

REPRESENTATION OF 'LOVE' IN PERSIAN POP MUSIC A COMPARISON OF 1970S AND 2000S POP MUSIC TEXTS IN IRAN

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Introduction

Many people all over the world fall in love and understand it as a critical important experience in their lives; but 'love' is not merely a natural or biological phenomenon, nor a spontaneous event. It's instead a social construction which formation is determined under cultural and historical conditions. Love can have different faces in different social contexts. The social historical totality of an era, determines that what love is, what kind of relationship is romance, who the lover and beloved one are, and what are their characteristics. People can understand their interpersonal relationships through this collective mentality. Based on this social context, they can interpret their personal experiences and make them meaningful.

In order to show how love depends on the social conditions, we can compare two different historical ages and find out how love was understood in those periods of time. The formation and meaning of love can change during the time. For example love has been changed from a 'platonic love' in ancient Greece, a rational love of a male beloved one, to the 'amour passion' in middle age Europe. In the platonic love, a man chose another man because of philosophic or ethic reasons. Woman is only appropriate for sexual satisfaction or as a mother, she doesn't deserve to be loved and loving her is a shameful psychological weakness for a man. By emerging the new social formation, feudalism and knighthood, a new mentality about love was formed. The Amour passion doesn't humiliate the woman but admire her as soul mate. This blue blooded woman, has a high social prestige, can control her own passion like men and chose her soul mate from her lovers. The amour passion claims a complete physical and spiritual union and idolizes the woman. "This kind of love needs the union of man and woman by their match in loving and making love; Therefore the man tries to think about his female twin and the woman to her male twin" (Sattari 2005:151, from Rene Nelly 1384).

Max Weber has traced these changes in the meaning of love until renaissance, when the knighthood and epical traditions subsided and literary circles began to be common. "A further enhancement of the specifically sensational character of eroticism developed with the transition from the conventions of the Renaissance to the increasingly non-military intellectualism of salon culture" (Gerth and Mills 1949:346). In Persian literature and music, we can find different pictures of love in different periods of time. Firstly, in *Khorasani* style¹, we can recognize a love that is equal to physical pleasure and happiness. In this form of love, the beloved one has a low social status and usually is a slave or a bondwoman. After that, under different social conditions, we can see a different form of love in *Iraqi* style² poems that admires a cruel unfaithful beloved one. In this new form, love is equal to worship and absolute devotion (Shamisa 2003).

Nowadays, where can we find the collective mentality about the concept of love? What are the differences between this new picture and the old one? And how the social changes have affected the representation of love? This paper tries to answer these questions in the theoretical framework of representation theories. In order to seek the picture of love in Iranian cultural

1 - a style in Persian poetry, between 9th and 12th centuries in Iran

2 - a style in Persian poetry between 14th and 16th centuries in Iran

products, pop music lyrics are selected here for two main reasons. First, in Iran, the pop music lyrics cover a wider range of individuals and tastes than do other cultural products such as novels or movies. The second reason is that unlike the other cultural products, both of the permitted and forbidden pop music are easily produced, distributed and consumed in Iran, so they don't only follow the official or governmental policies. In this paper, two decades of pop music are selected to be analyzed: 1970s or the 'golden age of Persian pop music', and recent decade, 2000s. As discussed later, qualitative content analysis is applied in order to analyze these lyrics.

Representation

Representation is a chief concern in cultural studies, a cross-disciplinary approach to study culture and its effects. Cultural studies began at the University of Birmingham, England, in 1963. Stuart Hall has a great contribution in developing the concept of representation and applying the cultural studies approach into the empirical researches in the field of media studies.

From Hall's point of view, the 'circuit of culture' consists of representation, production, consumption, identity and regulations. In order to clarify the relationship between the culture and these elements, he firstly describes a debate about the concept of 'culture' and explains his own approach. In more traditional defining of the culture, it is understood as a sum of the best ideas and greatest thought. This 'high culture' can be found in the classic works of literature, painting, music and philosophy. A more modern approach sees culture as 'mass culture' or 'popular culture' that refers to the widely distributed popular music, art, design and entertainments. From this point of view, culture does not carry the meaning of high intellectual ideas, but refers to all activities that form the everyday lives of ordinary people. Despite its difference to the traditional point of view, the modern approach also focuses on the cultural products in the same way.

Another defining of culture mentioned by Hall, is the social science point of view that describes it as the 'way of life' of a people, community, nation or social group (with a more anthropological emphasis); or as the shared values of a group or society (with a more sociological emphasis). According to Hall, the 'cultural turn' in social and human sciences focused on importance of the meaning, and argued that culture is: "not so much a set of things –novels and paintings or TV programs and comics – as a process, a set of practices. Primarily culture is concerned with the production and the exchange of meaning –the 'giving and taking of meaning'- between the members of a society or group. To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways" (Hall 1997:2).

Regarding the cultural turn, du Gay (1997) has suggested his 'circuit of culture' to explain how cultures maintain their identity, undergo changes and interact with the multitude of cultures they contact to and overlap with. This circuit is composed of five elements or five positions. The first element, 'regulation', consists of various kinds of controls on cultural activities, either formal controls such as laws and institutionalized systems, or the informal and local controls like cultural norms and expectations. The regulation often has a strong coherence with the political or economic power, and determines what is acceptable or correct in a social group, but it can't completely determine the shared meanings by itself. The second component or 'production' outlines the process by which creators of cultural products fill them with meaning (Hall 1993). Producers try to shape discourse during production by encoding materials with meaning. This process of 'encoding'

depends on some other factors, such as technology because of its possibilities or limitations for the process of producing or distributing cultural artifacts; organizational characteristics and management agendas. For example military organizations or nonprofit firms have different characteristics and thus have different impacts on production.

Discussing about the 'representation', the third element of circuit of culture, Hall mentions three different accounts or theories, the reflective, the intentional and the constructionist approaches to 'representation'. The first one sees 'representation' as a reflecting process in which the reality is exactly reflected in the texts, pictures, paintings or other cultural products. The second point of view, the intentional approach, believes that the texts always convey the meaning that the author has intended to. Hall argues that the third one, the constructional approach, understands 'representation' as a system of 'signs and symbols' that follows the same general and social characteristics of the language. Reality is never experienced directly, but always through the symbolic categories made available by society. All of the representation systems act like the language because they transmit the meanings and whatever we want to say (thinking, ideas, emotions) and because they follow the logic of language and use signs and symbols to re-present whatever exists in the world in terms of a meaningful concept, image or idea. "The embodying of concepts, ideas and emotions in a symbolic form which can be transmitted and meaningfully interpreted is what we mean by 'the practices of representation'" (Hall 1997:10).

Although production provides a series of possibilities, they can become actualized only in and through 'consumption' (du Gay et al. 1997). The consumers are not downright passive audiences or receivers of meaning and messages, they have a creative role in consuming the cultural products, which means that they decode those signs and symbols and interpret them in their own semantic network of meaning. "The receiver of messages and meanings is not a passive screen on which the original meaning is accurately and transparently projected. The 'taking of meaning' is as much a signifying practice as 'putting into meaning'" (Hall 1997:10).

The last component of circuit of culture, the Identity, refers to how meaning is constructed or made and internalized by the individual person or cultural group when confronted with a text (du Gay et al 1997). The producers of meanings encode the identity they want to convey during production, by segmenting publics, which creates identities for various target audiences. In addition Consumers also create their own identities and memberships during the process of consumptions. The way a group of consumers, for example some of teenagers, uses or consumes a cultural product, can create a sense of uniqueness and identity for them. "Pop music culture –songs, magazines, concerts, festivals, comics, interviews with pop stars, films, etc. –helps to establish a sense of identity among youth" (Storey 2008:54).

Based on this conceptual and theoretical framework, this paper concentrates on the process of representation of 'love' in the lyrics of aforementioned two decades of popular music in Iran. It tries to show how these texts represent the events, the individuals and the emotions in a romance relationship; how they segment the reality into different concepts; and how they make and encode the meanings about love.

Methodology

In order to discover and clarify the latent messages of a text, the best way is to follow

'qualitative content analysis method' that contrary to quantitative method dose not focus on counting the words and phrases, but categorizing qualitative textual data into groups of similar entities, or conceptual categories. Qualitative content analysis concentrates on the latent structure of a text and clarifies the constant patterns of themes and relationship between variables or components of it. This analytic method is a way of reducing data and making sense of them (Given 2008:120). Qualitative content analysis is an appropriate method for analyzing a wide range of textual data from books, newspapers, speeches and interview transcripts to recorded observations, photographs or videos.

The first stage of qualitative content analysis, as well as other qualitative research methods, is to explicitly clarify the research questions and indicate the textual data that is supposed to be analyzed. It is important in this stage to record the ways of producing and gathering these data, for example who gathered them, who has been present at the interview location, or in which way the documentations are obtained (Flick 2006:342).

The analysis consists of three levels of coding. Regarding the aim of this method, to reduce data, the text is supposed to be broken in to meaning units and then be joined again in a higher degree of abstraction. At the first level of coding or 'open coding', we should abbreviate the text and delete the irrelevant or repeated elements, separate the meaning units and labeling them, and classify them in various categories. During this initial stage a close line-by-line reading of the data is often suggested in a search to identify as many ideas and concepts as possible without concern for how they relate. By attaching code labels or words to identify occurrences, meanings, activities, or phenomena, the researcher begins to group events that are similar and to distinguish those that differ (Given 2008:86).

The open coding stage output is often a long list of codes, labels and categories attached to the text in which certain concepts may be evidenced repeatedly. The next step is axial coding, in which output the of first step is analyzed again and classified in more general categories such as phenomena, causes, effects, processes, degrees, expectations etcetera. These concepts belong to a higher degree of abstraction and cover many similar categories. The selective coding, that is the third step of coding, continues the axial coding with particular concentration on the most important concepts (according to the research questions), indicates central themes and more general variables, and finally put them in appropriate positions within a paradigm model which should clarifies the relationship between them (Flick 2006:337).

Sampling

Similar to some other qualitative methods, qualitative content analysis uses theoretical sampling that selects samples with a theoretical sensitivity and considers the main properties or aspects highlighted by the theory. This research, according to the aforementioned representation theory considers the importance of the 'regulation' and the 'production'. In this case, the most important regulations that affect the representation of love, seems to be the legal laws about the music in Iran. The sample includes both permitted and forbidden music which are produced under different conditions (inside Iran or beyond borders) and are affected by different legal limitations. Since the singing by women has been forbidden during recent decades, and because of men and women different access to the production, the sample consists of 1970s music. Group B includes

the permitted music which is performed by the singers that either started their work legally or started illegally but finally succeed to gain the formal permission to publish their albums. Group C consists of forbidden music most of which are produced by Iranian musicians living in exile especially in United States.

I have selected the samples from the best and most popular songs of each decade. Since there was no complete list of the bests in 1970s, I had to refer to the popular magazines that have been published in that period of time about music, stars interviews, audience comments and etc. such as *Javanan*, *zan e rooz* and *sepideh*. In order to find the bests of 2000s I had two ways, first to select from the official list of best-seller music (for permitted music); and second to refer to several Iranian websites or weblogs about the music, which include a great amount of information about rankings, the best albums, the best singers and audience opinions. The final sample includes 59 love songs: 19 songs of 1970, 20 permitted songs of 2000s, and 20 forbidden songs of 2000s. This sample also includes 7 female and 23 male singers.

Findings

The abovementioned lyrics have been analyzed through the three steps of coding. At the first step or open coding, ninetythree repeated themes emerged in the music texts of both decades. At second stage or axial coding, these themes have been labeled again and grouped as different categories. Table 2 shows the axial categories obtained from the music texts of 1970s, while table 3 includes corresponding categories of 2000s permitted music texts. As will be explained later, the forbidden music texts of 2000s seem to combine both of these patterns and have no certain particular categories or themes. Making sense of the results

In order to understand these two different pictures of love, it is necessary to know about the social conditions or the context in which they have been shaped.

Persian pop music originated during Qajar dynasty in 19th century. However after the invention of radio and in the aftermath of World War II, it grew rapidly in Iran. Before the emergence of Vigen Derderian in the early 1950s, the music industry was dominated by Persian classical singers; Vigen, shaped a revolution that coincided with the emergence of a new, western-influenced middle class. New economic reforms, increasing rate of urbanism and the modernization policies have developed this new class and provide vast audience for Persian pop music (Zarghami 2008).

Group A		
No.	Categories	themes
1	situation	Separation – distance – far from each other – the mistress has to marry to someone else - there are many obstacles between them
2	emotions	Eager – peace – released from loneliness – released from fears – miss her – deep dependency – the lover can't live without her – worried – she makes his life meaningful
3	Appearance	Young – black eyes – beautiful – black hair – warm hands – shining hair
4	Characteristics of the beloved one	Nice - kind – charming – seducing – sympathy – understanding – listening – supportive – proud (male) – strong (male) – glorious
5	characteristics of the lover	Loyal – devoting – self giving
6	expectations	Loyalty – honesty – to be together forever – emotional support – acceptance – compeer – same destiny – sharing happiness and sadness – comrade – help
7	Strategies	Loyalty after the separation – to forgive – best regards for her – to beg
8	Metaphors	The rain in a desert – the moon light in dark nights – song in the silence flowers – tiny birds – sun rise – sun heat

Group B		
No.	Categories	themes
1	situation	The mistress has left him – she has betrayed him – he is Deceived– his life is ruined – he lost the game
2	Emotions	Failure – anger – he is excited –he missed her – jealousy - suspicion – loneliness - competition
3	Appearance	Cold hands
4	Characteristics of the beloved one	Unfaithful – cruel – snide – reluctant – cold blooded – weak – worthless - opportunist
5	Impacts (for the lover)	He can't fall in love again – he doesn't want to see her again – his entire life is destroyed – he can't trust anyone again
6	Expectations	Fully dominant – loyalty
7	Strategies	To ignore – to revenge - to kill – to hurt – forget – never come back – never forgive – not to accept the mistress apology
8	Metaphors	Like a doll – like a toy

Group C seems to have a combination of these two patterns with more emphasis on physical or sexual description and expectations. As we can see, in group B or permitted songs in 2000s the mistress 'body' is absent. She has no face and no appearance but in the forbidden music there are many detailed information about her body. At the third coding step or selective coding, the central concepts of each group have been derived, and the relations between them have been clarified as below:

Group A. (1970s music texts)

Central concept: love as a unique emotional occurrence in an individual life

**Love can make the life meaningful.
Love can save us from loneliness or fears.**

**The lover is a loyal, self-giving man.
The beloved one is a decent, chaste, passive woman.**

Some external obstacles take the lovers apart.

Group B. (2000s permitted music texts)

Central concept: love as a competition or game with a winner and a loser

**Love can cause strong dependency.
Love can ruin the lover's entire life.**

**The lover is a lonely betrayed man.
The beloved one is a cruel, unfaithful, cold blooded woman.**

The winner actively chooses the separation and ends the relationship.

Group C. (2000s forbidden music texts)

Central concept: a combination of two other groups

The first studio in Iran was called *Tanin*, which was extremely influential and successful. A lot of music was recorded in the *Tanin* studio during those years. The music that came out of *Tanin* studio had a fresh and innovative sound. It is notable that radio and television played a significant and powerful role in the distinct sound of the 1970s to get into the public consciousness and become popular. In particular, the radio and TV's pop orchestra played an instrumental role in this endeavor. Persian pop music was developed by the 1970s, which is known as the 'Golden Age' of Persian pop music using indigenous instruments and forms and adding electric guitar and other imported characteristics; the most popular musicians of this period were *Vigen*, *Aref*, *Googoosh*, *Hayedeh*, *Sattar*, *Ebi*, *Habib* and *Dariush*.

By the revolution of 1979, many social changes affected the pop music: many musicians and singers had to leave their home; Many Iranians fled to foreign countries, especially Los Angeles in the United States, and many continued to sing. The LA style music was quickly welcomed and became popular in Iran; although some experts believe that the Iranian community living in exile was in no mood to produce great music. They had lost their contact to a vast range of their audience and could not closely experience the new situations and atmosphere of Iran.

Inside the country, the pop music was branded as western, un-Islamic, un-Iranian etc. The new discourse put a sign of 'depravity' and 'vice' on every love song and classified it as 'pornographic music'; Singing by women became strictly forbidden and the eight years of war developed a widespread militaristic music to admire the war heroes. The 'mistress' disappeared and the pop music continued its life beyond borders.

One decade after the war, the pop music and love songs rose again and slowly became a permissible genre in Iran music. In the 1990s, Iranian officials decided to produce and promote a 'decent' pop music to compete with the informal mainstream Persian pop music, mostly produced in California (so-called 'LA-type' music). Gradually several pop singers emerged and became famous. They could get the permit to publish their albums and the new technologies such as electronic equipments, home keyboards, home studios and etc, helped them to produce and distribute at low costs. These new love songs are about women who have no permit to sing, to express their selves and their experience of love, but they have changed actively and gradually during the time. They could not shape their own discourse, but their behavior shows meaningful changes in their attitude and beliefs. Three bellow diagrams describe these changes in women education, job and family affairs.

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