant that this kind of music was rarely heard in public – and bearing in mind that Iran was officially in a perpetual state of mourning – the classical music of this period became for many (and not just in Tehran) a very personal soundtrack to the war years. It was sometimes broadcast, but more generally circulated on cassette tapes, often duplicated privately. As Banietemad describes:

> Music at this time found a very particular situation. Separate from the military marches and the film music, a few works of Shajariān had a very profound impact.... it wasn't about encouraging people to go to the front, but somehow getting close to and empathizing [*hamdeli*] with the tragedy that the war brought to those who went to the front [*razmandehhā*]. In works that Shajariān produced, and performances with Lotfi and other musicians; and also a series of music produced by groups in the south, in Luristan, and so on. At that time, some of the performances in response to the war had a really powerful impact on people in a way that was much more profound than the news and the rest.[66]

In addition, as noted, there was also sonic agency in relation to the circulation of popular music, which had largely been banned after the revolution, but this played a very different role from that described for *musiqi-ye asil*, which became an important forum for expressions of social justice.

Missile Strikes on Tehran

> Attention! Attention! The sound that you are hearing is the announcement of danger or red alert. And this means that there is going to be an airstrike. Leave your workplace immediately and seek shelter.[67]

In 1984, a new phase of the war started. In what became known as the battle of the cities, Iran and Iraq, both desperate to gain the upper hand in what seemed like an interminable conflict, targeted civilian centers, including the capitals Tehran and Baghdad, as well as smaller cities. Of all the sounds related to the war, for those living in Tehran it is the several periods of bombing between 1984 and 1988 that is most ingrained in people's memories. Indeed, when talking more generally about sonic memories of Tehran, for those old enough to remember, the sounds of sirens and bombing (*mushak bārān*, literally "missile raining") are often the first thing that people mention, perhaps after the sounds of traffic. An intensely somatic experience, its sheer physicality was noted again and again in discussion, as in the following from Banietemad:[68]

66. Personal correspondence, 12 August 2021.

67. Red alert siren sounds. https://www.aparat.com/v/YKw9x/ Accessed 10 August 2021.

68. Personal correspondence 12 August 202. We are intensely aware of how personal and painful such memories can be and are very grateful to our discussants for sharing these with us.

> A very personal memory. I was pregnant and our flat was on the 4th floor. When the siren sounded, I ran down the stairs and I still don't know whether I heard the sound of the missile hitting the ground first or saw the white light that is just like you see in science fiction films. All the windows of the building facing the street became white and colorless, and from the wave of the explosion [*mowj-e enfejār*] I was thrown down the stairs. After a while we heard that a missile had landed close to our house and had completely destroyed a four-story building. This personal experience of hearing a missile fall close by was a very strange one: more than a sound, it was a frequency [*ferekāns*], a frequency that shook the depths of my being. The baby's heart beat couldn't be heard for twelve hours after the explosion. It was a very unfamiliar feeling [*kheyli gharib bud*] and for a long time I asked myself, what kind of sound or quality of sound is this that more than being heard was felt? And was it the sound that I heard first or the very strange white light that lit up everywhere.[69]

This testimony resonates strongly with Nafisi's description of the bombings quoted at the start of the chapter – "It was not just the very loud noise – if one could call it a noise – of the explosion: more than the sound, we *felt* the explosion, like the fall of a massive weight on the house. The house shook, and the glass trembled in the window frames"[70] – suggesting a "more-than-sonic" experience in which the extreme sounds of war become physically inscribed in the body and never really leave. Similarly, in the account of another discussant:

> At the time of the air raids, the sound was so loud that I could hear it with every inch of my body. I plugged my ears as hard as I could, but it did not matter.... my skin, my organs, my whole body heard it when it hit. I still have anxieties about loud sounds. It was truly an experience unlike any other in my life.[71]

Echoing the experiences of those who lived through the bombings of Abadan and Khorramshahr, several discussants described the constant sense of alertness and a generally heightened sensitivity to sound:

> Another thing is that truly at that time our sensitivity to sound, everyone's sensitivity to sound was greatly increased. For instance, the lorries that carry building materials are usually only allowed to move at night, and the sound of a pile of bricks being unloaded would generate the exact same anxiety

69. There are many descriptions of people in wartime, or hearing extreme bass sounds, feeling sound physically. At such times, the haptic physicality of sound becomes particularly noticeable. Interestingly, the origin of the term "stereo" is the Greek "*stereos*," meaning "firm" or "solid."

70. Nafisi, *Reading Lolita*, 207. Emphasis in original.

71. Parvin, female, aged 48, personal correspondence, 15 September 2021.

> [*hamān harās*] as we felt after hearing the red siren, and it seems like our state of mind was such that we heard it as the collapsing of a building. It was like that for a lot of people.[72]

In particular, Banietemad observes the long-term impact on those who were children at the time:

> Many of the children who were born during the missile attacks, and particularly those who were as yet unborn, like my daughter, were for many years extremely sensitive to sound. It was as though the missile that fell near our house while I was pregnant impacted on her for years and any unexpected sound, even something ordinary like a door slamming, would send her into a fright.[73]

Aida talked about what some authors have referred to as the "fearscape":[74]

> What I remember most in relation to sound – aside from sirens and the light flash that also had a sound – was really the sound of fear, of people's fear, in their talking voices, in their breathing, in their hurrying towards the shelter. I remember this all as sound. And then the sound when the electricity was cut and everything went quiet. That was somehow a deafening silence ... and these are all together in my mind: fear, silence, and darkness [*tars*, *sokut*, *tāriki*]. These were the most important sounds that I remember in addition to the sirens and the bombs. And also about using the sound of my own voice to make sure that I was not alone, so that someone would reply to me.[75]

Even more than the bombing, people talked about the fear triggered (still today) by the sound of sirens, which released an embodied anticipation of the now always hypervigilant body even before the actual sounds were heard.[76] In Tehran and other cities, the siren was broadcast from loudspeakers located on public buildings and mosques, as well as on radio and television. Many of the loudspeakers installed in the 1980s are still in

72. Rakhshan Banietemad, personal correspondence, 12 August 2021.

73. Ibid. This phenomenon of hyper-sensitivity to sound by those who have experienced conflict situations is well documented, as is the potential of sudden sounds to trigger traumatic memories. A touching recent example was when the Syrian refugee puppet Amal visited London in October 2021, and the puppeteers moved her hands to her ears at the loud sound of a passing train, to indicate that this reminded her of the sounds of war.

74. See, for example, Sykes, "Ontologies and Acoustic Endurance"; and Wood "'I thought it was a song but it turned out to be a siren.'"

75. Aida, female, aged 41, personal correspondence, 13 October 2021.

76. For an overview of earlier studies of sirens in wartime see Wood "'I thought it was a song but it turned out to be a siren.'" Alexander Rehding writes about the history of the siren and the developments that led to the first electric siren in 1885: Alexander Rehding, "Of Sirens Old and New," in *The Oxford Handbook of Mobile Music Studies*, volume 2, ed. Sumanth Gopinath and Jason Stanyek (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 77–106.

place today. Figure 4 shows the image that would be shown on television by Sedā va Simā (the national broadcasting organization) while the siren was sounding, cutting into any program that was airing. Mohammad Ali Abtahi, a former vice president of Iran who headed the National Radio during the war, reports on his blog that the siren sound was recorded before the revolution in anticipation of hostilities with Iraq that had been brewing for some time.[77] His claim that the siren is "the most listened-to part of [Iranian] radio in its history" is most likely true and he recalls that Sedā va Simā "record[ed] short calming messages that we would broadcast after the red status and before the white status was announced" as a way of reassuring people.

Many people described never being able to forget the sounds of the sirens; indeed, recalling these today (even without hearing them) elicits a similar embodied response, as in the following testimony which also invokes the nation as a listening body. This discussant was in their early teens during the period of bombing:

> One of the sounds that for my generation is quite unforgettable, but in a terrible way [*vahshatnāk*], such that even without hearing it, just thinking about it makes me feel ill [*hālam kheyli bad misheh*]. Aside from the sounds of bombs, explosions and so on, the sounds of sirens – red [*āzhir-e qermez*] and white [*āzhir-e sefid*] – the red siren was for when the attack was about to start and the white siren was the all-clear. I can't even describe it to you because it makes me feel ill. These are sounds that will definitely remain in the memory of Iran.[78]

Similar physical and embodied responses were recently reported on YouTube in the comments section of a posted recording of the siren and its announcement (quoted at the start of this section):

> I am 47 years old and I was 8 or 9 when I ... heard this sound. It brings a chill down my spine and brings back all the memories of that time (2021).[79]

> Omg my mom hated this sound and so do I it gives me the creeps even though I'm born in 2009.[80]

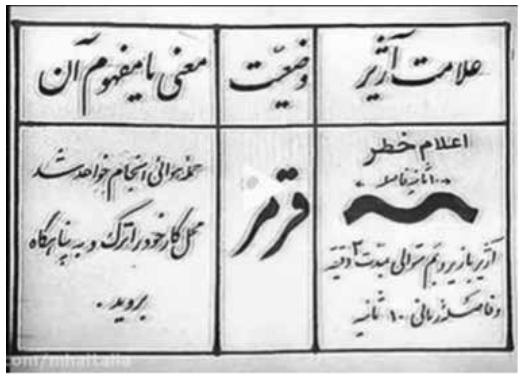
There are clear parallels in this discussion with broader "regimes of hypervigilant listen-

77. http://www.webneveshteha.com/weblog/?id=2146310420 (accessed 20.9.21). My thanks to Sara Feili for drawing my attention to this blogpost. Tension over the disputed Shatt al-Arab waterway dates back many decades. See Richard Schofield, "Interpreting a vague river boundary delimitation: the 1847 Erzerum treaty and the Shatt al-Arab before 1913," in *The Boundaries of Modern Iran*, ed. Keith McLachlan (London : UCL Press, 1994), 72–92.

78. Parisa, female, aged 49, personal communication, 15 April 2021.

79. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3uQ3o6v944U. Accessed 12 September 2021.

80. Ibid.



Meaning or concept	Status	Siren Sign
The airstrike will take place. Leave your workplace and go to the shelter	Red	Caution for danger 10-seconds apart 3 minute siren with consecutive high and low pitches 10 seconds apart

Figure 4. Siren alert public information notice and translation

ing" as described by Wood and which arguably also serve to discipline the civilian body in particular ways:

> Marking an impending moment of violent impact, references to the siren stand out in Jewish-Israeli descriptions of wartime sound – yet I argue that the salience of the siren as a marker of fear is rooted less in its momentary sound but in the regimes of hypervigilant listening in which it is embedded. These regimes of listening, in turn, implicate the civilian's relationship with the state: the siren system is the responsibility of the Home Front Command … and public instructions for how to act on hearing a siren are the primary way in which the HFC interacts with the public during wartime.[81]

One response to the exhaustion of continual sonic hypervigilance was to turn the sound off:

> We were supposed to keep the radio on at night in case the siren went off.

81. Wood, "'I thought it was a song but it turned out to be a siren.'" 188.

> But sometimes I just turned it off and preferred not to hear the siren; if there was to be no danger then I wouldn't be woken up and if something happened, well we didn't have a shelter as such, we just went down a few floors and there was never safety really. So sometimes I would just turn the radio off. But I will never forget the continual sound of the siren together with the intense anxiety [*delhoreh*] of that extraordinary time [*dowrān*] of the missile strikes and bombing of Tehran.[82]

A constant thread through this chapter and encountered repeatedly in disccussions, is the immense significance of the sounds of broadcast media, particularly radio, at this time: whether as an affective and sensory connection to a larger local or national collective, a trigger to seek refuge, or a form of comfort. As noted, some of the most iconic moments of the war are recalled vividly through their radio announcements. More generally, many describe the radio as an almost constant sonic backdrop (often with the simultaneous sounds of television), a saturation of private and semi-private spaces such as homes and cars. The only way to "escape" the war was to turn the radio off or drown it out with other sounds such as (prohibited) pop music. This heightened presence and importance of radio during periods of conflict has been noted and discussed elsewhere. Writing about Britain during World War II, Wiebe describes the role of radio in "providing a crucial sense of aural continuity amidst disruption,"[83] and Deer similarly notes that radio "shaped the sensory landscape of wartime like no other medium."[84] On the one hand, radio has played a recognized role in fostering a sense of national belonging and unity, important in any war effort; on the other, it can often represent the voice of authority to which citizens stand in a complex and sometimes conflicted relationship. Wiebe's observations of 1940s Britain (also quoting from the work of Jeffrey Sconce) are highly pertinent to what was happening in Iran in the 1980s: "for some, it was 'a system for binding together a national audience, even against its own will,' invading homes and dissolving the private sphere while forcing 'participation in a vast and possibly terrifying public sphere.'"[85] At a more fundamental level are the ways in which "radio shapes the very conceptualization of sound and listening,"[86] discussion of which lies beyond the scope of this chapter.

It is not difficult to find personal footage and news reports online, offering some

82. Rakhshan Banietemad personal correspondence 12 August 2021.

83. Heather Wiebe, "Morale as Sonic Force: *Listen to Britain* and Total War," *Sound Studies* 7:1 (2021): 29–30.

84. Patrick Deer, *Culture in Camouflage: War, Empire, and Modern British Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 132 and 134.

85. Wiebe, "Morale as Sonic Force," 30, quoting Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 109.

86. Ibid.

sense of the sonic experiences of this period.[87] And while there is arguably little that has been described in this chapter that differs significantly from the sounds of war elsewhere, it is also important to consider the particularities of the Tehran context where the arrival of the "direct" sounds of war followed seamlessly on from several years of post-revolutionary control and saturation of sonic space; the new sounds of warfare were understood by many as an extension of this, returning us to questions of disciplinary bodily control. In other words, as Wood observes, the modes of listening at this time "articulate[d] a point of intersection between public practices of securitisation led by the state, embodied practices of civilian citizenship, and individual affect and agency."[88]

What is very apparent in the above discussion, then, is the power of sound to subjectify and to (re)inscribe power relations. The war may have been initiated by Iraq, but it served the purpose of certain factions of the post-1979 Iranian government and the resulting assertion of power was notably marked through the sonic domination of public space, whether through music, public announcements, sirens, or missiles. What we want to argue, then, is that – notwithstanding the importance of everyday civilian experiences of war – these more "extreme" sonic events take on enormous significance and become deeply embedded in bodily memories. It is clear from the testimonies above that such auditory scars continue to resonate in the after-memory of succeeding generations who have no personal recollection of the war, as well as in the national consciousness, "the memory of Iran." And, returning to where we began this story, while the historic role of oil in the entanglement of Abadan-Khorramshahr and Tehran has somewhat receded into the background, it remains a central linchpin, a ghostly presence that has shaped the urban soundscape for more than a century. Ultimately, we argue, bombs and sirens can be understood as sonic manifestations of oil and the quest to control it.

Concluding Comments

> This amount of pain, this amount of fear, that was tied to moments we didn't really understand at the time, not until the war was over, many years later. For years, the sounds of construction and road building really stressed me out [*moteshannej mikard*]. At first I thought it was me, and then I discovered that all my family members are the same, *all* of them. That sound was the same as the aeroplanes, not one or two but 70 or 100 that made the city black [because they blocked out the sunlight], and they were so close that we could actually *feel* them. The stress and fear that we suffered at that time ... for me, 1370 [1991] to 1375 [1996] was the height of the stress that was

87. See, for instance, this UK 'News at 10' broadcast (24 March 1988), which also highlights the class disparities in shelter conditions https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tmq1Sq0ankc. Accessed 21 June 2021.

88. Wood, "'I thought it was a song but it turned out to be a siren,'" 2.

> the legacy of the war. The stress of my father going to work and not knowing whether he will return, that was with me until maybe 1380 [2001]. Or the quality of anxiety that in the middle of the day – years had passed since the war – my mother still asked if I had phoned my father at work to check that he is ok. Or a loud banging sound still makes you feel fear or makes you jump at the age of 45. Because you have lived it as a reality. A missile has fallen close to you [*bikh-e gushet*, literally "next to your ear"].[89]

Interviewed in 2020, Zahra explains to Radio Marz host Marziyeh why the war is still not over for her and probably never will be. Another war survivor responds, "I still have that feeling of insecurity … after 40 years. I mean, whenever the war is mentioned, I start to feel sick to my stomach [*ye hāli misham*] and I remember those days, those insecurities, going to sleep at night and really not knowing if we would still be there in the morning."[90]

This chapter has explored the profound entanglement of sound, affect, and memory through the lens of one particular conflict and with a focus on two major urban centers that were impacted by it. We ask what it means to listen to and remember sonic experiences, including traumatic ones, at a distance of several decades. Where do those memories sit and what are their legacies: the sounds that still resonate in minds and bodies and that live on in the inherited memories and transferred trauma of people who were not even alive in the 1980s? Writing about the Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, China, Rachel Harris observes:

> individual experiences of trauma may be transmitted within families to future generations and become part of the collective memories of whole social groups: forms of cultural trauma that arise in response to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, or a tear in the social fabric.[91]

More than a tear, the Iran-Iraq War created a gaping wound in Iran's social fabric, a wound to which sound was central. Beyond individual memories, such sounds are alive in the collective imagination and we hear their memorialization in documentaries, novels and (more recently) podcasts, including the affect-laden sounds of voices bearing witness. Telling the stories of how individuals' lives have been impacted by the legacy of World War II, the BBC program *Legacy of War* observes:

> There is a sense in which none of us really begin with a clean slate. From childhood we are shaped by the things that shaped the generation before us.... All our lives are, in part, an accumulation, deepening like a coastal shelf.

89. Zahra, Radio Marz, Episode 24, 40:36–42:57.

90. Ibid., 94:30–94:55.

91. Rachel Harris, *Soundscapes of Uyghur Islam* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2020), 201.

> Is it ever possible to draw a line and walk into the future unaccompanied by fragments of the past? … While the physical injuries of war heal and scars fade, emotional wounds can remain open, continuing to affect the lives of those wounded and the lives of those who follow. These emotional wounds filter down through the generations and can still be felt today."[92]

So in Iran, the sonic legacy of the Iran-Iraq War filters down the generations, continuing to echo and ripple through Iranian society. It seems fitting to end with the words of Forugh Farrokhzad and her prophetic invocation to the endurance of sound when all else has faded away:

> Sound, sound, only sound
> Pleading sound, of clear running water
> Sprinkling sound, of starlight on sheltered mother earth
> Setting sound, of the seed of meaning
> And the growing link of mind and love
> Sound, sound, only sound remains.[93]

92. Extracts from the BBC Radio 4 series *Legacy of War*. Episode 1 (released 20.5.2020) (7:36–7:46); Episode 3 (released 27 May 2020) (3:02–3:15) and Episode 4 (0:36–0:56). See https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000j2rb. Accessed 17 August 2021.

93. From "Only Sound Remains," Forugh Farrokhzad, translation by Jilah Peacock.

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