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Composing Otherwise: Actualizing Difference in Persian Musical Ontology

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Abstract This article undertakes an ontological and sociopolitical enquiry into Persian classical music within the broader context of globalization. It interrogates how Persian music has been shaped by historical encounters and ideological tensions, and focuses on the *radif* (the repertory of Persian melodic models) as both constraint and generative site. Drawing upon Deleuze's philosophy of difference and becoming, it reimagines Persian music not as a fixed tradition but as a dynamic process. Composition is approached as an ontological enquiry, through which Persian music resists essentialism, engages with internal tensions, and actualizes itself as difference in motion — an ever-unfolding field of transformative possibility.

The Glocality of Difference: Art, Power, and the Pursuit of Cultural Democratization

At a time when artistic practices are increasingly subject to the dual pressures of economic instrumentalization and ideological control, the question of how cultural difference is negotiated within global networks assumes new urgency.[1] Persian music, long situated at the crossroads of empire, modernity, and resistance, presents a particularly fertile case through which to examine the shifting power dynamics that characterize contemporary cultural production. The reciprocal entanglement of global reach and local particularity — rather than their simple opposition — forms the structural condition of the present, demanding nuanced strategies for sustaining aesthetic autonomy without retreating into essentialism. In this opening section, I examine how globalization shapes cultural dynamics and power structures that impact artistic practices. My aim is to contextualize the contemporary condition of Persian music by exploring the complex tensions between global cultural homogenization and local difference, using the concept of *glocalization* to frame this relationship.

The political phenomena shaping our current era are marked by an extraordinary upheaval, a fundamental reordering of the structures underpinning human existence.[2]

[1] This article has arisen directly from my doctoral dissertation, entitled 'Becoming Persian Music: A Poststructuralist Approach to Composition', completed at the University of Cambridge in 2023. See especially the first two chapters and Chapter 4.

[2] Giacomo Marramao, *The Passage West: Philosophy after the Age of the Nation State* (Verso, 2014), p. 11.

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Humanity now navigates a world that diverges significantly from its past configurations.[3] This transformation has been driven by a hegemonic system extending its influence globally in multifaceted ways. As a result, we are compelled to confront a trajectory of difference that demands rigorous engagement and critical reflection.[4] Over the past two decades, the cultural value of artistic disciplines and activities in various societies has been increasingly undermined by political and legislative agendas. For instance, in the United States, federal funding for the arts and humanities has been systematically eliminated, while in other western countries, similar reductions or challenges to public arts funding have occurred. In the Middle East, Islamic governance has imposed stringent censorship and restrictions on artistic expression.

These conditions suggest that artistic practices are deemed legitimate only when aligned with economic imperatives or religious doctrines, casting a shadow over musical practices. To navigate this critical landscape, I discuss here the need to develop robust methodologies that shield musical practices from such external pressures while fostering their potential to transcend conventional boundaries and stimulate intellectual and cultural growth.[5] To achieve this, it is crucial to adopt an analytical framework that recognizes how, in David Hesmondhalgh's eloquent words, 'power, history, subjectivity interlock in the highly complex and unequal societies of today'.[6] The mid-twentieth century witnessed significant advancements in the pursuit of cultural democratization, largely facilitated by sociological studies that examined how inequality was embedded within artistic practices.[7] I argue that a comparable inequality persists between western and Persian musical traditions, particularly concerning their respective potential to evolve as global phenomena. This disparity necessitates renewed efforts towards the democratization of Persian music, recognizing its intrinsic value and global relevance.

Globalization cannot be reduced to a simplistic, unidirectional expansion from the 'West to the Rest', to use Giacomo Marramao's encapsulation, nor should it be interpreted merely as an extension of contemporary westernization.[8] Instead, it must be understood as a complex web of historical processes characterized by what John Tomlinson terms 'complex connectivity'.[9] This network has evolved over centuries, culminating in a dynamic manifestation of global interconnectedness — as Peter Osborne neatly expresses it, 'a projected "worlding" of the globe'.[10] After all, the West, particularly Europe, remains deeply indebted to the East for its enduring contributions

[3] Saman Samadi, 'پساپارسیّت: جهان بومیّیت ناسان اندیشی' ['Glocality of Difference'], *Baru Magazine*, 2 (February 2021) <www.baru.wiki/saman.samadi/pasaa-paarsiyat> [accessed 12 September 2026].
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.
[6] David Hesmondhalgh, 'Towards a Political Aesthetics of Music', in *The Cultural Study of Music: A Critical Introduction*, ed. by Martin Clayton and others (Taylor & Francis, 2011), pp. 364–74 (p. 365).
[7] Ibid.
[8] Marramao, *The Passage West*, p. 22.
[9] John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (University of Chicago Press, 1999).
[10] Peter Osborne, 'The Postconceptual Condition, Or, the Cultural Logic of High Capitalism Today', *Radical Philosophy*, 184 (2014), pp. 19–27 (p. 22). Also see Justin Jennings, *Globalizations and the Ancient World* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

to mathematics, science, and technology, as well as for the significant influence that these have exerted on western developments in these fields over the past millennium.[11] This reciprocal exchange continues today with, as Amartya Sen argues, the flow of knowledge and influence increasingly moving in the opposite direction, from West to East.[12] Globalization, characterized by the dynamic interaction between global and local dimensions, emerges as a cultural process resulting in the creation of local identities on a global scale, thereby encouraging the development of diverse and imaginative personas.[13] As Marramao observes, 'Globalisation divides *because* it unifies different life-worlds in the form of compression, i.e., in the form of a homologating indifferentiation and coercive juxtaposition.'[14] Thus the integration of the process of universalizing a nation's unique identity and nationalizing a universal concept involves a dual operation that should be acknowledged as glocalization, a sophisticated incorporation of the locality of difference into the global framework, where the forces of homogenization and heterogenization interact reciprocally.[15] We must resist letting the dominant assumptions of western social theory, which are based on a significant divide between tradition and modernity, unduly shape our intellectual discourse; yielding to this dominance would confine us to a barren space of uncreative obscurity. It is crucial, therefore, to acknowledge this key issue as we seek to identify the essence of difference within the broader scope of globalization, fostering a productive space for the innovative formation of new communities and the emergence of new traditions.[16]

As both a composer and a theorist, I approach Persian music not merely as an object of intellectual enquiry but as a dynamic field of creative practice. In what follows, I engage with the composition of Persian music as a site where questions of identity, tradition, and philosophical difference are negotiated through sound. My aim is not to produce a hybrid fusion with western music, but rather to localize philosophical concepts — those that have generated transformative knowledge globally — in ways that activate new possibilities for compositional thought and practice within Persian musical ontology.

Tradition and Transformation: Rethinking Persian Musical Praxis

In the past century, Iran has experienced a confluence of historical events, such as the Persian Constitutional Revolution (1905–11), the Islamic Revolution (1978–79), and

[11] As should already be clear, the term 'West' here refers not solely to the Anglosphere but to a broader western perspective, encompassing Europe and North America.

[12] Amartya Sen, 'Does Globalization Equal Westernization?', *The Globalist*, 25 March 2002 <https://www.theglobalist.com/does-globalization-equal-westernization> [accessed 12 September 2026].

[13] Marramao, *The Passage West*, p. 7.

[14] Ibid., p. 32.

[15] Samadi, 'Glocality of Difference'; Jonathan Matusitz and Anne Reyers, 'A Behemoth in India: Walmart and Glocalisation', *South Asia Research*, 30.3 (2010), pp. 233–52 <https://doi.org/10.1177/026272801003000302>. Glocalization, originating from the Japanese concept *dochakuka*, initially referred to the adaptation of agricultural practices to local conditions, before being reframed in the late 1980s by Japanese economists to describe global marketing strategies that maintain local relevance.

[16] Samadi, 'Glocality of Difference'.

its encounters with the western world, which have shaped its sociopolitical and cultural landscapes, including the domain of music.[17] The Pahlavi regime (1925–79) introduced secularism and modernism into Iran's political and artistic spheres; it heavily promoted western music as a symbol of progress and modernization, substantially influencing the development of hybrid musical forms that merged Persian and western elements.[18] Within this institutional context, Alinaqi Vaziri (1887–1979) sought to create a systematic framework for modernized Persian music by integrating western theories and practices. However, the persistent conflict between tradition and modernity remains a central issue in Persian music.

Since the early twentieth century, Persian musical discourse has evolved in three primary streams: those advocating for the replacement of 'old music' with 'new music'; those insisting on the unyielding preservation of tradition; and those aspiring to modernize Persian music without forsaking its identity.[19] Despite the efforts of these groups, Persian music has endured a prolonged state of crisis due to a lack of governmental support, a stagnation of creativity, and an over-reliance on repetitive patterns. The traditionalists, in their adherence to the *radif* — the repertory of Persian melodic models — often treat it as a static repertoire, limiting innovation. On the other hand, self-proclaimed modernists frequently emulate western styles without critically engaging with their own cultural heritage.[20] Hooman Asadi, a prominent musicologist, critiques both camps for their lack of critical introspection, arguing that their approaches reduce genuine creativity and innovation to mimicry and preservation, devoid of meaningful evolution.[21] In light of these circumstances, one is compelled to ponder whether Persian modernity in the realm of Persian music is achievable.

The *radif*'s centrality in Persian music is both its strength and a challenge. Asadi notes that the perception of it as a 'frozen repertory' is a defensive response to the growing influence of western music.[22] The *radif* is widely regarded as an essential educational and performance resource for Persian classical music; its organization is thought to facilitate the systematic transmission and preservation of the rich musical heritage, thereby serving as a cornerstone for the study and practice of the tradition. Originally intended as a flexible and dynamic tool for creative exploration, the *radif*'s potential has been constrained by rigid interpretations.

To provide further context: in Persian classical music, *dastgāh* (within the *radif*) represents a system that organizes a collection of melodic models within a cyclic multimodal framework. The cyclic nature is exemplified by the fact that the system

[17] Hooman Asadi, 'تصلب سنت، انجماد ردیف: پرسشی از سنت موسیقایی' ['Consolidated Tradition, Frozen Radif: Questioning the Musical Tradition'], *Mahoor Music Quarterly*, 34 (2007), pp. 209–19 (p. 209).

[18] Mehrdad Gholami, 'Iranian Contemporary Flute Music: An Analysis of Kouchyar Shahroudi's *Dances Mystiques* (2017) and Kiawasch SahebNassagh's *Amusie* (2018) for Flute and Piano' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Texas Christian University, 2019), p. 12.

[19] Asadi, 'Consolidated Tradition, Frozen Radif', p. 209.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

commences and concludes in the same mode, referred to as the principal mode, which is also frequently employed for cadences across the entire *dastgāh* after traversing through various other modes. Traditionally, Persian music comprises twelve *dastgāhs*, each distinguished by a varying number of melodic models, or *gušes*, generally between six and thirty-eight. Each *guše*, or sometimes a group of a few *gušes*, is characterized by a distinct mode. Nevertheless, the mode of the initial *guše*, known as *Darāmad*, assumes a significant role as it is recurrently reinstated to serve as a cadential anchor throughout the *dastgāh*'s melodic journey. *Dastgāh* offers inherent flexibility, enabling diverse and dynamic performances. Recognizing this flexibility can help revitalize Persian music through critical analysis and innovative reinterpretations.

One could argue that the stagnation of creativity within the Persian musical tradition stems from entrenched attitudes towards the *radif*, which have led to its gradual stultification.[23] Is it possible to resolve this challenge through theoretical and musicological enquiry? Can the revitalization of tradition be achieved by cultivating innovative creative practices? Addressing this issue requires rigorous analytical investigation coupled with a thorough re-examination of the historical and theoretical foundations of Persian music.[24] Such an endeavour demands the development of a perspective that is attuned to the cultural and intellectual exigencies of Persian society while also fostering a dynamic rethinking of its conceptual frameworks. Importantly, this approach does not involve replicating the specific ideas or materials of other traditions. Instead, it necessitates an engagement with the philosophical underpinnings and intellectual strategies that shaped those systems, critically examining how their foundational concepts were constructed, articulated, and systematized. By drawing on their processes of philosophical enquiry rather than their specific content, this approach seeks to establish a reflective and robust foundation for Persian music. In doing so, it aims to articulate a philosophy that not only revitalizes the tradition but positions it as a site of intellectual and creative innovation.

During the mid-1960s Iran underwent a cultural shift characterized by the emergence of a traditionalist movement in music. This movement developed alongside the modernization and westernization initiatives of the Pahlavi era, which introduced transformative changes to the nation's artistic and cultural frameworks. While these reforms facilitated significant advancements, some musicians and scholars turned their attention to Persian classical music, prompted by questions regarding its role and relevance within the evolving cultural landscape. This traditionalist approach sought to

[23] Asadi, 'Consolidated Tradition, Frozen Radif', p. 210. In Chapter 2 ('A Conceptual History') of my dissertation, I explore the notion and genesis of the *radif* (pp. 39–40). I posit that its inception may have arisen from an earnest endeavour to record a compendium of significant Persian musical compositions, wherein a curated selection of the era's most successful works, each exemplifying a distinctive musical essence with respect to mode and structure, underwent a process akin to Schoenbergian liquidation, whereby form, rhythm, and melody were distilled and abstractly memorialized, thus allowing for compositional flexibility within the realm of boundless improvisation — an attribute potentially mastered by virtuosos of the art form, and facilitated by the dearth of a comprehensive and adequate musical notation system in Iran prior to the advent of western influences.

[24] Asadi, 'Consolidated Tradition, Frozen Radif', p. 211.

foreground the practices and structures of Persian classical music amid the broader dynamics of societal transformation. In other words, concerns about the potential erosion of cultural heritage during this time prompted the formation of this revivalist approach.[25]

The first generation of traditionalists embarked on comprehensive efforts to resurrect Persian classical music, focusing on safeguarding the *radif* and preserving its cultural significance. Their initiatives included meticulous documentation, systematic teaching, and the revival of traditional pieces through performance, all aimed at restoring the prominence of indigenous musical forms.[26] However, despite their admirable dedication, the efforts of this first generation often overlooked the critical theoretical discussions necessary for the evolution of tradition. This narrow focus on preservation, while essential for the continuity of the musical heritage, led to eventual calcification. Instead of evolving with contemporary demands, the *radif* was rendered inert. This stagnation, compounded by subsequent sociopolitical reforms and shifts, catalysed the emergence of a second generation of traditionalists, who recognized that the survival and vibrancy of Persian classical music required more than just preservation.[27] They therefore sought to reinterpret and revitalize the *radif* by adopting analytical and critical approaches, aiming to uncover its latent potentials and align it with contemporary cultural and intellectual contexts. This generation advanced the idea that tradition must be subjected to enquiry, critique, and reinterpretation, not as a static relic but as a dynamic framework capable of responding to new challenges and ideas.[28]

The vitality of a musical tradition lies in its ability to assimilate and reflect the intellectual and cultural ideas of its time. I believe that engaging the tradition through rigorous critique and rational methodologies can allow for its rejuvenation while remaining attentive to the unique characteristics of Persian musical culture. Even the wisdom gleaned from other cultures' philosophical enquiries can contribute to this pursuit. Importantly, this process does not aim to replicate the philosophies or materials of other traditions; instead, it draws on the methodologies, strategies, and conceptual frameworks employed by other intellectual traditions to construct robust and reflective foundations for Persian music. By adapting these processes of theorization and systematization, Persian classical music can position itself as a site of intellectual and creative innovation, capable of resonating within and beyond its cultural context.[29]

In examining modernist practices, it becomes evident that by the mid-twentieth century, certain western musical principles, such as polyphony, were imposed upon what was regarded as the 'traditional' form of Persian music. Despite retaining an

[25] Ibid., p. 213; Laudan Nooshin, 'Two Revivalist Moments in Iranian Classical Music', in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Revival*, ed. by Caroline Bithell and Juniper Hill (2014; online edn, Oxford Academic, 2013) [accessed 26 January 2025].
[26] Ibid.; Asadi, 'Consolidated Tradition, Frozen Radif', p. 213.
[27] Ibid., pp. 213–14.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., pp. 210–14.

audible Persian character, such works were not recognized as authentically traditional by experts; many integrated Persian melodic and rhythmic idioms within western classical forms yet failed to exhibit an unequivocal 'Persianness'.[30] Composers sought to reconfigure tradition through a westernized structural lens, predominantly utilizing western instrumentation in ensemble settings, applying elementary counterpoint, and harmonizing Persian melodies in ways that aligned with western tonal conventions.[31] This methodology was championed by figures such as Vaziri, his pupil Ruhollah Khaleqi (1906–65), and their disciples, often categorized as the National (ملّی) school of composition. However, their approach faced criticism from musicologists, who argued that its reliance on rudimentary harmonic techniques and simplistic counterpoint, rooted in western tonality, failed to encapsulate the defining characteristics of Persian music, for example 'the use of microtones, the frequent absence of a clear tonic and dominant, and the distinctly modal character of many melodies'.[32]

A different cohort of Persian composers, primarily those who received formal training in European or American institutions, can be categorized into two distinct subgroups: those whose works remain entirely detached from Persian musical traditions and those whose compositions, whether intentionally or subconsciously, bear traces of Persian musical heritage. The latter group's works tend to feature more translucent textures and a pronounced inclination towards contrapuntal techniques. While these compositions may exhibit a weaker connection to Persian musical identity compared to the National (ملّی) school, they often display a higher degree of structural sophistication and technical refinement.[33] Alireza Mashayekhi (b. 1940), a trailblazing figure in Persian symphonic music and my former composition professor, epitomizes this compositional approach. His artistic sensibilities emerged during the latter half of the twentieth century, amid post-war developments in European modernism and electronic music.

Born in Tehran, Mashayekhi pursued his musical education at the Vienna Academy of Music (now the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna) in the 1960s, where he studied composition under Hanns Jelinek, a pupil of Arnold Schoenberg and Alban Berg. He later continued his studies in electronic and computer music at Utrecht University in the Netherlands, working under the guidance of Gottfried Michael Koenig, a key figure in European avant-garde electronic music. Mashayekhi's engagement with Persian musical material was highly innovative, particularly in his electronic compositions, where he incorporated recordings of Persian instruments in their original tuning — an experimental method for interrogating the aesthetic tendencies and implicit biases of Persian modal structures. In a series of graphic and aleatoric scores composed for Persian traditional orchestras, he preserved Persian modal frameworks while incorporating improvisation on Persian instruments in their unaltered tuning. However, the majority of his extensive oeuvre does not adhere to Persian tuning

[30] Jean During and others, *The Art of Persian Music* (Mage, 1991), p. 52.
[31] Ella Zonis, *Classical Persian Music: An Introduction* (Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 194.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., p. 195.

systems; instead, it reinterprets Persian modal structures through tempered western scales. This hybridized approach, which balances Persian and western musical influences while prioritizing western techniques, has persisted across three generations of Persian composers, many of whom have embraced similar methodologies in their work.

In summary, a comprehensive categorization of Persian composers can be proposed. First are the composers primarily devoted to Persian music, either traditionalists or Persian–western hybrids who accentuate Persianness (including composers associated with the National school). Second, there are the composers primarily devoted to western music, who are either modernists or western–Persian hybrids who accentuate westernness. A notable figure within the latter subgroup is Kouchyar Shahroudi (b. 1959), who defines himself as a western–Persian composer with a predominantly western orientation. While he possesses an intrinsic understanding of Persian music, he argues that the compositions of the earliest generation in this category cannot be classified as authentically Persian. According to Shahroudi, their artistic paradigm was fundamentally western, with Persian musical elements incorporated within a western framework rather than shaping the core of the compositional process. In his own work, he seeks to go beyond this paradigm, crafting a sonic landscape in which western music is interwoven with an unmistakably Persian 'texture'. He further advocates a more expansive approach, asserting that musical inspiration should not be confined to Persian sources but can emerge from any cultural tradition.[34]

It is important to note that some composers, primarily those associated with the modernist group, occasionally — whether consciously or subconsciously — draw inspiration from non-musical sources that later become identified as markers of their so-called Persian identity. For instance, Persian mythology serves as both a thematic interest and a creative influence in many works by Kiawasch Sahebnassagh (b. 1968). Initially, Sahebnassagh distanced himself from his Persian identity during his studies in Austria, but over time it permeated his subconscious, shaping his philosophical outlook. This period of introspection coincided with his engagement with Persian mythology, ultimately prompting him to embrace and explore his identity as a Persian composer.[35]

As a composer, I am deeply fascinated by the quest for innovative compositional approaches that encapsulate the very essence of Persian music — methods that introduce a new perspective on Persianness. These approaches draw upon musical elements rooted in the *radif*, which Nur-Ali Borumand described as 'the heart of Persian music', yet engage with them from a global standpoint by means, for example, of poststructuralist philosophy, which 'challenges what comes to be accepted as "truth" and "knowledge"'.[36] This framework invites a reconsideration of the *radif* from an alternative perspective.

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[34] Gholami, 'Iranian Contemporary Flute Music', p. 86.

[35] Ibid., p. 48.

[36] Nur-Ali Borumand quoted in Bruno Nettl, *The Radif of Persian Music: Studies of Structure and Cultural Context in the Classical Music of Iran* (Elephant & Cat, 1992), p. 1; Aishling Mc Morrow, 'Poststructuralism', in *International Relations Theory*, ed. by Stephen McGlinchey, Rosie Walters, and Christian Scheinpflug (E-International Relations, 2017), pp. 56–61 (p. 56).

An examination of the development and transformation of the *dastgāh* concept in Persian music unveils a system that navigates fluidly through various modes, governed by an internal logic and a cyclical structure, thereby facilitating dynamic and diverse musical interpretations. This adaptability is an essential and defining trait of the *dastgāh* concept.[37] It is crucial to acknowledge that the *radif* itself does not inherently possess the quality that led to its so-called 'frozen repertory', as Asadi argues; rather, this rigidity was externally imposed, stemming from an effort to preserve Persian musical heritage in response to the growing influence of western music.[38] Asadi contends that thorough musicological enquiry into the conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of Persian classical music can equip composers and musicians with the tools to explore novel forms of creative expression.[39] In recent years, a significant group of musicologists, including Dariush Talai, Hooman Asadi, and their students, have advanced this line of enquiry by shedding light on the fundamental principles of Persian music. Analytical studies examining the modal and melodic structures of the *radif*, as well as the structural components of *dastgāhs*, have deconstructed these elements, unearthing novel constituents rooted in Persian music's intrinsic logic. Such efforts compellingly illustrate the possibility of devising new modes, cycles, and *dastgāhs*, and of fostering a revitalized perspective on the *radif* concept.

In an insightful article from 2007, Asadi urges a reconsideration of the conventional approach to the *radif* concept, advocating for the establishment of a new space in which artists can craft innovative works of Persian classical music 'while staying within the *boundaries* of the musical tradition and preserving its *identity*'.[40] The latter point, on preserving identity, constitutes a critical viewpoint of his, from which I respectfully dissent.

Persian Music Redefined: Semiotics, Semantics, and Sonic Signification

Language serves as a complex epistemological tool for sharing knowledge through systems of signs, including both symbols and images; this communicative system compels us to discern nuanced variations in terminology, vocabulary, and syntactic structures, thereby necessitating the assimilation of new knowledge.[41] In the realm of Persian music, skilled musicians must learn and properly apply its specialized vocabulary while understanding how these terms are organized to work together. Such erudition cultivates a deep comprehension of the symbolic structure of Persian music, one that is abundant with arcane terms such as *radif*, *dastgāh*, *āvāz*, and *guše*.[42]

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37 Asadi, 'Consolidated Tradition, Frozen Radif', pp. 215–17.
38 Ibid., p. 217.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.; my emphasis.
41 Catherine Belsey, *Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 3.
42 Within academic discourse, the term *āvāz* in Persian music is attributed a range of connotations. Primarily, it denotes the classical vocal style of Persian music. Moreover, the term is employed to identify certain minor *dastgāhs* characterized by simpler modal structures, which serve as subsidiary branches to the more elaborate and intricate *dastgāhs*. Notably, *Abuʿatā*, *Bayāt-e Tork*, *Afshāri*, and *Dashti* are recognized as four such *āvāzs*, functioning as auxiliary modal systems to the prominent

The fundamental importance of meanings is found in their function as channels for cultural reproduction, where they exercise a dominant influence by continuously reinforcing both assumed and marginalized forms of knowledge, thereby shaping our cognitive processes. Simultaneously, meanings act as powerful agents in reaffirming our core values, instilling in us a steadfast commitment to the disciplinary frameworks inherent in their nature.[43]

Yet within the transformative pressures of a new context, a familiar term drawn from scholarly enquiry does not automatically yield a fresh interpretative meaning. Language continuously shifts into new semantic forms and is deliberately reformed by bold thinkers, who, through the endorsement of their peers, mirror the intellectual trajectories outlined by celebrated philosophers, poets, and scientists.[44] In their unyielding quest for innovation, poststructuralist thinkers frequently coin new terms or reappropriate established ones, endowing them with renewed semantic nuance.[45] Although these expressions might be hastily labelled as 'jargon' by those unacquainted with their intended meaning, it is important to distinguish them from mere technical language: they are deliberate conceptual tools crafted to articulate complex, evolving ideas. Rather than dismissing them as superfluous, we should resist the urge to constrain the diverse pathways of cognitive ideation with rigid linguistic limitations.[46]

Ferdinand de Saussure's groundbreaking ideas sparked deep reflection among later scholars, who tirelessly sought to decipher the complexities of human culture. In the aftermath of World War II, a critical need arose for epistemological alternatives to challenge established paradigms.[47] Thus began an era of meaning's transformation, as traditional referential confines gave way to differential signification, wherein difference assumes supreme importance.[48] Rooted in the discipline of semiotics, a field pioneered by Saussure and his contemporaries, this pivotal development united the concept of the sign as a vessel for meaning with its corresponding sound-image (signifier) and conceptual content (signified).[49] Emerging from the deepest recesses of the psyche, these enduring sound-images continue to serve as powerful vestiges of our linguistic impressions.[50] Saussure wrote:

> The psychological character of our sound-images becomes apparent when we observe our own speech. Without moving our lips or tongue, we can talk to ourselves or recite mentally a selection of verse. Because we regard the words of our language as sound-

Shur dastgāh, while *Bayāt-e Esfahān* is associated with the *Homāyun dastgāh*. Significantly, the term *āvāz* is used to delineate a substantial segment of the Persian music repertoire, distinguished by its non-metric nature and performance within a remarkably flexible rhythmic framework. In this context, *āvāzi* music in the Persian tradition is set in contrast to *zarbi*, a distinct classification reserved for metric compositions characterized by fixed rhythms.

43 Belsey, *Poststructuralism*, p. 4.
44 Ibid., p. 5.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., p. 10.
48 Ibid.
49 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (Philosophical Library, 1959), p. 66.
50 Ibid.

> images, we must avoid speaking of the 'phonemes' that make up the words. This term, which suggests vocal activity, is applicable to the spoken word only, to the realization of the inner image in discourse. We can avoid that misunderstanding by speaking of the *sounds* and *syllables* of a word provided we remember that the names refer to the sound-image.[51]

According to Saussure, the differentiation between the signifier and the signified possesses an inherently methodological nature — that is, their separation is governed by systematic, rule-based processes intrinsic to language, rather than arising by chance. This means that the relationship between the two components is structured and consistent, reflecting the underlying conventions of linguistic communication. In everyday use, we rarely encounter a signifier without an associated signified, because native speakers share an understanding of these linguistic rules. However, when faced with an unfamiliar language, many signifiers appear isolated and detached from any recognizable meaning, as the systematic connections that native users rely on are not immediately apparent to outsiders.[52] In this context, for a reader unacquainted with Persian, سخن serves as a clear example of a pure signifier. These three letters outline its written form, which is read from right to left:

سـ (IPA: *s*), corresponding to the sound of the initial letter, *s*, as in the English word 'sad'.

خـ (IPA: *x*), corresponding to a sound similar to the German *ch* in 'Buch' or the Spanish *j* in 'ojo'.

ن (IPA: *n*), corresponding to the sound of the letter *n*, as in the English lexeme 'no'.

When spoken, this signifier exhibits a range of possible phonetic variations, depending on the inclusion of the vowels *a* (as in *cat*) or *o* (as in *forty*), resulting in pronunciations such as *saxn* or *soxn.* These variations can be represented rhythmically in notation, akin to a dotted quaver (with the semiquaver functioning as the smallest rhythmic unit). In addition, forms such as *soxon*, *soxan*, *saxon*, and *saxan* align with rhythmic patterns resembling a semiquaver followed by a quaver.

In Persian writing, vowels are typically omitted, which means that words with the same consonantal structure can take on different meanings depending on their vocalization. As a result, their precise interpretation relies on contextual cues. For a fluent Persian speaker, the signifier سخن can generate a broad spectrum of meanings, each corresponding to various English equivalents. Depending on context, it may signify 'heat' or 'fever', convey the sense of 'warm' or 'hot', represent concepts such as 'word', 'vocable', 'speech', 'saying', or 'discourse', express ideas of 'will' or 'pleasure', or denote a 'thing', 'business', or 'affair'. It may even imply 'somewhat'.[53] Thus meaning

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51 Ibid.

52 Belsey, *Poststructuralism*, p. 11.

53 Francis Joseph Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian–English Dictionary, Including the Arabic Words and Phrases to Be Met with in Persian Literature* (Routledge & K. Paul, 1892). This dictionary has been chosen for the breadth of its historical and literary coverage of Persian, which captures the particular range of meanings associated with سخن.

remains fluid, shaped by linguistic and cultural context, allowing for multiple nuanced interpretations accessible to those proficient in Persian.

In the field of semiotics, the interaction between the signifier and the signified in fact reveals an intriguing insight: the signifier does not explicitly *convey* meaning, nor does the signified necessarily *mirror* the form or sound of the signifier.[54] Rather, their connection is fundamentally arbitrary, meaning that their association is not derived from inherent similarity or intentional representation but is instead shaped by linguistic convention.

Thus I advocate a rigorous interrogation and subversion of the rigidly defined notions of Persian music, as well as of the largely unexamined signifieds that underpin our cultural heritage, in order to reveal the multifaceted nature of 'Persianness' embedded within musical practice. How, then, might we approach this deconstruction of Persian music's prevailing conceptual framework, reorienting it towards a foundational system of theories and signification — one that integrates rhythms, metres, phrasing, and intonation, interwoven with the lyrical refinement of Persian language and poetry, alongside modes, pitch, intervallic structures, ornamentation, texture, and beyond? Furthermore, a radical reconfiguration of the very structure and fluidity of these foundational elements is necessary, involving the dismantling of entrenched hierarchies and the introduction of greater flexibility in the organization of musico-linguistic components. This approach allows for the development of a novel framework for assessing the Persian authenticity of any musical composition.

Accordingly, I contend that the dictates of authority, tradition, and hierarchical classification imposed upon these theoretical and conceptual constructs serve merely as residual constraints, obstructing the emergence of innovative works that genuinely embody Persian musical identity. Instead, I propose that any musical creation built upon these fundamental elements, regardless of whether it conforms to or deviates from conventional hierarchies but which is conceived through creative ingenuity, qualifies as an authentic manifestation of Persian classical music.

Identity or difference, being or becoming

This final section introduces key concepts from Gilles Deleuze's philosophy — particularly *difference* and *becoming* — as a means of rethinking Persian music not as a fixed cultural form but as a dynamic and emergent process. While the immediate focus is on clarifying Deleuze's conceptual framework, these ideas will later be shown to underlie my compositional strategies and support a reimagined ontology for Persian music. I propose that by prioritizing Deleuze's concept of difference over identity, we can forge a new path for Persian music and compositional practice. Addressing the issues examined in this article, I argue that Persian musical composition can meaningfully engage with our postmodern condition by embodying Deleuze's philosophy of

[54] Belsey, *Poststructuralism*, p. 11.

becoming. Thus my central thesis posits that Persian music should be understood as a generative trajectory of becoming, shaped by the dynamics of Persian difference rather than constrained by static notions of Persian identity.

Becoming signifies a continuous transformation, an unfolding process of movement, change, and deterritorialization within an assemblage. Unlike traditional conceptions of a cohesive whole in which distinct elements are fixed within a structured organization, becoming acknowledges the fluid relationships and interactions between these elements. In this process, one component of the assemblage is drawn into the domain of another, altering its role and generating new configurations of meaning. As Deleuze and Félix Guattari explain, becoming involves recontextualizing an element beyond its initial function, allowing it to assume new, unforeseen possibilities.[55] This conceptual openness, where elements shift function through relational transformation, anticipates how Persian musical forms might be reconceived as mutable rather than fixed, an idea I will return to shortly.

Deleuze's philosophical framework is fundamentally structured around the concepts of difference and becoming, which he presents as correctives to the western metaphysical tradition's overemphasis on being and identity, a perspective he critiques as reductive and insufficient. He argues that this privileging of fixed identities extends beyond abstract philosophy and permeates everyday thought, restricting our capacity to fully grasp the fluidity and multiplicity inherent in reality. This fixation on stable categories, he asserts, leads to an oversimplified understanding of the world's complexity and suppresses the transformative potential embedded in processes of change and variation.[56] Such a model, when transposed into the musical domain, challenges inherited pedagogies of *radif* transmission, which often rely on the reassertion of identity through imitation. Instead, it opens the door to understanding Persian musical material as sites of emergent transformation.

Deleuze addresses habitual patterns of thought from both philosophical and practical perspectives. Philosophically, he develops theories on difference, repetition, and becoming, challenging traditional metaphysical concepts that prioritize identity over difference. Practically, his writings provoke established perspectives, offering conceptual tools to envision the world in new ways. His work encourages a departure from conventional modes of thinking, fostering a more dynamic understanding of reality.[57] In his philosophy, the concept of becoming plays a pivotal role in both philosophical and practical domains. While identity pertains to a world characterized by repetition and representation, becoming, as Deleuze interprets it, signifies a process of continuous transformation, leading to novel manifestations. This perspective

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[55] Davin Heckman, '"Gotta Catch 'Em All": Capitalism, the War Machine, and the Pokémon Trainer', *Rhizomes*, 5 (2002) <https://www.rhizomes.net/issue5/poke/pokemon.html> [accessed 14 September 2026].

[56] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (Columbia University Press, 1994). See the chapter on 'Difference in Itself' (pp. 28–69).

[57] Ibid.; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Bloomsbury, 2014); see the chapter '1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible…' (pp. 271–360).

emphasizes the fluid and dynamic nature of existence, contrasting with static notions of identity.[58]

Deleuze challenges the primacy of *being* in western thought by redefining difference through lived experience. He argues that the dominance of being and reliance on representational thinking carry problematic political, aesthetic, and ethical consequences. To counter this, he introduces *difference in itself* — an empirical, non-conceptual approach that disrupts established norms. This shift refocuses attention on singular instances of creation rather than imposing predefined categories, fostering a deeper understanding of variation, influence, and the contingent interactions shaping individual development.[59] In Deleuze's account, difference is no longer treated as a measure of similarity. Traditionally, difference is subordinated to 'sameness', framed in relation to identity and categorized through resemblance, opposition, and analogy. This tendency, however, reduces the complexity of individual experiences, forcing them into rigid frameworks of unity. Deleuze's reconfiguration proceeds in two ways: firstly, by formulating a concept of *difference in itself* that is not dependent on that 'sameness', and secondly, by challenging the 'philosophy of representation', which reduces individuality to instances of pre-existing categories. Instead, his approach emphasizes the 'singularity' of each instance of difference, fostering a deeper recognition of the unique influences, contingencies, and interactions that shape individual development.[60]

The philosophy of becoming challenges the traditional focus on being and identity, rejecting the notion of a hidden reality beyond appearances. Instead, Deleuze sees objects and states as products of continuous transformation. Becoming embodies an understanding of pure, open-ended time, undermining Platonic ideas that prioritize being, originality, and essence. For Deleuze, becoming illustrates the constant recurrence of difference in the formation of events, whether physical or conceptual. This concept represents the inherent motion within transitions, where events are not enclosed within becoming but rather shaped by it as it moves through them. Each event thus functions simultaneously as an origin, a destination, and a passage within an ongoing cycle of creation.[61]

This notion of becoming is integrated into Deleuze's work on two levels: one within the domain of ideas, through his reinterpretation of Friedrich Nietzsche's eternal return, and the other in the realm of expression, through his adaptation of Henri Bergson's concept of duration.[62] In my compositional project, my focus is primarily on the former. Deleuze reconfigures eternal return as a repetition of difference rather than identity, liberating it from rigid structures and fixed categories, constraints that Nietzsche himself consistently critiqued throughout his writings.[63] While a coherent

[58] Cliff Stagoll, 'Becoming', in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. by Adrian Parr (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), pp. 25–27 (p. 26).
[59] Cliff Stagoll, 'Difference', in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. by Parr, pp. 74–76 (p. 75).
[60] Ibid.
[61] Stagoll, 'Becoming', pp. 25–27.
[62] Samantha Bankston, *Deleuze and Becoming* (Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 1.
[63] Ibid., pp. 162–65.

idea within the realm of self-identical being gravitates towards identity by minimizing the gap between reflection and truth, becoming stands apart: it embodies continuous transformation. In the words of Edward Campbell,

> In contrast with the traditional representational and identity-based thought, which, according to Deleuze, accounts for most previous Western thinking, this new [abstract] image [of thought] is to be based upon a concept of difference, which no longer reduces all differences to identities.[64]

Within Deleuze's account, difference prevails, and simulacra — representations that do not simply imitate but actively generate new meaning — proliferate endlessly. He explores how permutating series, in which elements continuously shift and evolve rather than repeating identically, and circular structures, which challenge linear progression by looping and diverging, disrupt conventional notions of representation. These dynamic forces compel philosophy to move beyond entrenched frameworks, necessitating a fundamental re-evaluation of representation as evolving rather than static, shaped by continuous transformation rather than predefined interpretation.[65] This shift demands a fundamental reconsideration, one that recognizes the fluid nature of difference and the ever-expanding presence of simulacra as essential forces that drive and shape artistic expression. These concepts converge with my compositional practice, wherein modal systems, rhythmic logics, and notational forms derived from Persian tradition undergo precisely this kind of differential actualization.

Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* could fittingly be seen as a counterpoint to Heidegger's *Being and Time*, offering a poststructuralist rethinking of ontology. His critique of *being* in Heidegger's work shapes the central problematics of his own. Within poststructuralism, becoming — often oversimplified in philosophy — is rigorously examined as a challenge to fixed hierarchies and the constraints of linear time. Deleuze argues that being imposes external regulation on forms, reinforcing rigid structures of uniformity.[66] He reinterprets identity and time as expressions of difference and repetition, challenging the traditional view that ties identity to a fixed temporal framework. In this reconfiguration, no ontological unity remains unchanged, as continuous transformation negates static notions of being and identity, giving rise to becoming. The different is never fixed — it is always in flux, diverging from itself in each instance. Deleuze stresses that eternal return should not be mistaken for a cycle of identical repetition or habitual recurrence; while habit reinforces sameness, memory constructs identity by organizing past experiences.[67] Rather than reaffirming sameness, eternal return affirms difference: 'The subject of the eternal return is not the same but the different, not the similar but the dissimilar, not the one but the many.'[68] Deleuze writes:

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64 Edward Campbell, *Music after Deleuze* (A. & C. Black, 2013), p. 12.
65 Ibid., p. 13.
66 Bankston, *Deleuze and Becoming*, p. 2.
67 'Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995)', *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (n.d.) <https://iep.utm.edu/gilles-deleuze> [accessed 15 September 2026].
68 Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 126.

> That identity not be first, that it exist as a principle but as a second principle, as a principle become; that it revolve around the Different: such would be the nature of a Copernican revolution which opens up the possibility of difference having its own concept, rather than being maintained under the domination of a concept in general already understood as identical.[69]

Indeed, as Deleuze writes, 'Returning is everything but everything affirmed in a single *moment*'.[70] In Deleuze's theory of temporality and becoming, the moment plays a crucial role, and is described by Samantha Bankston as 'a qualitative inversion of the quantified present', marking the intersection of past and future.[71] His concept of becoming carries a dual nature, drawing from Bergson's theory of memory, which conceives the present as two simultaneous streams: the inherently past and the unfolding future, where 'on the line of becoming, […] all ontological processes are caught in the middle, in-between what they were and what they are not yet'.[72] In this framework, becoming allows no fixed or static ground.

Deleuze's philosophical concepts take material form in my own compositional practice and approach to Persian musical thought. The concept of becoming informs my own compositional methodology and reorients how we might engage with traditional structures like the *radif*. Accordingly, I do not perceive the *radif* as a rigid essence of Persian music but as a fluid, evolving process. My approach to composition involves extracting Persian classical music's conceptual elements and engaging them within new intellectual contexts, a practice aligned with Deleuze's method of repurposing philosophical concepts and extending their scope through innovative expression and unconventional structuring.[73] As these concepts break free from their textual limitations, they undergo a revitalization that transcends temporal constraints, coexisting across multiple intersecting planes.[74] This is the foundation upon which Persian musical concepts are realized in my compositions.

While Deleuze's philosophy revitalizes rigid structures, urging a critical re-examination of long-standing assumptions treated as absolute,[75] in my project, applying the philosophy of becoming enables the retrieval of *consistency* from the fixed structure of the *radif*. This transformation redefines consistency in accordance with the fluidity and unpredictability inherent in the 'contingency of chaos'.[76] My pursuit is to reimagine the foundational concepts of Persian music as expressions of difference, allowing them to unfold within new compositional dimensions. Here, *dastgāh* and *radif* are no longer fixed structures but open questions; Persian modes are re-situated within unexplored musical neighbourhoods; rhythms emerge through the deconstruction of Persian poetic prosody; and the contours of Persian intonation serve as the

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69 Ibid., p. 41.
70 Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (Columbia University Press, 1983), p. 72; my emphasis.
71 Bankston, *Deleuze and Becoming*, p. 165.
72 Ibid., p. 3.
73 Ibid., p. 4.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., p. 5.
76 Ibid.

groundwork for redefined pitch relations.[77] In this space, Persianness is no longer bound by identity; rather, it pulses as difference itself. Each composition aspires not to simply reference or represent Persian music but to enact its perpetual unfolding, to resonate within the differentiating motion of its becoming, to *become* Persian music.

This compositional logic has not remained theoretical: I have engaged it across a series of works that explore difference through distinct sonic, notational, and structural modalities. These principles have been realized across five recent pieces, each foregrounding one or more strands of difference-driven composition. The strategies first emerge in *Asha* (2020) for solo flute, where I layer modal-rhizomatic fragments — splicing and reconfiguring tetrachordal cells around a central pitch — with ornamentation and heterophonic micro-nuance as the work's structural engines.[78] The key embellishment technique is *tahrīr* (a vocal-inspired micro-melisma in Persian *āvāz*, combining rapid oscillations over microtonal intervals), whose nuanced inflections and shifting microtonal shapes drive every phrase. *Through a Veil* (2021) for wind quintet and fixed media marries modal-rhizomatic derivation with Persian Calligraphic Scores, using forms drawn from *Shekasteh Nastaliq*, a cursive Persian calligraphic style developed from *Nastaliq*, to shape pitch, texture, and silence while tetrachordal cells interlock in non-linear networks.[79] Subsequently, in *Vāyuvēra* (2022) for piano trio, the compositional operation itself is rhizomatic: I begin with a pool of *radif*-derived fragments and iteratively splice, overlap, and re-link them to generate form.[80] By contrast, *Shattering in Seven Pieces for Dream and Wedding and Death* (2022) for string quartet turns exclusively to prosody, extracting sub-second pitch-rhythm gestures from spoken contemporary Persian verse to animate every melodic arc.[81] Finally, *Thus Spoke Earth* (2022) converges these methods: modal rhizomes, prosodic modules, and a calligraphic score disperse at poetic ruptures and reterritorialize wherever the text demands, materializing an assemblage of speech, mode, and notation.[82]

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77 Saman Samadi, 'An Introduction to Post-Pars Modal Music: A New Approach to Microtonality', paper delivered at the symposium 'ICTM Study Group on Applied Ethnomusicology, 7th Symposium, Performing, Engaging, Knowing' (Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna, and the Swiss Society for Ethnomusicology, 2020).

78 Saman Samadi, *Asha* (2020), perf. and rec. by Mehrdad Gholami, in *Pieces for the Flute* (Mahoor, 2021) <www.mahoor.com/en/cd/20052-pieces-for-the-flute> [accessed 7 July 2025]. For score and video recordings, see <https://www.samansamadi.net/asha> [accessed 7 July 2025]. Here and below, 'rhizomatic' refers to Deleuze and Guattari's model of non-hierarchical, non-arborescent connection, in which heterogeneous elements can enter into multiple and shifting relations; see Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus.*

79 Saman Samadi, *Through a Veil* (2021), perf. and rec. by Saman Samadi Collective (N. Anton Dromia, 2021) <https://www.samansamadi.net/through-a-veil> [accessed 7 July 2025].

80 Saman Samadi, *Vāyuvēra* (2022), perf. by Junya Makino, Nicholas Swett, and Kristin Barone-Samadi (Saman Samadi Collective, 2023), on the album *Thus Spoke Earth* <https://www.samansamadi.net/vayuvera> [accessed 7 July 2025].

81 Saman Samadi, *Shattering in Seven Pieces for Dream and Wedding and Death* (2022), perf. by Saman Samadi, Junya Makino, Polly Almond, and Sarah Henderson (Saman Samadi Collective, 2023), on the album *Thus Spoke Earth* <https://www.samansamadi.net/oeuvre/shattering> [accessed 7 July 2025].

82 Saman Samadi, *Thus Spoke Earth* (2022), perf. by Saman Samadi and Kristin Barone-Samadi (Saman Samadi Collective, 2023), on the album *Thus Spoke Earth* <https://www.samansamadi.net/thus-spoke-earth> [accessed 7 July 2025].

Together, these works enact a practice of 'composing otherwise'. Modal cells become flexible modules, prosodic logic asserts its own temporal grammar, ornamentation and heterophony serve as compositional engines, and calligraphic notation transforms the page into a semiotic field. In each case, Persian musical ontology is not preserved as a static archive but is materialized as a dynamic, emergent process, where difference is not an afterthought but the very material of creation.

Composing otherwise, ontologically

In light of this Deleuzian framework and the modalities explored throughout this article, I would like to articulate what it means for me to compose otherwise. This phrase signals more than a deviation from tradition or a stylistic novelty; it denotes a deliberate ontological stance in which composition becomes a method of philosophical enquiry. Rather than composing within fixed systems, I treat composition as a space for configuring difference, drawing from Persian music's latent potentialities to enact new structures of thought and sound. To compose otherwise is to resist reproducing the *radif* as a closed and hierarchical system. Instead, I engage with its constituent elements — modal cells, cadential logic, ornamental grammars — as mobile sonic intensities that can be spliced, stretched, and reassembled in rhizomatic configurations. My compositions do not cite Persian music as a static archive; they operate within its unresolved tensions, unfixing its ossified taxonomies to recover its generative potential.

This approach also transforms the function of ornamentation, heterophony, and prosody. Ornamentation, freed from a merely decorative role, becomes a temporal and modal engine. Heterophony is recast as a deliberately composed multiplicity, rather than an improvisatory afterthought. Persian poetic rhythm becomes an ontological ground from which rhythmic structures emerge, its function extending beyond that of a text to be set. Together, these strategies extend composition beyond craft alone, situating it as an ontological negotiation between history, structure, and the actualization of what music can become. Notation itself becomes a site of ontological inscription. My Persian Calligraphic Scores, structured through *Shekasteh Nastaliq* forms, do not merely encode performance; rather, they inscribe thought. The visual curvature of language gives shape to pitch and rhythm, enacting a co-presence of script and sound. In this way, the score becomes a transdisciplinary object, a philosophical artefact as much as a musical one.

Thus to compose otherwise is not simply to make something different; it is to compose difference itself. It is to use the act of composition to interrogate being, to undo musical identity in favour of becoming, and to reconfigure Persian musical ontology not through preservation but through its actualization in motion. This is not a departure from Persian music but its reactivation as a living philosophical practice, continuously differentiating and reconstituting itself through sound.

Conclusion

This enquiry has traced the evolution of Persian music as it has been shaped by historical encounters and the shifting currents of cultural exchange. At its heart lies an

intricate negotiation between forces that seek to preserve, transform, or reimagine its foundations — an enduring tension that continues to shape Persian musical thought. The *radif*, central to this exploration, reveals its dual nature: an open field of creative possibility when critically engaged, yet prone to inertia when confined within rigid structures.

Through an interrogation of semiotics and semantics, this study has revealed the pivotal role of language and musical symbols in sustaining and renewing Persian musical thought. A deeper understanding of this symbolic terrain allows musicians to move beyond passive reception, engaging instead with its lexicon as an active site of meaning-making that reshapes itself with every interpretation. Drawing upon Deleuze's philosophy, this article has challenged static formulations, proposing a new course for Persian music that moves not through fixed categories but through the fluid and generative unfolding of becoming. No longer bound to inherited structures as immutable givens, Persian music emerges as an ongoing process, a field of forces in constant motion, where composition itself is an act of reconfiguration rather than replication.

To sustain both creative vitality and artistic integrity, Persian music should fully embrace its intrinsic dynamism, which does not oppose tradition but re-engages with it in ways that remain open, unfinished, and ever-responsive to new conceptual terrains. This demands a perspective that is at once deeply rooted and radically forward-looking, allowing Persian music to move not merely through time but with it, shaping and being shaped by the transformations it encounters. Such a stance calls for composition to function not only as a response to tradition but as a philosophical operation, a space for enacting difference, reconfiguring ontology, and composing Persian music *otherwise.* This pursuit calls upon a new generation of composers and musicians to step beyond the boundaries drawn for them, to chart new trajectories that awaken the dormant potential within Persian musical thought. In doing so, they will not only extend the legacy of this tradition but propel it into new realms of existence, allowing it to move beyond preservation and into the ceaseless motion of *becoming Persian music.*