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Liberating Music?
A Marxist Critique of Revolutionary Songs in Iran

Ali Bakan
PhD in Art Studies, Aras International Campus, University of Tehran

Abstract
This article examines the hidden capacities of popular songs in Iran to instigate revolutionary movements from a Marxist critical perspective. By posing the central question of whether music is merely an instrument for expressing emotions or can function as a material force and productive agent in social transformations, the article analyzes the context of production, dissemination, and influence of these songs within the class relations of Iranian society. While elucidating music's potential to stimulate class consciousness, strengthen proletarian solidarity, and organize the masses, the article also addresses its weaknesses, limitations, and mechanisms of co-optation when confronted with capitalist and state power structures. Ultimately, this research offers a critical conclusion regarding the actual role and function of music in the process of revolution and class struggle.

Keywords: Music, revolutionary song, Marxist critique, revolutionary movement, Iran, class consciousness

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Email :akan@ut.ac.ir

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To what extent can revolutionary anthems in Iran transcend the level of emotional expression to function as a material force in shaping class consciousness and cultural resistance against ideological mechanisms?

Extended Abstract

This article employs a Marxist critical framework to analyze the dual potential of revolutionary anthems in contemporary Iranian history. It interrogates whether these musical forms are merely instruments for affective expression or can function as a "material force" capable of shaping class consciousness and advancing radical social transformation. Moving beyond conventional formalist or descriptive analyses, the study examines the dialectical relationship between music as a superstructural phenomenon and the underlying socio-economic base of production relations. The analysis is grounded in the theories of Marx, Gramsci, Althusser, and Adorno. From a classical Marxist perspective, revolutionary songs like Az Khoon-e Javanan-e Vatan and Morgh-e Sahar are not passive reflections of social contradictions but active agents in producing critical consciousness by articulating class oppression and emancipatory aspirations. Drawing on Gramsci's concept of "cultural hegemony," the article argues that music can serve as a counter-hegemonic tool, challenging the dominant class's values and contributing to the collective organization and solidarity of subaltern classes.

However, the analysis dialectically acknowledges the inherent limitations of music's influence. Referencing Adorno's "Culture Industry" and Althusser's "Ideological State Apparatuses," it highlights the perpetual risk of co-optation, commodification, and absorption by state and capitalist power structures. This process can neutralize art's emancipatory potential, transforming it into a tool for reproducing the dominant ideology, as exemplified by the state's utilization of some revolutionary anthems post-1979 to consolidate its own power. The text also considers a neo-Gramscian view, suggesting that underground music produced outside the Culture Industry can create "subcultural resistance" and foster revolutionary subjectivity.

In conclusion, the author posits that music's revolutionary capacity is conditional, contingent upon class conditions and the organizational level of social movements. Music alone does not create a revolution. Its emancipatory potential is actualized only when it is intrinsically linked to organized class struggle and remains autonomous from the logic of the Culture Industry and ideological co-optation. Therefore, music is neither a fully independent phenomenon nor a passive reflection but a contested field of ideological struggle.

Revolutionary music and anthems are not merely instruments for affective expression; rather, within the context of the relations of production and class struggle, they can serve as active agents in the production of critical consciousness and collective organization. Drawing upon the theories of Marx, Gramsci, and Adorno, the author contends that the emancipatory value of music is preserved only when it distances itself from the logic of commodification and the Culture Industry, finding its meaning in connection with social praxis and cultural resistance. This critical stance is rooted in a materialist analysis of culture.

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