Improvisation as 'Other': Creativity, Knowledge and Power – The Case of Iranian Classical Music

LAUDAN NOOSHIN

I.1 (NON-)POLITICS, POWER AND THE DISCOURSES OF MUSICOLOGY

Difference in an encompassing sense has been at the center of one arena of linguistic study ever since structuralism proposed the notion that difference creates meaning. From this origin emerges the proposition that Western thought has been dominated by a series of tightly interconnected binary dualisms: good/evil, male/female, culture/nature, reason/emotion, self/other, and so forth. . . . These linked pairings create long chains of associations, virtuosic in their ready applicability, that exercise a strong and virtually subliminal influence on the ways we position and interpret groups of people, their behaviour, and their works.[1]

THE recent emergence of a new postmodernist musicology has brought with it a growing awareness of the extent to which musicological thought has been shaped by a whole series of binary dualisms of the kind referred to by Solie. Most evidently in areas such as gender and sexuality, race and class, scholars are exploring the implications of this 'logic of alterity' and the discourses which follow.[2] But there are still many aspects of music-making which have remained untouched by such exploration. This article will examine one such area – creative processes in music – most discussion and writing about which depends upon a set of discourses replete with dualisms, and in particular the paradigmatic positioning of 'improvisation' and 'composition' in a largely oppositional relationship. Whilst a number of recent studies have begun to deconstruct this paradigm, few have questioned why it should have emerged in the first place. To some extent, this is hardly surprising. The use of language to mark difference of various kinds has a long tradition within musicology, coupled with a largely unchallenged assumption that such differences and the essentialized categories on which they are often based (and which they in turn

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[1] Ruth Solie, 'Introduction: On "Difference"', *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*, ed. Solie (Berkeley, 1993), 1–20 (p. 11).

[2] Lawrence Kramer, *Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge* (Berkeley, 1995), 34. Kramer writes at length on the political significance of alterity. See *ibid.*, 260–1, for a comprehensive listing of relevant work in this area. Discussion of the broader implications of a postmodernist musicology and a critique of Kramer can be found in Alastair Williams, 'Musicology and Postmodernism', *Music Analysis*, 19 (2000), 385–407.

perpetuate) are derived from the self-evident 'truth' of the music itself, as simply 'the way things are'.[3] But, as Minow argues,

> When we identify one thing as like the others, we are not merely classifying the world; we are investing particular classifications with consequences and positioning ourselves in relation to those meanings. When we identify one thing as unlike the others, we are dividing the world; we use our language to exclude, to distinguish – to discriminate.[4]

Thus, to deny the constructed nature of our categories is also to deny their political nature. Moreover, as Bohlman suggests, such denial is in itself highly political: 'This act of essentializing music, the very attempt to depoliticize it, has become the most hegemonic form of politicizing music.'[5] Solie gets straight to the point: 'Politically, then, difference is about power';[6] and if one follows Foucault's argument that 'there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute, at the same time, power relations',[7] then it becomes necessary to examine how such relations are implicated in the construction of knowledge about music though language.

In this article I argue that many of the discourses surrounding improvisation and composition continue to depend on the reification of particular aspects of music-making and that, whatever their musical merit, there are important ideological implications. The issues discussed below have emerged over a number of years of studying creative performance in Iranian classical music, during which I have become increasingly uneasy with the predominantly essentialist and dualistic discourses. *Musiqi-e assil*,[8] the classical or art music of Iran, is a tradition in which the performer plays a central creative role. Refined

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[3] In the same way that many musicologists continue to discuss 'features of composition and reception that are taken for granted as aspects of autonomous musical practice, as simply "the way music goes" '. Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis, 1991), 16.

[4] Martha Minow, *Making All the Difference: Inclusion, Exclusion and American Law* (Ithaca, NY, 1990); quoted in Solie, 'Introduction', 2.

[5] Philip Bohlman, 'Musicology as a Political Act', *Journal of Musicology*, 4 (1993), 411–36 (p. 419).

[6] Solie, 'Introduction', 6.

[7] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London, 1977), 27.

[8] *Musiqi-e assil* literally means 'pure music' or 'noble music', and is also known as *musiqi-e sonnati* ('traditional music'). It is generally referred to outside Iran as Persian (or Iranian) classical music, but I prefer to use local terminology, particularly since in Iran the term 'classical' (*klasik*) denotes Western classical music. Most English-language writings refer to this music as 'Persian' classical music, and it is true that the music is historically rooted in Persian culture. However, over recent decades the music has broadened in scope and has come to be widely regarded as a national music (although the Persian associations are still strong). In Iran, this music is described as *Irani* ('Iranian'), and I follow this here. For background information on *musiqi-e assil*, including the history of the music, the reader is referred to Ella Zonis, *Persian Classical Music: An Introduction* (Cambridge, MA, 1973); Jean During, *La musique iranienne: Tradition et évolution* (Paris, 1984); and Hormoz Farhat, *The Dastgāh Concept in Persian Music* (Cambridge, 1990). To clarify the distinction between 'Iranian' and 'Persian', the former indicates nationality, whilst the latter refers to the largest ethnic/linguistic group in Iran. Iran was of course called 'Persia' by Europeans and others for many centuries, but 'Iran' has been the internationally recognized name for the country since 1936 (and has been the local name for at least 2,500 years).

and contemplative, the beauty of this music lies in the intricate nuances of the (usually) solo melody line, often compared to the complex patterns found on Persian carpets and miniature paintings. To the extent that creative performance lies at the heart of this music, it is usually described as 'improvised', both by musicians and in the literature. Yet, whilst the concept of creativity – *khalāqiat* – has a long history in *musiqi-e assil*, as in so many other musical traditions there existed no equivalent of the Western concept of improvisation in Iran prior to the twentieth century.[9] Creativity in performance was simply an accepted part of a tradition in which no distinction was made between the roles of composer and performer. However, this creativity was understood to be firmly grounded in a lengthy and rigorous training involving the precise memorization of a canonic repertory known since the late nineteenth century as *radif* (literally 'series').[10]

For the first Europeans to encounter *musiqi-e assil*, performed apparently spontaneously and without notation, the music must indeed have seemed improvised, particularly since they are unlikely to have been aware of the underlying learnt repertory. Thus, this music became known as 'improvised' by Western writers, and later ethnomusicologists and others continued to describe the music in this way. In time, Iranian musicians also became familiar with the concept of improvisation, and some time in the early twentieth century the term *bedāheh navāzi* (literally 'spontaneous playing') was adopted from the realm of oral poetry as an equivalent to the Western term.[11] Important factors in this process were the neo-colonial imbalance of power in the relationship between Iran and the West for much of the twentieth century and the associated widespread emulation of Western ideas, which continued even after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. This, in turn, gave authority to the writings of orientalist scholars, including musicologists, in constructing certain 'truths' about Iran. However, whilst the initial idea of *bedāheh navāzi* as a concept applicable to music was a direct result of the theorizing of Western scholars, it gradually gained currency, and musicians today use the term freely, readily translating it as 'improvisation'. Indeed, there is a certain irony in the fact that only in the last two decades has the concept become fully accepted in Iran, more or less coinciding with a period of intense anxiety and problematization over improvisation as a concept in the West.

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[9] Another example of the ways in which our language is permeated with dualistic structures is the terminology 'East'/'West'. The term 'West' usually refers to Europe (often excluding many of the former Eastern-bloc countries) and North America, and is based on an implied distinction between so-called developed/'industrialized' countries and the rest of the world. Some writers use the terminology 'North'/'South' to make the same distinction. Whilst the political significance of this way of dividing up the world has long been clear, such distinctions are becoming ever more blurred and problematic in an increasingly globalized world.

[10] This repertory exists in a number of related versions and is essentially a collection of several hundred pieces known as *gusheh*s (each of which has its own modal identity), which are arranged according to mode into the *dastgāh*s of Iranian music. The individual *gusheh*s function rather in the manner of 'fixed' compositions, memorized by pupils and then used as the basis for creative performance.

[11] Other commonly used terms include *fel bedāheh* (literally 'spontaneously'), *bedāheh khāni* ('spontaneous singing') and *bedāheh sarāi* ('spontaneous recitation').

The first part of this article will consider the kinds of discourse which have dominated the musicological study of creativity over the last 50 years or so, focusing on the concept of improvisation (and its relationship to composition), particularly as applied to musics outside the notated Western tradition. The aim is not to present a history of the concept nor to compare or add to the many definitions already available, but rather to suggest ways in which changing discourses of creativity may have served specific ideological purposes in recent decades. This is followed by a consideration of how improvisation is discussed within the Iranian tradition and, finally, a number of musical examples which illustrate the problematic nature of the existing discourses.

I.2   IMPROVISATION AS 'OTHER'

The starting point for this discussion is a quotation from one of the earliest studies of performance practice in *musiqi-e assil*:

> The interplay of both the rational and irrational elements, the struggle between the simple making of music and the thinking about its tonal orders, makes for the dramatic history of Oriental music, in general. Never, in occidental music, was the gulf separating practice and theory as deep as in the Eastern countries. The non-rational system of improvisation, comprising the instrumental one, is certainly the older of the two.[12]

The language is uncompromising. There is a 'struggle', a 'gulf' even, not only between theory and practice, between the physical and the cerebral, between 'rational' and 'irrational', but also (and here we see the 'long chains of associations' referred to by Solie) between East and West. What makes this quotation so interesting is the extent to which Gerson-Kiwi draws from a deep-rooted discourse of binary opposition – a language of difference – in order to mark the boundaries between Europe and its 'ethnic others'. A similar quotation, this time in the context of Indian music, is found in a book published some 20 years earlier:

> Indian music is almost entirely a matter of improvisation. Art is not, never has been, and never can be, a matter of improvisation. . . . Indian music has yet to suffer the pangs of birth, the pangs which are the inevitable accompaniment of all artistic creation. It must boldly proclaim itself on paper, in black and white.[13]

Again, the implications are clear: Europeans have art; others, such as Indians, have improvisation. Not having gone through the process of true artistic creation, and particularly not having been notated, Indian music is not 'real' music. Just as the 'natives' were often represented as infantile, so their music is still embryonic ('yet to suffer the pangs of

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[12] Edith Gerson-Kiwi, *The Persian Doctrine of Dastga-Composition: A Phenomenological Study in Music Modes* (Tel Aviv, 1963), 6.

[13] John Beverley Nichols, *Verdict on India* (London, 1944), 134–6; quoted in R. Anderson Sutton, 'Do Javanese Musicians Really Improvise?', *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, ed. Bruno Nettl with Melinda Russell (Chicago, 1998), 69–92 (p. 72).

birth'). What emerges clearly from both quotations (and is fairly typical of writings on 'oriental' musics at this time) is the way in which improvisation became a euphemism for referring to the opposite – the other – of 'real' art: that is, composition. Moreover, as the second quotation testifies, it was often the absence of notation which marked the difference and the chains of associations which followed: absence of notation equals non-cerebral, which in turn equals non-art, which is inferior to real art, and so on.[14]

One could draw on many similar examples to illustrate the fact that for many years Western discourses tended to position improvisation as the other half in a dualistic relationship to notated composition.[15] When discussing musics outside the Western notated tradition, improvisation was often regarded as 'the exception to something normal, more grounded, something *with* all the attributes that improvisation lacks: preparation, guidance, planning ahead, proceeding apace. That something, of course, is "composition".'[16] It was not simply that improvisation was different from composition but, as Treitler points out, the whole concept was laden with the negative associations of something unprepared and unforeseen. Moreover, 'the very concept of "improvisation" as we have seen it anchored in language is a product of cultures that have valorized its opposite – composition – as a norm'.[17] Thus, improvisation came to represent everything that composition was not: simple, ephemeral, irrational, inexplicable, created at a 'whim' on the 'spur of the moment' by the 'primitive', 'untutored' mind. Within musicology, there was of course some acknowledgment of the role of (always grounded) improvisation in European art music, but the study of notated compositions remained the norm. In particular, there was an assumption that only these could represent works of lasting value embodying such aesthetically valued principles as organic

[14] According to Kramer, 'music has been closely tied to the logic of alterity since the mid-eighteenth century at the latest' (*Classical Music*, 35). There are also gender implications of the mind–body split created by the representation of Western composition as a cerebral activity. Thus, Lucy Green writes, 'composition involves a metaphorical display of the power of mind. This cerebral power conflicts with patriarchal constructions of femininity to the extent that, when it is harnessed by women, it produces a threat to the sexual order.' *Music, Gender, Education* (Cambridge, 1997), 88. Green discusses a number of ways in which women's music-making has been controlled by men. There are clear parallels with the kind of racial 'othering' discussed below. Like 'ethnic others', women were not considered capable of the kind of rational, cerebral thought required for composition. Just as colonial power was partly justified by appealing to an alleged cultural superiority, so McClary explains the rise of the 'rational' male composer as part of an attempt to control this arena and simultaneously to deny the role of the physical and sensual alongside the cerebral (*Feminine Endings*, 17).

[15] There is, of course, an intersecting dualism at work here between performance based on a notated score (including the performance of such music 'from memory') and performance without reference to notation. The former is often referred to as 'interpretation' whilst the latter is usually included under the improvisation 'umbrella', even though in many cases musicians work from a rigorously memorized repertory which functions very much like a notated score. Although it is not possible to discuss this particular dualism in detail here, it should be noted that many of the general points made with regard to the improvisation–composition paradigm can also be applied to the 'interpretation of a score in performance'/'improvised performance' dualism.

[16] Leo Treitler, 'Medieval Improvisation', *New Perspectives on Improvisation*, ed. Bruno Nettl (*The World of Music*, 33 (1991)), 66–91 (pp. 66–7).

[17] *Ibid.*, 67.

unity, growth and development, 'balance, cohesion, rationality, etc., all those qualities of good *design*',[18] and therefore worthy of study. In the words of Sloboda, the improviser is 'absolve[d] . . . from the task of evaluation and long term planning'.[19] There thus existed for many years a deep-rooted distinction within musicological thought between composition (usually meaning notated) and improvisation (particularly where there appeared to be no 'grounding' framework or model), and by extension between European art music and 'other' musics.[20] In short, improvisation became an 'icon of musical difference'.[21]

Whatever the musical basis for such a distinction, there are clear political implications. Returning to Nichols briefly, the unnerving vehemence of his tone reveals that a great deal more is at stake than the simple difference between two musical systems. It could be argued that Nichols, like Gerson-Kiwi some 20 years later, is striving not only to define but to justify the boundaries between 'us' and 'them'. Without such essential differences, what legitimacy would European power have over its colonies? Even the title of the book, *Verdict on India*, affirms Europe as the centre of authority, reserving the right to pass judgment on its disempowered others. The extent to which this writing, published in the twilight years of British imperial power, belongs to a long tradition of colonial 'othering' can be illustrated by comparing it to a speech made by Thomas Babbington Macaulay in the British House of Commons in July 1833 (over a century before Nichols's book was published), as discussed by Leppert:

> Macaulay concluded his speech by redrawing the connection between Western cultural superiority (defined as art and morality) and the suppression of India by British political power (defined as law). . . . Macaulay thus drew attention to the relationships I have developed here: that political empire is mirrored by the empire of culture: *our* arts, *our* morals, *our*

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[18] *Ibid.*, 80.

[19] John Sloboda, *The Musical Mind* (Oxford, 1985), 149.

[20] Stephen Blum, for example, reports that for much of the first half of the twentieth century, 'Africans were presumed to be "incapable" of forming or using musical systems.' 'European Musical Terminology and the Music of Africa', *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music: Essays on the History of Ethnomusicology,* ed. Bruno Nettl and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago, 1991), 3–36 (p. 25). Moreover, the musical mapping of such discourses was not restricted to geographically distant 'others'. For example, the association of improvisation with lack of control and order was expressed through the almost hysterical polemic against jazz in the United States between *c.*1920 and 1940. Merriam considers the ways in which jazz was perceived by the largely 'white' establishment of the time and how such perceptions were publicly expressed: 'Jazz, then, was associated with crime, insanity, feeble-mindedness, and other ills as a co-symbol of the degradation of a nation; but it was also looked upon as the symbol and instrument of individual physical collapse. . . . In this period, too, jazz came to be regarded as the symbol of barbarism, primitivism, savagery and animalism. . . . The composer, Sir Hamilton Harty, worried that future historians "will see that in an age which considers itself musically enlightened we permit groups of jazz barbarians to debase and mutilate our history of classical music . . .".' Also, writing in the *New York Times*, 'a Dr. Reisner added that "Jazz is a relic of barbarism. It tends to unseat reason and set passion free." ' Alan Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Evanston, 1964), 242–3. It was not simply that jazz was regarded as 'black' music, but there was a perceived lack of control and rational thought which threatened the very tenets of Western civilization. Once again the dualisms (barbarian/civilized, passion/reason and so on) and their associations are clear.

[21] I paraphrase here from Tenzer, who uses this expression to describe the 'othering' of Bali by Western writers. Michael Tenzer, *Gamelan gong kebyar: The Art of Twentieth-Century Balinese Music* (Chicago, 2000), 435.

literature, *our* laws. By direct implication, moreover, these cultural markers provided for him the rationalization – hence, justification – for imperialism.[22]

The orientalist position is clear: 'a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, "us") and the strange (the Orient, the East, "them") . . . a kind of Western projection onto and will to govern over the Orient'.[23]

What is so fascinating is that a term which originally emerged in the context of European art music and more or less as a direct consequence of the development of notation (and thus the conceptual division between performer and composer) had, by the end of the nineteenth century, extended its role and become a marker to distinguish between the creative processes in that music (which had notation and was therefore art) and other musics (which generally did not and therefore were not). Of course, improvisation played a significant role in European music for several centuries and many composers were also skilled improvisers, but by the time Ernst Ferand wrote his now classic study of improvisation in European music in 1938, improvisation had lost much of its importance.[24] Blum discusses the emergence and trajectory of a range of concepts and terminologies associated with improvisational practice in Europe, tracing the transition from the various adverbs and adverbial phrases in use from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, through to the more all-encompassing verbal and nounal forms – improvise/improvisation – which did not come into regular use until the early nineteenth century.[25] It is interesting to note that such umbrella terms emerged at a time when improvisational practice itself was starting to decline in Europe. It was also perhaps no coincidence that the very period when Europe was consolidating its colonial power was also the time that improvisation started to become devalued in favour of the solidity, permanence and strength represented by the great, notated, nineteenth-century master(*sic*)works.[26] In this way, increased contact with Europe's

[22] Richard Leppert, *The Sight of Sound: Music, Representation and the History of the Body* (Berkeley, 1993), 116–17.

[23] Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London, 1978), 43, 95.

[24] Ernst Ferand, *Die Improvisation in der Musik* (Zurich, 1938). Richard Taruskin describes improvisation as 'nine-tenths of the Renaissance and Baroque musical icebergs'. *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (Oxford, 1995), 61.

[25] Stephen Blum, 'Recognizing Improvisation', *In the Course of Performance*, ed. Nettl with Russell, 27–45 (pp. 36–40). Blum reports on the debate which surrounded the use of these terms at this time, as regards both their translation from one European language to another and the question of what kinds of musical activities they might suitably be applied to (*ibid.*, 38–9). Elsewhere, he traces the growing distinction between composition in notation and composition in performance during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. See Stephen Blum, 'Composition', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2nd edn, London, 2001), vi, 186–201 (pp. 192–3).

[26] Taruskin talks of the 'zealously "anti-improvisatory approach" of modern Mozart scholarship' (*Text and Act*, 289): 'for to admit a performance practice that exalts spontaneous creativity over work-preservation, and that when exercised at the highest level can actually threaten work-identity, would violate the most fundamental tenet of our classical music culture, that of *Werktreue*' (*ibid.*, 283). He also comments on the irony that the so-called 'authenticity movement' did not create a single good improviser.

'others' served to confirm the apparently irreconcilable differences between European art music and other musics:[27] between ever longer and more complex works written for increasingly larger forces and enshrined in a medium that would preserve their authority – and, crucially, their 'work-identity' – for posterity,[28] on the one hand, and the primitive and ephemeral nature of what came to be known as oral tradition, on the other.[29] By the time Europe reached the height of its imperial power, the composer had acquired a status and composition a significance unprecedented in the history of Western music. In contrast, improvisation acquired a new role as a way of talking about 'other' people's music-making.

The use of a Western concept in this way could work only if there were a clear understanding of the difference between improvisation in Western art music and in other musics. From the earliest writings on improvisation in European music, and particularly from the seventeenth century onwards, there is an emphasis on 'grounding' and on creativity controlled by the intellect, as seen in the large body of tutors on the subject.[30] In contrast, the idea that improvised musics outside the European art tradition might also follow certain rules and represent an exercise of the intellect as much as the emotions has emerged only very recently, as will be discussed below.[31] Consider the entry on 'Extemporization' in the 1954 edition of *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, for example, which begins as follows:

> EXTEMPORIZATION or IMPROVISATION. The art of thinking and performing music simultaneously. It is therefore the primitive act of music-making, existing from the moment that the untutored individual obeys the impulse to relieve his feelings by bursting into song. Among all primitive peoples, therefore, musical composition consists of extemporization subsequently memorized, and the process can proceed no farther until some

[27] Ideas about which have proved surprisingly enduring and of which there are many examples in the literature. Writing in 1916, for example, Oscar Sonneck opined that 'both "the [native American] Indian's musical system" and the songs of American Negroes were "ethnomusically too different from our inherited European system" to permit meaningful interchange in musical life and musical scholarship' (quoted in Blum, 'European Musical Terminology', 22). According to Blum, 'discourse along these lines continued for many years to ignore the work of cultural anthropologists and folklorists, as well as writings on music produced by African-Americans' (*ibid.*).

[28] For further discussion of the 'work-concept', see Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford, 1992), and Blum, 'Composition', 197–8.

[29] Another problematic dualism which implies essential differences between music which is notated and that which is not. As Seeger points out, 'in the first place, (music) writing can be learned only by oral-aural techniques; in the second, no conventional music writing can be read without them'. Charles Seeger, 'The Music Compositional Process as a Function in a Nest of Functions and in Itself a Nest of Functions', *Studies in Musicology 1935–1975* (Berkeley, 1977), 139–67 (p. 154).

[30] See 'Improvisation, II: Western Art Music', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2nd edn), xii, 98–128 (pp. 125–6).

[31] An important exception to this was the influential work of Albert Lord (and his teacher, Milman Parry), who used evidence from the study of 'oral formulas' in Yugoslav epic songs to present novel ideas relating to the authorship and modes of composition and transmission employed in the Homer epics. Among other things, Lord argued that these formulas facilitated rapid composition in performance and made it unnecessary for musician-poets to memorize long epic works word for word. See Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Cambridge, 1977), 60.

method of notation is devised to record the composer's musical thoughts independently of his musical performance.[32]

The article then proceeds to disregard the 'primitive' and to focus entirely on improvisation in European art music (from the fourteenth century onwards), as found in different styles and periods, but always controlled within certain formal or stylistic parameters. Whilst there is some acknowledgment of improvisation as a kind of composition, the main frame of reference is still notated composition, as evidenced by the comparative brevity of the entry on 'Composition' which, as the 'norm', seems not to require lengthy explanation.[33]

From the early 1960s, however, there was a significant shift, and improvisation started to gain some visibility as a serious focus of academic study, most notably within ethnomusicology and jazz studies. Just as the demise of improvisatory practices in European music coincided with Europe's assertion of cultural (and thus political) supremacy, so it is perhaps not altogether by chance that improvisation should have started to become revalued at a time which represented a particular kind of challenge to the existing order in Europe and North America. Monson, for example, discusses the ways in which improvisation in jazz became a metaphor for freedom, both musical and social, especially in the context of the American Civil Rights movement and growing black political consciousness in the United States. At this time, 'a broad range of social, spiritual, transnational, and political meanings became attached to the improvisational tendencies implied by the term modal jazz', and the idea 'that it might be possible to experience or even create freedom through improvisation . . . was a belief held by many in the jazz world of the 1950s and 1960s'.[34] In a similar vein, Baily suggests that 'our [recent] interest in improvisation in the West is also surely related to our preoccupation with freedom of personal expression', and Titon observes that 'perhaps at some deep level we prize improvisation not just because of the skills involved but because we think it exemplifies human freedom'.[35]

For decades, improvisation had served partly as an arena to play out Western representations of the primitive and untutored 'other'; now this orientalist trope was turned on its head and improvisation came instead to represent in part what was desirable in other cultures and was perhaps being lost in modern Western societies. Thus, many of the discourses which emerged from the 1960s onwards drew upon a whole new series of binary dualisms in which 'ethnic others' were romanticized and represented (and indeed represented themselves) as spontaneous, natural, authentic, free of the trappings of modern life, and

[32] H. C. Colles, 'Extemporization or Improvisation', *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (5th edn, London, 1954), ii, 991–3 (p. 991).

[33] Hubert Parry, 'Composition', *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (5th edn), ii, 388–9.

[34] Ingrid Monson, 'Oh Freedom: George Russell, John Coltrane, and Modal Jazz', *In the Course of Performance*, ed. Nettl with Russell, 149–68 (pp. 160, 163).

[35] John Baily, 'Ethnomusicological Perspective: Response to Sawyer's "Improvised Conversations"', *Psychology of Music*, 27 (1999), 208–11 (p. 208); Jeff Todd Titon, *Worlds of Music: An Introduction to the Music of the World's Peoples* (2nd edn, New York, 1992), 11.

so on: contemporary noble savages. The promotion of improvisation in primary and secondary education in the US and some parts of Europe, starting in the 1970s, owes a great deal to the idea of improvisation as a liberating 'other' to the authorial canon of Western classical music.[36] Whilst this clearly indicates an important shift from earlier discourses, it would be naive to imagine that the new, apparently more sympathetic discourse was any less a Western construct than the old and, indeed, it could be argued that it served a similar purpose. In both cases, the underlying assumption was one of essential difference: just as the colonial period ingrained the myth of racial essences so, I would suggest, the continued oppositional paradigm between improvisation and composition was partly rooted in a perceived need to perpetuate difference and in particular for European art music to maintain its 'others'.

I.3 RECENT DISCOURSES: TOWARDS IMPROVISATION AS COMPOSITION

What was missing from both the earlier discourses and the more recent 'celebration of the spontaneous' was a recognition both of the lengthy training involved in many so-called improvised traditions and of the structures within which musicians work. Sorrell, for example, reports that the North Indian musician Ram Narayan initially found the idea of improvisation totally alien to his understanding of musical performance, since he associated the term with the deliberate attempt to transgress tradition with unconventional experiments like 'putting alcohol or butter in tea'.[37] For him, such a term implied a disregard for the many years of discipline involved in acquiring the knowledge necessary to perform the music correctly. When it was suggested to Narayan that improvisation could take place within strict boundaries, he became more willing to accede to the term. According to Sorrell, 'What improvisation there is takes place within the narrow limitations of a strict discipline . . . the narrower the limits the sharper the focus, and the really good musician is one who can find the greatest freedom within the narrowest limits'.[38] There are many such examples in the literature which serve to highlight the difficulty of applying a single Western concept, with its own particular historical trajectory, to diverse musical traditions which may have nothing in common other than belonging

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[36] For example, see R. Keith Sawyer, 'Improvised Conversations: Music, Collaboration, and Development', *Psychology of Music*, 27 (1999), 192–205, to whom Baily was responding in the quotation above. Similarly, Griffiths describes how this period marked an increasing experimentation with improvisatory practice by Western composers. See Paul Griffiths, 'Improvisation, II, 6: Western Art Music: The 20th Century', *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (2nd edn), xii, 125. Corbett also considers the complex issues surrounding the orientalist discourses in the use of improvisation by contemporary experimental composers. See John Corbett, 'Experimental Oriental: New Music and Other Others', *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley, 2000), 163–86 (pp. 180–1).

[37] Neil Sorrell and Ram Narayan, *Indian Music in Performance: A Practical Introduction* (Manchester, 1980), 113.

[38] *Ibid.*, 2.

to so-called 'oral' tradition (and even that may not be the case nowadays).

One of the most important consequences of the new 'improvisation as freedom' discourse was a scholarly interest which in turn led for the very first time to detailed studies of improvised musics and to a re-evaluation of the relationship between improvisation and composition.[39] With the increasing number of such studies, particularly from the early 1980s, there began to emerge a clearer understanding of the grounded nature of many of these musics and of the years of study and discipline underlying their performance. Thus, writers started to use language previously found only in studies of notated compositions. Becker, for example, discusses the '*technique* of composition' in oral traditions, Bailey refers to an 'essential core of material [which] is given substance through the operation of tacit rules and strategies', Berliner talks of 'the rigors of composing music in performance' and Racy describes a 'meaningful stock of compositional devices' used in Arabic art music.[40] In contrast to earlier discourses, then, we now had 'devices', 'strategies', 'rules', 'techniques' and even 'musical grammar': things had clearly come a long way from the idea of improvisation as a spontaneous whim. Whilst this represented the start of what might be called the deconstruction of 'improvisation as other', writers still went to some lengths to maintain existing boundaries. According to Sloboda, for example,

> The keynote of the compositional process seems to be the moulding and perfecting of musical ideas. Although an idea may come spontaneously, unbidden, and instantaneously, its subsequent development may take years. In improvisation, the composer has no opportunity to mould and perfect his material.[41]

But clearly improvisers also 'mould and perfect' their material over years of performing, just as notated compositions become 'reworked' in individual renditions (over and above the composer's reworkings, foregrounded in the quotation above). Although Sloboda concedes to the idea of improvisation as a kind of composition (and the improviser

[39] As a result of which there is now a substantial body of writing on improvisation (particularly with reference to jazz and various types of Asian music), although not all explore the actual creative processes in detail. The reader is referred to (among others) Ferand, *Die Improvisation*, and *Improvisation in Nine Centuries of Western Music: An Anthology with an Historical Introduction* (Cologne, 1961); Bruno Nettl with Bela Foltin, Jr, *Daramad of Chahargah: A Study in the Performance Practice of Persian Music* (Detroit, 1972); Bruno Nettl, 'Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach', *Musical Quarterly*, 60 (1974), 1–19; David Sudnow, *Ways of the Hand: The Organisation of Improvised Conduct* (Cambridge, MA, 1978); Sorrell and Narayan, *Indian Music*; *L'improvisation dans les musiques de tradition orale*, ed. Bernard Lortat-Jacob (Paris, 1987); Jeff Pressing, 'Improvisation: Methods and Models', *Generative Processes in Music: The Psychology of Performance, Improvisation and Composition*, ed. John Sloboda (Oxford, 1988), 129–78; Derek Bailey, *Improvisation: Its Nature and Practice in Music* (2nd edn, London, 1992); Paul Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz: The Infinite Art of Improvisation* (Chicago, 1994); *New Perspectives on Improvisation*, ed. Nettl (*The World of Music*, 33 (1991)); *In the Course of Performance*, ed. Nettl with Russell.

[40] Judith Becker, *Traditional Music in Modern Java: Gamelan in a Changing Society* (Honolulu, 1980), 20; Bailey, *Improvisation*, 7; Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 3; Ali Jihad Racy, 'Improvisation, Ecstasy, and Performance Dynamics in Arabic Music', *In the Course of Performance*, ed. Nettl with Russell, 95–112 (p. 103).

[41] Sloboda, *The Musical Mind*, 138.

as a kind of composer: he uses the term 'live composition' to describe improvisation), he is uneasy with accrediting improvisation with the kind of 'long-term structural goals' which characterize composition in notation:[42] the latter still represents the 'norm' and the distinction between the two is emphasized in Sloboda's book.[43]

Sloboda's work is interesting because it exemplifies a particular kind of discourse prevalent in the 1980s and 1990s, and which still has some currency. Improvisation had become worthy of academic study, but there was still hesitance in ascribing it full compositional status. The result has been an intense anxiety over definition: almost every study of improvisation since the early 1970s begins with an attempt to define – to essentialize – just what improvisation is (and what it is not), and in particular its relationship to notated composition. The elements of the discourse are familiar: improvisation is something which takes place more or less spontaneously within a specific time-space and which often involves interaction with other musicians as well as a responsive audience. The absence of notation and the link with 'oral' tradition is another important definitional strand, as is the element of risk-taking which makes improvisation so potentially exciting to both performers and audiences. What is so interesting about such definitions, however, is the extent to which what is said of improvisation can also be said of composition (and vice versa), even where authors set out explicitly to distinguish between the two (as in the quotation above).

This essentializing of improvisation – treating it as one particular kind of music which is somehow distinct from composition – is problematic for a number of reasons. For one thing, many of its defining elements are not absolute, but relative. For example, much debate has surrounded one of the central defining concepts of improvisation – spontaneity – and in particular the exact meaning of the term, the extent to which particular performances are 'truly spontaneous', whether spontaneity can be judged from the sound alone, and so on. As Berliner argues, besides the fact that many musicians prepare aspects of performance in advance, 'the popular conception of improvisation as "performance without previous preparation" is fundamentally misleading. There is, in fact, a lifetime of preparation and knowledge behind every idea that an improviser performs.'[44] Moreover, any 'spontaneity' is clearly mediated and shaped through musical and cultural norms, as well as through musicians' idiosyncrasies, the physical limitations and possibilities of instruments or voice, interaction with other musicians and the audience, and so forth.

The ambiguity and relative nature of some of the central concepts of improvisation aside, one could argue that much of the definitional angst which has characterized this area of study for the last 30 years or

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[42] *Ibid.*, 139, 149.

[43] Similarly, according to Griffiths, the initial interest in breaking the boundaries between composer, improviser and performer in Euro-American contemporary music in the 1960s did not last long and 'improvisation was rapidly reaffirmed as secondary to composition . . . once the 1960s had passed' (Griffiths, 'Improvisation, II, 6', 125).

[44] Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 17.

so is rooted in the dualistic nature of the inherited categories. Despite a growing appreciation of improvisation as a kind of composition, the dualistic discourses have remained with us, and until very recently much of the literature was still preoccupied with asking whether a particular piece, style or repertory was composed (for later performance from notation) or improvised, the implication being that it had to be one or the other.[45] But what is it in fact that all improvised musics share? And what exactly differentiates improvised musics from those which are composed? A perusal of the literature shows that the distinction has tended to focus on two things: creative context and the product of creative activity. This has, in turn, highlighted particular kinds of difference between, on the one hand, creativity which generally takes place away from the performance context and whose product is usually a score requiring further creative acts to be realized as music in performance; and, on the other, that which takes place in performance and which does not result in a physical product (other than perhaps a sound recording, which differs from a score in following rather than preceding the performance).

   From this perspective, it becomes possible to define essences. Obviously all 'composed' composition shares the fact of being written down; and all 'improvised' composition shares the fact of taking place 'in performance'. But what is the real significance of this distinction? Whilst the absence of a notated score is often taken to indicate greater freedom in performance, we know that this is not necessarily the case and that musicians often spend many years memorizing an oral repertory which effectively functions in much the same way as a score. As Hood asks:

> Can we say that the essential difference is that the composition can be subjected to greater cultivation through a process of writing and revision? But then, what about those cultures that know only an oral tradition and yet have developed fixed melodies, that is compositions?[46]

   Nettl's 1974 *Musical Quarterly* article was one of the first publications to challenge the idea of improvisation and composition as oppositional categories and to suggest instead a continuum of creative practice between music which is primarily 'compositional' and that which is primarily 'improvisatory', whether musicians are using notation or creating in performance. He cites examples of composers who created primarily in their minds or at an instrument and apparently recorded the music on paper only after it had been fully worked out. Whilst composers such as Beethoven continually reworked material in writing, sometimes over a period of years, 'the fact that Schubert wrote down certain of his works rapidly . . . without working and reworking them very much, could lead us to regard his musical thinking as basically

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[45] Whilst it has already been noted that some contemporary composers have used 'improvised' elements in their compositions, there is still a clear conceptual division between these two creative modes.

[46] Mantle Hood, 'Improvisation in the Stratified Ensembles of Southeast Asia', *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology*, 2 (1975), 25–33 (p. 26).

improvisatory'.[47] Likewise, there are numerous written records of improvisations (such as those of Franz Liszt) which, once 'fixed' in notation, have come to be regarded in much the same way as compositions which were originally notated. Moreover, with the advent of sound recording, improvisations can now be preserved in sound, transcribed, studied and reinterpreted in the same way as a written composition. During gives the example of the renowned Turkish musician Çemil Bey, whose improvised *taqsim* recordings dating from around 1905 have become regarded as exemplary models of the music, functioning in much the same way as notated compositions.[48] Similarly, students of jazz study the improvisations of prominent musicians, using both recordings and transcriptions, whether published or their own.[49] The ways in which these performances become starting points for further creativity are discussed at length by Berliner.[50]

In fact, the idea of an integral relationship between improvisation and composition is not new. 50 years before Nettl's 1974 seminal article, Schenker was writing about this relationship in the context of European art music. His insightful awareness of the improvisatory nature of composition is discussed by Rink, who notes the 'frequency and conviction with which Schenker uses the term to describe the act of composition and to define musical structure'.[51] The very title of his 1925 essay *Die Kunst der Improvisation* confers a status on improvisation rarely seen at this time. The significance of Schenker's writing is not simply in the acknowledgment of the role of improvisation in the history of Western music, or that many composers were also accomplished improvisers and even incorporated elements of their improvisations into their notated compositions, but something much more fundamental: the possibility that composition and improvisation may in fact be part of the same process. He explored the idea of background, middleground and foreground structure functioning in both composition and improvisation, and also suggested that 'the demise of improvisation in the nineteenth century precipitated a decline in compositional technique, that is, the ability to compose not according to form but spontaneously, and to effect a synthesis'.[52] In applying Schenker's ideas to specific case studies, Rink notes 'the close relation between improvisation and composition in Chopin's music, and even more importantly the use of a common set of structural principles – in other words, *a stylistic use of structure* – in works belonging to very different genres'.[53] We will return to this idea briefly at the end of Section III below.

[47] Nettl, 'Thoughts on Improvisation', 10–11.

[48] Jean During, 'Le point de vue du musicien: Improvisation et communication', *L'improvisation*, ed. Lortat-Jacob, 33–44 (p. 34).

[49] For example, Michael H. Goldsen, *Charlie Parker Omnibook, Transcribed Exactly from his Recorded Solos* (Atlantic Music Corporation, 1978), consists of transcriptions of improvisations by Charlie Parker from the 1940s and early 1950s.

[50] Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 97–105.

[51] John Rink, 'Schenker and Improvisation', *Journal of Music Theory*, 37 (1993), 1–54 (p. 2).

[52] *Ibid.*, 3.

[53] *Ibid.*, 41.

In general, though, the reification of difference on the basis of context and product (on which the categories of composition and improvisation depend) has long served to deflect attention away from what musics created in notation and performance might share in their creative processes. Whilst Nettl was arguing for a more meaningful understanding of the relationship between music which is 'basically improvisatory' and that which is worked out over a period of time ('compositional') as far back as 1974, it was not until the early 1990s that scholars started to write about improvisation and composition as integrally related, even using the same 'basic ground rules'.[54] Berliner describes 'the Eternal Cycle' between improvisation and precomposition in jazz,[55] between ideas which are generated in performance and those which form part of a musician's 'store' of ideas: 'Characteristically, improvisation perpetually shifts between precomposed musical ideas and those conceived in the moment. . . . This cyclical process of generation, application, and renewal occurs at every level of music making';[56] and Kartomi describes how the musical 'doodlings' of children at play can be formulated into composition:

> sometimes an idea contained in an improvisation is picked up and reproduced by another child, or by several children playing nearby, in which case it sometimes becomes established as a playsong [i.e. a composition] . . . [which] also includes an element of improvisation, for no two renderings are ever exactly the same.[57]

This marks a new phase, then, in which the perennial question of whether a piece of music is 'really' improvised becomes somewhat immaterial, since 'improvisational' and 'compositional' elements are to be found in all music.[58] An interesting indicator of this can be found in Stephen Blum's article on 'Composition' in the most recent edition of *The New Grove Dictionary*, in which he more or less dispenses with the idea of improvisation as an activity separate from composition and talks instead of 'composition during performance' to refer both to the act of interpreting a written score and to what might more generally be referred to as improvisation.[59] The first five sections of the article discuss compositional practices in a range of performance traditions, and not until Section 6 is the role of notation discussed. Above all, European concepts of composition are clearly situated, both historically and culturally: notation is not presented as a taken-for-granted prerequisite for composition, nor is notated composition held up as a

[54] Hood, 'Improvisation in the Stratified Ensembles of Southeast Asia', 26.
[55] Berliner, *Thinking in Jazz*, 221.
[56] *Ibid.*, 495.
[57] Margaret J. Kartomi, 'Musical Improvisations by Children at Play', *New Perspectives on Improvisation*, ed. Nettl (*The World of Music*, 33 (1991)), 53–65 (pp. 55, 63).
[58] Indeed, it might be argued that publications which focus on the theme of improvisation, bringing together writings on different traditions (for example Bailey, *Improvisation*; *L'improvisation*, ed. Lortat-Jacob; Nettl, *The World of Music*; *In the Course of Performance*, ed. Nettl with Russell), further reinforce the reification of 'improvisation' as a particular type of music different from 'composition'.
[59] Blum, 'Composition', 187–8.

'norm'. This signifies an important departure in which composition in notation and composition in performance stand on equal terms.

I.4 POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Whilst notions of musical difference are fundamental to the ethno-musicological endeavour, it is only quite recently that scholars have started to recognize and write about the colonizing effects of such notions. Tenzer, for example, draws attention to the ways in which our habitual scholarly discourses are informed by 'the politics of irre-ducible difference',[60] and cites, among other examples, the tendency among writers on Balinese music to draw on oppositional concepts of time in which Balinese cyclical structures (often represented as trance-like and static) are contrasted with the directed and apparently progressive linearity of much Western music.[61] Similarly, in discussing the history of academic writing on African music, Agawu challenges a whole series of 'normalized' modes of representation which reveal the 'inescapably ideological nature of writing'. He argues that such writing has often followed a quasi-imperialist agenda (no doubt partly sublim-inal, but nevertheless persuasive) in which differences are emphasized and distilled into stereotypical essences and even myths which 'only a scholarly plot seeking difference between Africa and the West will insist on propagating'.[62] In calling for a greater demystification of other musics, writers such as Tenzer and Agawu have pointed to the impera-tive of exploring what it is that musical traditions share as well as what makes them different, and of finding ways of discussing difference which are not reliant upon orientalist stereotyping. In the context of this article, whilst there are clearly certain kinds of differences between music created in notation and that created in performance, the exact nature and significance of such differences remain largely unexam-ined. Certainly, as far as underlying creative processes are concerned, there is growing evidence to suggest commonalities, something which has emerged from my own work on *musiqi-e assil*, as will be discussed below.

Our understanding of creative processes has clearly come a long way in recent years, and few scholars and musicians would now argue with the idea that what might once have been thought of as opposites are in fact closely related, if not part of the same process. If this is indeed the case, one might ask what (or even whose) purpose the existing discourses serve. However natural the categories of improvisation and composition may seem, they are in fact constructions which depend on the privileging of certain criteria – specifically context and product – and which have in turn deflected attention away from what musics

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[60] Tenzer, *Gamelan gong kebyar*, 435.
[61] Tenzer writes: 'The linkage is an orientalism: another trope of the "timeless" East, recalling also Geertz's characterization of Balinese time as a "vectorless now".' *Ibid.*, 375; see Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 404.
[62] Kofi Agawu, 'Representing African Music', *Critical Inquiry*, 18 (1992), 245–66 (pp. 256, 249).

created in notation and in performance might share in their creative processes. Such categorization is not one of the inevitable, but ultimately harmless, tools of discussion within our discipline, simply reflecting the 'way things are', but a set of constructions which draws heavily on orientalist assumptions and continues profoundly to influence the ways in which we think about creative processes in different kinds of music. As Agawu puts it, 'we are our discourses'.[63] In effect, one possible way of categorizing creativity has come to be presented as the only way, the natural order, so to speak. Masking an ideology in which music created in performance is represented as sharing something which differs in essence from music created in notation, this is indeed what Minow refers to above: 'When we identify one thing as like the others, we are not merely classifying the world; we are investing particular classifications with consequences and positioning ourselves in relation to those meanings.'[64] In other words, when it comes to creative processes, musicological language tends to be divisive rather than inclusive, stressing what is different rather than what is shared. As I have argued, the political significance of this lies partly in the way in which such discourses have served to emphasize perceived differences between Western art music and 'other' musics and to downplay similarities.

Given the political implications of this debate, and in particular the ways in which our discourses connect and separate different types of music, I have been intrigued by certain parallels in current ways of discussing 'race' and ethnicity. Take the term 'Asian', for example, which has been used in Britain since the 1970s as a convenient label to refer to people of South Asian origin, thus serving to circumscribe and define a group primarily through their ethnicity.[65] Just as the term 'improvisation' groups together musics that may share little more than the creative licence of the performer, which becomes reified as the central defining aspect of the music, so 'Asian' constructs a category which reifies ethnicity and implies essential differences between those who belong to this category and those who do not. The analogy can be taken even further. Labels such as 'Asian' or 'black' have in recent years become the focus of so-called identity politics in which terms originally used to discriminate negatively are appropriated as a symbol of empowerment through difference. In what seems to be a curious musical parallel to such identity politics, Smith is unwilling to acknowledge common ground between jazz and Western art music, preferring to stress difference and criticizing writers who have pointed to certain attributes of jazz which coincide with aesthetic criteria valued in

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[63] Agawu, 'Representing African Music', 266.

[64] Minow, *Making All the Difference*, 3; quoted in Solie, 'Introduction', 2.

[65] The term was first used in East Africa as an all-encompassing label to refer to migrant (and late settler) workers of South Asian origin. The eventual appropriation of this term in Britain as part of a process of empowerment and the subsequent emergence of a new British 'Asian' identity is discussed by Gerd Baumann in *Contesting Culture: Discourses of Identity in Multi-Ethnic London* (Cambridge, 1996), 149ff. Incidentally, this term continues to alienate those who originate from other parts of Asia and who do not identify with the category of 'Asian' as used in Britain today.

Western art music.[66] In objecting to the analysis of improvised music using methods and value criteria similar to those used for notated music, Smith appeals to essentialist categories which are somewhat reminiscent of discourses of racial essentialism, although it is interesting to note that his own analysis draws heavily on the kinds of methodology and language he himself criticizes.[67] In stark antithesis to this approach, Kramer suggests that 'many jazz musicians (in contrast to fans and critics) resist the "othering" of improvisation, preferring to speak of craft'.[68] Monson, for example, discusses the ways in which George Russell's music theory (as set out in a number of publications in the 1950s and early 1960s) served, among other things, a 'need to prove the intellectual worth of jazz by demonstrating mastery of the rationalist tools of music theory (thereby undermining the racist idea that the jazz improvisation sprang from the instinctual outpourings of the untutored)'.[69] Describing the background to the emergence of bebop, Russell talks of trying 'to convince . . . small-minded people that . . . this music does not come from someone who lacks complexity'.[70] In fact, jazz provides an interesting case illustrating the ideological implications of musical discourses. In particular, from the mid-1960s modal jazz became an arena for expressing the growing tensions between 'philosophies of universality [on the one hand] and black nationalism'[71] on the other, informed by complex issues of ownership, power and control (including empowerment through difference). Moreover, with a growing black consciousness came an identification with other anti-racist and anti-colonialist struggles around the world which depended upon a 'mapping of freedom, spiritual development, and identification with an undifferentiated non-Western world',[72] this latter comprising a quasi-orientalist grouping of Africa, India and the Middle East.

Returning to the central point, whether one is dealing with musical creativity or ethnicity, it is the most immediately observable differences which have tended to form the defining criteria of categorization and which the predominantly essentialist discourses have emphasized. Perhaps this is why they have proved so enduring: because they point out the most obvious differences, they provide a kind of closure, as if describing a piece of music as 'improvised' or a person as 'Asian' says everything there is to be said, whereas in fact it tells us very little about what lies beneath the surface. As Said argues:

> No one today is purely *one* thing. Labels like Indian, or woman, or Muslim, or American are no more than starting-points, which if followed into actual

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[66] Gregory Smith, 'In Quest of a New Perspective on Improvised Jazz: A View from the Balkans', *New Perspectives on Improvisation*, ed. Nettl (*The World of Music*, 33 (1991)), 29–52 (pp. 31–2).

[67] See in particular *ibid.*, 38–9, 49.

[68] Kramer, *Classical Music*, 266. The position of 'other' does of course have its advantages, such as the licence to deviate, but this is within a hierarchical framework in which it is always clear who is 'on top' (*ibid.*, 62–3).

[69] Monson, 'Oh Freedom', 156.

[70] Quoted *ibid.*, 157.

[71] *Ibid.*, 163.

[72] *Ibid.*, 162.

experience for only a moment are quickly left behind. Imperialism['s] . . . worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white, or black, or Western, or Oriental. . . . No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about. Survival in fact is about the connections between things.[73]

Even more disturbing, and something which has been thrown into relief by recent events on the world political stage, is the extent to which current political discourses continue to draw on the same kinds of dualisms used over 150 years ago by Macaulay and others, which depend on assumed differences between 'worlds' that are 'civilized', 'free' and 'democratic' and those that are not, between good/evil, West/East, Christianity/Islam and so on. One might ask to what extent musicological discourses are implicated or bound up with these political dualisms, for it is perhaps not such a great leap from discourses which suggest essential differences between musical systems to those which imply essential differences between the people who make that music. To conclude this section, then, I would suggest that we need to foster a musicology which is attuned to the historical and ideological roots of its own discourses and which recognizes the ways in which such discourses continue, spectre-like, to exert their influence in reinforcing the essential and the oppositional.

II.1 DISCOURSES OF CREATIVITY IN *MUSIQI-E ASSIL*[74]

What are the implications of the preceding discussion for Iranian music? Like so many traditions in which the performer plays a significant creative role, *musiqi-e assil* is often described as improvised, both within the tradition and by those outside. But what does this really tell us about the music and its underlying creative processes? The second half of this article will consider discourses of improvisation among Iranian musicians and in the literature before looking at some examples from the repertory itself.

As discussed earlier, the idea of creative performance rooted in years of training, and specifically in knowledge of the canonic repertory or *radif*, has a long history in *musiqi-e assil*. Blum presents a number of descriptions of performance practice in Near Eastern writings from the tenth century AD onwards which illustrate the important role that

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[73] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1993), 407–8.

[74] The main focus of this article is a discussion of the orientalizing effects of Western discourses of creativity as they have been applied to 'other' musics, using specific examples from *musiqi-e assil* to illustrate the problematic nature of these discourses. Whilst the social, 'ideological and cultural meanings attached to improvisation by performers and audiences' (Monson, 'Oh Freedom', 149) within Iran itself are important (but poorly documented) aspects of the tradition, detailed discussion of this lies outside the scope and central focus of the current article. The main aim of Section II is to examine briefly the impact of the relatively recent dualistic discourses on the ways in which creativity is discussed and written about in *musiqi-e assil* and to establish the broader context for the analytical discussion which follows in Section III.

creative performance has played in Persian musical culture for several centuries (and long before the *radif* was formalized), and in particular the expectation that musicians should be responsive to their audience and to the performance setting.[75] Whilst it is often difficult to ascertain from such writings the constraints within which musicians worked and the extent to which performances might have been prepared in advance – and writers also differ on the question of how much freedom should be allowed or expected in performance[76] – creative performance was clearly the norm and was highly valued. However, the conceptual division between composition and improvisation entered the tradition much later, following increased contact with Europe during the nineteenth century.[77] In particular, the introduction of Western notation eventually led to the emergence of a new figure, the 'composer' – *āhangsāz* (literally 'song-maker') – whose status was enhanced by association with Western culture,[78] and to a series of new 'composed' (i.e. notated) genres, which further served to reinforce the emerging dualistic concepts.

Some older musicians resisted the trend towards an unquestioning and normative acceptance of these new categories, as During notes: 'When H. Gholi (d.1915) was asked why he did not "compose" fixed pieces like his pupils, he replied haughtily: "What I compose is what I play." '[79] But by the mid-twentieth century, the conceptual division between composition and improvisation was widely accepted, and with it the idea that *musiqi-e assil* was predominantly improvised. The process has been a gradual one, though, and even as recently as the early 1970s, 'those who had been in contact with western musicians and with western ways of thinking about music were familiar with the concept [of improvisation] and accepted it readily. Others, however,

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[75] Blum, 'Recognizing Improvisation', 28–36.

[76] *Ibid.*, 32.

[77] The term *badihe* was in use by the twelfth century, but seems to have been applied primarily to the poetry which was being sung rather than to the music itself (*ibid.*, 29).

[78] Two factors are important here. From the early years of the twentieth century and with increased momentum during the Pahlavi period (1925–79), the social arena was dominated by a struggle between proponents of modernization and increased contact with the West on the one hand, and more traditional factions on the other. From the 1960s in particular, modernization and Westernization became closely linked in a discourse controlled through government institutions and later particularly through the media. Music was an integral part of this discourse, in which *musiqi-e assil* became a symbol of the traditional way of life and was generally represented as inferior to Western music, which was often referred to as *musiqi-e 'elmi* ('scientific music'). Secondly, the association of notated composition with the cerebral was significant in a society in which the dualism of mind and body has a long history, and this further served to elevate the status of the composer working with notation. Many of these composers were (and still are) trained in Western techniques and styles of composition (including electro-acoustic music), and a number have written compositions for Western-style ensembles whilst drawing on Iranian influences in their music. Bruno Nettl, for example, discusses the work of Ali Reza Mashayekhi and Dariush Dolatshahi in *The Radif of Persian Music: Studies of Structure and Cultural Context* (Champaign, 1987), 125, and Kay Kaufman Shelemey profiles Reza Vali's 1998 Flute Concerto in *Soundscapes: Exploring Music in a Changing World* (New York, 2001), 251–6. A similar situation is found elsewhere in Asia. Tenzer, for example, discusses the emergence of Indonesian *musik kontemporer* beginning in the 1970s (*Gamelan gong kebyar*, 436–9).

[79] During, 'Le point de vue', 34 (my translation).

were somewhat baffled by it.'[80] The establishment of formal higher education in music in the late 1960s has been particularly significant in an increasing reflexivity among Iranian musicians in relation to creative performance and a widespread acceptance of improvisation as a concept. Improvisation now has a tangible presence in the tradition: referred to in concert programme notes and on the inserts of commercial recordings, some teachers are apparently even starting to discuss aspects of improvisation with pupils, something which rarely happened in the past.[81] All of the musicians interviewed by the author used the term *bedāheh navāzi* readily, translating it as 'improvisation', and many drew comparisons between Iranian music and other improvised traditions, particularly jazz and Indian classical music.[82] The discourses emphasize at one and the same time the absolute rigour of the training process and a kind of idealized mystique of the creative performer. Moreover, some musicians even talk about *musiqi-e assil* as linked in some way to other 'improvised' traditions, and again jazz and Indian classical music are often cited as examples. Of particular interest is the way in which the idea of improvisation has, over the last 20 years or so, encouraged Iranian musicians to think of their music in a broader global context.[83] Indeed, the current popularity of improvisation can perhaps be explained both through what it appears to represent in terms of creative licence and by the way in which it provides a point of connection with musics outside the Iranian tradition. Regardless, then, of how the concept of improvisation entered the tradition (or how accurately it describes the music), this concept has taken on a life of its own, adapted to meet the needs of a complex web of cultural and political positions and, in particular, acquired heightened contemporary resonance.

The gradual acceptance of improvisation as a valid concept in Iranian music has not been uncontested, however. During the 1960s and 70s in particular, this issue sparked an intense debate in which the perception of improvisation as allowing musicians licence to transgress traditional limits was largely influenced by a particular understanding of the term at a time when 'improvisation as freedom' was the dominant discourse in the West. This appeared directly to contradict the ethos of discipline and training so central to *musiqi-e assil*. Invoking notions of purity, authenticity and even national identity (in the face of encroaching Westernization), and underpinned by a strongly moralistic tone, the debate was spearheaded by musicians such as Nur Ali Borumand, a prominent teacher who assumed the role of guardian of the traditional music:

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[80] Nettl with Foltin, *Daramad of Chahargah*, 12.

[81] As discussed by Laudan Nooshin, 'The Processes of Creation and Re-creation in Persian Classical Music' (Ph.D. dissertation, University of London, 1996), 128–31.

[82] Indeed, some musicians have even experimented with bringing together Iranian music and these other traditions, as for example in the music of Avizheh (a group whose members compose and perform a 'fusion' of Iranian music and jazz) and Ghazal (Iranian and Indian classical music).

[83] Not unlike the situation in modal jazz from the mid-1960s, as described above.

> Improvisation has (also) been a problem to Persian music, in the sense that
> (some) musicians have been thinking and saying that you can play whatever
> you feel like playing; and this is what they have done all along. As a result,
> we now have musicians who call themselves improvisers, and who do
> actually improvise. But when we really pay attention to their performances,
> we find them to be far removed from genuine traditional music. . . . they
> should realize that, in order to develop the subject properly, the work of an
> improviser must have a basic structure, and every phrase should be appro-
> priately related to the one that precedes it.[84]

What this quotation highlights is the way in which the debate over
improvisation and the extent of musicians' freedom in performance
became an avenue for playing out ideas about the place of a centuries-
old tradition in a rapidly modernizing society, and from which
emerged a discourse of authenticity quite new to Iranian music.[85]

In fact, the idea of improvisation as something grounded – as
freedom underpinned by knowledge of the *radif* – emerges strongly in
discussion with musicians, and has remained a constant theme in the
literature for decades.[86] In the words of the prominent musician
Hossein Alizadeh:

> anyone who wants to create must be linked to the roots [of the music]. He
> should know the true essence (*johar*) of Iranian music and its *radif*s, as an
> alphabet, as tools. But after this period, the artist is faced with the question
> of what to do with these tools. . . . Art should have its roots in the past and
> a view towards the future.[87]

Similarly, according to one of the earliest introductory books on
Iranian music to be published outside Iran (in France), this music
'gives a large place to improvisation, but in the framework of strict
rules'. Whilst such improvisation is 'partly innate . . . [it] cannot be
developed without many years of hard work'.[88] This points to another

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[84] Nur Ali Borumand (n.d., but probably some time in the 1970s), quoted in Jean During with
Zia Abdolbaghi and Dariush Safvat, *The Art of Persian Music* (Washington DC, 1991), 204–5.
Sha'bani, writing in 1973, expresses similar concerns about the effects of improvisation on *musiqi-
e assil*, particularly when practised by less experienced musicians. He lists five 'problems' with
improvisation, including the claim that 'the performer is not able to present a profound piece of
work through improvising'. Aziz Sha'bani, *Shenasai-e musiqi-e Iran: Usul-e nazari-e musiqi-e Iran*
(*Understanding Iranian Music*), iii (Shiraz, 1973), 32 (my translation).

[85] See Nooshin, 'The Processes of Creation', 151–4, for further discussion of this topic, which
lies outside the scope of this article. Mohammad Reza Fayaz also discusses the role of Western
musicologists in promoting notions of authenticity in Iran during the 1960s, in 'Bazkhooni-e
Esalat' ('A Look at the Notion of Originality in Iranian Music'), *Mahoor Music Quarterly*, 1 (1998),
93–112. The debate over the role and extent of creative performance in *musiqi-e assil* continues
today, at a time when the *radif* has become central to quasi-ideological discourses of canonical
control and authority by traditionalists, a position which is challenged through creative perform-
ance by many (particularly younger) musicians. For example, see Sarmad Ghader, 'Bedāheh
va shirin navāzi' (title translated as 'Improvisation and Certain Techniques'), *Mahoor Music
Quarterly*, 5 (1999), 133–6.

[86] Nooshin, 'The Processes of Creation', 137–51, examines the ways in which creativity is
discussed both by musicians and in the literature.

[87] Faraj Sarkoohi, 'Goftogoo ba Hossein Alizadeh' ('Interview with Hossein Alizadeh'), *Adineh*,
39 (1989), 33–9 (pp. 35–6; my translation).

[88] Nelly Caron and Dariouche Safvate, *Iran: Les traditions musicales* (Paris, 1966), 19, 129.

recurrent theme: improvisation as something 'intuitive', 'innate' or 'natural':

> Iranian musicians do not isolate this branch of theory, and they do not teach it formally. In fact, in the literature improvisation is hardly mentioned. . . . most of the theory of practice comes to an Iranian intuitively. . . . the student simply absorbs the compositional procedures without being aware of them as such. For this reason, a musician is often unable to explain precisely what he is doing during his improvisation. Likewise, Persian music theorists, considering this aspect of music to be an intuitive procedure, do not discuss it in their writings. Therefore . . . the foreign musicologist has little indigenous methodology or terminology on which to base a study of improvisation. . . . the musician does not calculate the procedures that will guide his playing. Rather he plays from a level of consciousness somewhat removed from the purely rational.[89]

Despite a greater awareness of improvisation since the 1970s, and the fact that musicians do talk about it in general terms, there is still very little 'indigenous methodology or terminology' with which to engage in detailed discussion of creative practice. Therefore, unlike certain aspects of the music such as modal structures, for which there is a relatively rich body of associated technical terminology and which are therefore readily discussed by musicians, creative processes are rarely talked about. Whether the growing awareness will eventually lead to the development of terminology in this area remains to be seen.[90]

As Zonis observes, and in contrast to the literature published outside Iran, one finds no mention of improvisation as such in Persian-language writings before the 1970s. After this time, as the concept gradually gained acceptance, writers started to use the term but there is no detailed discussion of improvisational techniques (by looking at specific performances, for instance). For example, Joneydi's book *Zamine-ye shenākht-e musiqi-e Irāni* is fairly typical in what one might be tempted to interpret as an almost deliberate avoidance of any detailed consideration of improvisation. In a short chapter entitled 'Bedāheh navāzi dar musiqi-e Irāni' ('Improvisation in Iranian Music'), he says surprisingly little about Iranian music, but instead quotes at length from the French musicologist Lavignac on the subject of improvisation in European art music, as well as briefly discussing improvisation in Iranian poetry.[91] The absence of detailed discussion in Persian texts may partly reflect the fact that musicological scholarship is a relatively recent arrival in Iran,[92] but may also be indicative of a reluctance to

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[89] Zonis, *Persian Classical Music*, 98–9, 125.

[90] For further discussion of the implications of this see Nooshin, 'The Processes of Creation', 128–31, 149–50.

[91] Fereydoun Joneydi, *Zamine-ye shenākht-e musiqi-e Irāni* (*The Basis for Understanding Iranian Music*) (Tehran, 1982), 185–93.

[92] The recent establishment of two scholarly music journals is indicative of a growing musicological presence in Iran, something which also owes a great deal to the work of the Iranian musicologist Mohammad Taghi Massoudieh. Massoudieh studied in Germany and returned to Iran in the 1970s, where he remained until his untimely death in 1999. After his initial interest in *musiqi-e assil*, Massoudieh spent much of the post-1979 period working on the folk music traditions of Iran. Massoudieh was a significant influence on an emerging generation of Iranian musicologists.

delve into what many regard as the quasi-sacred mysteries of creativity. In fact, Persian-language publications tend to be either general introductory texts, commentaries accompanying different versions of the *radif* or other didactic materials.[93]

Besides the work of Nettl and Blum (the latter being primarily historical), most of the literature on *musiqi-e assil* published outside Iran presents the composition–improvisation paradigm as an unquestioned starting point. All acknowledge the importance of creative performance, but few attempt to explore the discourses, to examine how they emerged and developed, or to deconstruct their ideological and cultural implications. Zonis, for example, talks of 'compositional procedures' when discussing improvisation but, like many other writers on the subject, she regards composition (in notation) as something else altogether, and includes a separate section entitled 'Composed Persian Music', by which she means notated pieces by named composers.[94] Sadeghi, on the other hand, shows some awareness of the problematic nature of the dualistic categories. As well as a section on 'Composed Pieces', he also discusses a separate category of 'Improvised-Composed Pieces', with the following explanation: 'Some of the composed forms have gone through an improvised stage before they became a fixed written composition.'[95] It is also interesting to note that During is the only author writing about contemporary performance practice in a European language to mention the Persian terminology – *bedāheh navāzi* – in his work.[96]

II.2 BEYOND DISCOURSE: CREATIVE PERFORMANCE IN *MUSIQI-E ASSIL*

So far, we have considered the dualistic nature of Western discourses of creativity, their political implications and the impact of such discourses on concepts of creativity in Iranian music. As indicated above, the improvisation–composition paradigm has become integral to the discourses of *musiqi-e assil* and is now used freely by musicians and others. But how do such discourses relate to what actually happens in the music? Many of the ideas discussed in Section I have taken shape as a direct result of my work on Iranian music and my increasing

[93]   It is interesting to consider the impact of historical and political events on the trajectory of a particular field of study. Much of the musicological literature on *musiqi-e assil* available to us now was published in the 1960s and 70s at a time when scholarly thought in this area was dominated both by the dualistic composition–improvisation paradigm and by a largely structuralist approach. It was not until the 1980s that ethnomusicologists became more widely interested in generative aspects of music-making, by which time the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the events which followed had cut short what had been a growing musicological interest in *musiqi-e assil*. For that reason, very few studies of performance practice in this music lie outside the predominantly structuralist and positivist approach of 1960s and 70s scholarship. An important exception is the work of Nettl, who has perhaps done more than any other ethnomusicologist to challenge dominant discourses on improvisation. It is significant that the very period when Nettl was developing his ideas on this subject (as crystallized in his 1974 article 'Thoughts on Improvisation') was also the time when he was working on material collected in Iran during the late 1960s.
[94]   Zonis, *Persian Classical Music*, 98, 139–47.
[95]   Manuchehr Sadeghi, 'Improvisation in Nonrhythmic Solo Instrumental Contemporary Persian Art Music' (MA dissertation, California State College, Los Angeles, 1971), 65–74 (p. 71).
[96]   During, *La musique iranienne*, 202 (During transliterates as *bedā'i navāzi*).

discomfort with the oppositional categories used so frequently and uncritically in the literature. Whilst there are important improvisational aspects to *musiqi-e assil*, this music is also highly compositional, something I have discussed at length in an extended study of performance practice in Iranian music that focuses primarily on a section of repertory known as *dastgāh Segāh*, from which the examples below are drawn.[97] This work follows a tradition of musicological scholarship dating back to the early 1960s in which much of the relevant literature is written in English, French or German (by Iranians and others) and published outside Iran. As well as writings which consider improvisation (albeit to varying degrees of detail),[98] a number of publications concerned primarily with the relatively fixed repertory of the *radif* also include some consideration of this aspect of the music.[99] In addition, several introductory books on Iranian music discuss improvisation in fairly general terms.[100] As already mentioned, few detailed studies of creative performance in *musiqi-e assil* have been published since the late 1970s. Exceptions include Nettl's 1987 volume, which is largely a compilation of earlier writings based on material collected in the late 1960s and which in any case focuses mainly on the *radif*, as does Farhat.[101] During lists and briefly describes techniques of elaboration in various publications, but these are rarely illustrated with musical examples or with discussion of specific performances.[102]

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[97] Nooshin, 'The Processes of Creation'. This study compares 30 different performances of *dastgāh Segāh* and four different versions of the *radif* of *Segāh*, in order to identify shared material and to explore the ways in which musicians generate new material in performance. The renditions of *Segāh* analysed in this study span a period from the 1960s to the late 1980s, comprise performances by musicians of different ages and training lineages, singing and playing different instruments, and include live performances, commercial recordings and Iranian radio broadcasts. The study explores various aspects of the music, ranging from large-scale sectional organization right through to details of motivic structure.

[98] Gerson-Kiwi, *The Persian Doctrine*; Mohammad Taghi Massoudieh, 'Āvāz-e sur: Zur Melodiebildung in der Persischen Kunstmusik' ('Āvāz-e shur: Melodic Construction in Persian Art Music') (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cologne, 1968); Eckart Wilkens, *Künstler und Amateure im Persischen Santurspiel: Studien zum Gestaltungsvermögen in der iranischen Musik* (Regensburg, 1967); Sadeghi, 'Improvisation'; Laura Jafran Jones, 'The Persian Santur: A Description of the Instrument together with Analysis of the Four Dastgāh' (MA dissertation, University of Washington, 1971); Nettl with Foltin, *Daramad of Chahargah*; Bruno Nettl, 'Notes on Persian Classical Music of Today: The Performance of the *Hesar* Section as Part of *Dastgāh Chahargah*', *Orbis musicae*, 1 (1972), 175–92; *idem*, 'Aspects of Form in the Instrumental Performance of the Persian Āvāz', *Ethnomusicology*, 18 (1974), 405–14; Jean During, 'L'improvisation dans la musique d'art iranienne', *L'improvisation*, ed. Lortat-Jacob, 135–41; Nooshin, 'The Processes of Creation'; *idem*, 'The Song of the Nightingale: Processes of Improvisation in *Dastgāh Segāh* (Iranian Classical Music)', *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, 7 (1998), 69–116.

[99] See Khatschi Khatschi, *Der Dastgāh* (Regensburg, 1962); *idem*, 'Das Intervallbildungsprinzip des Persischen Dastgāh Shur', *Jahrbuch für musikalische Volks- und Völkerkunde*, 3 (1967), 70–84; Farhat, *The Dastgāh Concept*; Gen'ichi Tsuge, 'Āvāz: A Study of the Rhythmic Aspects in Classical Iranian Music' (Ph.D. dissertation, Wesleyan University, 1974); Nettl, *The Radif of Persian Music*.

[100] Caron and Safvate, *Iran*; Zonis, *Persian Classical Music*; During, *La musique iranienne* and *The Art of Persian Music*.

[101] Nettl, *The Radif of Persian Music*; Farhat, *The Dastgāh Concept* (a reworking of his Ph.D. dissertation, 'The Dastgāh Concept in Persian Classical Music', University of California at Los Angeles, 1966).

[102] See During, *La musique iranienne*; 'L'improvisation dans la musique d'art iranienne', 139; and *The Art of Persian Music*.

Writers have adopted a variety of approaches to the study of perform-ance practice in this music, but the work of Wilkens, Massoudieh, Jones, Nettl and Nooshin shares a strongly comparative approach in which different versions of the same section of repertory are compared, often focusing on the relationship between taught *radif* and creative performance.[103] Most writers have tended to focus on the large-scale organization of performances, particularly the ordering of *gusheh*s in a *dastgāh* performance, as well as exploring internal details of individual *gusheh*s, such as scales, techniques of elaboration[104] and characteristic motivic patterns.[105] The idea of phrases as 'combinations of motifs and figures which may be repeated, sequenced or modified' is a recurrent one,[106] but few authors discuss this aspect of the music in detail as it relates to specific performances. Nettl has perhaps gone furthest in this respect, describing with reference to individual rendi-tions how the kinds of techniques listed separately by others actually operate in relation to one another in performance.[107] At the same time, his writing focuses mainly on the canonic *radif*, and his obser-vations with regard to performance are often general and largely struc-tural in approach.

What is implicit in much of the earlier literature, and comes out more clearly in Nettl's work, is that *musiqi-e assil* is based on 'a group of general principles of musical structure' which are found both in the taught repertory of the *radif* and in creative performance.[108] Thus, whilst Sadeghi and Zonis both devote considerable time to discussing improvisation, in both cases the musical illustrations are taken not from actual improvised performances, as one might expect, but from the canonic *radif*.[109] Zonis justifies this by claiming that in the case of at least one of the *radif*s which she uses 'this author judges it to be extremely close to live performances'.[110] Sadeghi adopts a similar approach, claiming that (as with the 'improvised-composed pieces'

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[103] Wilkens, *Künstler und Amateure*; Massoudieh, 'Āvāz-e sur'; Jones, *The Persian Santur*; Nettl with Foltin, *Daramad of Chahargah*; Nettl, 'Notes on Persian Classical Music' and 'Aspects of Form'; Nooshin, 'The Processes of Creation' and 'The Song of the Nightingale'.

[104] For example, Sadeghi, 'Improvisation', 95–120; Zonis, *Persian Classical Music*, 104–25.

[105] See Gerson-Kiwi, *The Persian Doctrine*, 38, 42–3; Sadeghi, 'Improvisation', 80–5; Nettl with Foltin, *Daramad of Chahargah*; Nettl, 'Notes on Persian Classical Music', 'Aspects of Form' and *The Radif of Persian Music*.

[106] Sadeghi, 'Improvisation', 86.

[107] Much of Nettl's work in this area appeared in a series of publications in the 1970s (including *Daramad of Chahargah*, 'Notes on Persian Classical Music' and 'Aspects of Form'), some of which were reprinted in the collected volume *The Radif of Persian Music*. Whilst the latter is primarily a study of the *radif,* there is some discussion of improvisation, particularly with reference to *dastgāh Chāhārgāh* (based on material originally published in *Daramad of Chahargah*). The chapter on *Māhur* also discusses the improvisational choices of musicians, but with regard to the selection and ordering of individual pieces (*gusheh*s) within the performance rather than the internal details of each *gusheh*.

[108] Nettl, *The Radif of Persian Music*, 64.

[109] Sadeghi does include a brief analysis of two performances, the second by the author himself ('Improvisation', 130–5). This largely focuses on sectional aspects of the music, although there is some mention of motifs and various techniques discussed earlier by Sadeghi.

[110] The *radif* of Mussa Ma'rufi, published in Mehdi Barkechli, *La musique traditionnelle de l'Iran* (Tehran, 1963). Zonis, *Persian Classical Music*, 115.

mentioned earlier) 'the examples chosen from printed books were in an improvisatory stage before they were notated'.[111] In fact, the history of the *radif* is highly speculative and it is not at all clear that this repertory originally derived from improvisatory practice. Although neither Zonis nor Sadeghi states this explicitly, the fact that they are able to illustrate a range of improvisational techniques in this way highlights the significant structural similarities between the relatively fixed pieces which make up the learnt *radif* on the one hand and the supposedly impromptu creations of improvising musicians on the other. Other writers have also pointed to the close relationship between the 'improvisational' and the 'precomposed' in this music:

> composed pieces have, in their structure, many of the characteristics that are also found in the improvisations: repetition, variation, variation of a motif, extension, sequence, reliance on tetrachords. Thus, the traditional division between 'composed' and 'improvised' materials in Persian music may have limited value.[112]

Indeed, a number of authors have suggested that the very process of memorizing the *radif* (usually in a number of different versions) may be one way in which pupils learn fundamental compositional principles that can later be used in performance, particularly since teachers rarely discuss improvisation as such during teaching.[113]

A number of points have emerged from my earlier work which raise questions about the use of 'improvisation' as a blanket description for *musiqi-e assil*. First, the analyses showed that individual *gusheh*s of *Segāh* differ considerably in the extent to which they are varied in performance. Longer and more prominent *gusheh*s are relatively free in performance (and are defined primarily through modal structure and a few characteristic motivic patterns). In contrast, less prominent *gusheh*s have a more clearly defined melodic and rhythmic structure, and their performance might be more appropriately termed variation (rather than improvisation).[114] Indeed, some are so clearly defined that their performance corresponds more closely to the interpretation of a precomposed notated piece of music. Whilst a number of authors have noted this 'hierarchy' of *gusheh*s within each *dastgāh*,[115] few have explored this aspect of the music in detail and none discuss the implications for performance practice.[116]

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[111] Sadeghi, 'Improvisation', 75–135, 136.

[112] Nettl with Foltin, *Daramad of Chahargah*, 12.

[113] See Nooshin, 'The Processes of Creation', 115–20.

[114] See Nooshin, 'The Song of the Nightingale', 80–91.

[115] See Nettl, *The Radif of Persian Music*, 21–34, for an overview. Caron and Safvate, *Iran*, 112, and Sadeghi, 'Improvisation', 56–7, refer to the longer and more prominent *gusheh*s of each *dastgāh* as *shāh-gusheh* (literally 'king *gusheh*s'); at the other extreme are the shorter and less important *gusheh*s. Between the two lies a range of *gusheh* types which writers such as Farhat, Sadeghi and During have classed in a series of tiered categories, but which Nettl characterizes as a continuum (*The Radif of Persian Music*, 24–9).

[116] See Nooshin, 'The Processes of Creation', 228–84, and 'The Song of the Nightingale', 98–9. Practising musicians also acknowledge a hierarchy, but rarely discuss the implications of this for creative processes.

Secondly, several writers have likened the performance of *musiqi-e assil* to a patchwork or mosaic involving the juxtaposition of memorized motifs and phrases.[117] Whilst memorized phrases do play a role in performance (particularly in more pre-defined *gusheh*s), my analyses indicated something akin to what Treitler (in the context of medieval chant) describes as 'an interwoven texture of materials and procedures . . . internalized non-verbally by singers who practice them daily and have been doing so since childhood'.[118] Thus, over many years of learning different versions of the *radif,* and through other musical experiences, pupils memorize phrases which embody both specific musical material on the one hand (a particular motif or melody, for instance) and general compositional principles or ways of structuring and developing that material on the other (including, for example, various types of extension, contraction and sequence). What the analyses suggested was that memorized material and compositional principles become subliminally 'abstracted' from one another and incorporated into the musician's store of patterns and ideas for use in later performance. Thus, I have shown elsewhere that whilst the relationship between learnt repertory and creative performance is fairly straightforward in the case of *gusheh*s with a relatively well-defined structure – there is usually a recognizable melody of sorts which is transferred directly into performance – in the case of freer *gusheh*s this relationship is more complex and performance more often involves the abstraction and recombination of previously learnt material and compositional principles. Therefore, creative performance in *dastgāh Segāh* transcends the simple memorization of alternative versions of phrases and their subsequent selection and re-arrangement in performance, and this is particularly apparent in more prominent *gusheh*s.[119]

This discussion touches on the wider debate about the role of formulaic patterns in so-called oral traditions.[120] In his study of jazz improvisation, so anxious is Smith to counter the idea that such patterns render the music somehow uncreative that he almost overstates the case, referring to the work of Albert Lord and claiming that 'the ability to compose rapidly rests not on the memorization of stock formulas, but on the ability to create new phrases by analogy, using the patterns

[117] See in particular the work of Gerson-Kiwi (*The Persian Doctrine*), Sadeghi ('Improvisation', 75–135), Nettl with Foltin (*Daramad of Chahargah*) and Zonis (*Persian Classical Music*, 104–25).

[118] Treitler, 'Medieval Improvisation', 77.

[119] Nooshin, 'The Song of the Nightingale', 96–7.

[120] For further discussion of the role of formulas within 'oral' traditions see John Miles Foley, *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology* (Bloomington, 1988), and Benjamin Stolz and Richard Shannon, *Oral Literature and the Formula* (Ann Arbor, 1976). With specific reference to music, James Kippen discusses formulaic patterns in the context of North Indian *tabla* playing in *The Tabla of Lucknow: A Cultural Analysis of a Musical Tradition* (Cambridge, 1988), and Treitler examines possible parallels between the transmission of the Homeric epics and Gregorian chant in 'Homer and Gregory: The Transmission of Epic Poetry and Plainchant', *Musical Quarterly*, 9 (1974), 333–72. Smith discusses the use of formulas by jazz musicians ('In Quest of a New Perspective'), as does Berliner (*Thinking in Jazz*, esp. pp. 227–30), who also refers the reader to other writings on the subject (*ibid.*, 799–800, note 4).

established by the basic formulas'.[121] In fact, whilst formulaic patterns of various kinds do play an important role in *musiqi-e assil*, composition in performance depends on both memorization and the creation of new phrases, and I suspect that this is true for a wide range of musics, whether created in performance or in notation.[122] As will be seen in the analyses below, the creation of new phrases involves much more than the simple substitution of one formula for another, namely, the continuous negotiation of a network of choices in which the formulas themselves have a flexibility not usually associated with the term.

   As mentioned earlier, whilst Iranian musicians readily discuss certain aspects of performance, compositional techniques are still rarely talked about in any detail. My discussions with musicians yielded many interesting points, but they also raised questions about the complex relationship between cognition, the verbal domain and musical practice: between what musicians think, say and do.[123] There is undoubtedly greater awareness of improvisation as a concept nowadays, yet musicians are still generally either unable (perhaps partly because of the lack of appropriate terminology) or unwilling to discuss detailed aspects of performance. The latter may be partly rooted in a desire to sustain the ideal of music as 'something pure and disembodied, coming unbidden from the spirit realm',[124] and certainly many Iranian musicians are keen to preserve the aura of mystique surrounding so-called spontaneous performance. Either way, it became increasingly clear that the verbal domain offered limited insights into detailed aspects of underlying musical structures and creative processes. In terms of methodology, therefore, I have sought to understand such aspects of performance primarily through analysis of the music itself.[125]

III.1 COMPOSITIONAL PRINCIPLES IN *DASTGĀH SEGĀH*

My earlier work on *dastgāh Segāh* focused on the relationship between what pupils learn when they memorize the canonic repertory of the *radif* and what they later do as creative performers. As well as exploring the characteristics of individual *gusheh*s and how *gusheh* identity is maintained in performance, the analyses looked at the ways in which

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[121] Smith, 'In Quest of a New Perspective', 38.
[122] Clearly, music created using notation also draws on a wide range of formulas. See Rudolph Réti, *The Thematic Process in Music* (London, 1961), Alan Walker, *A Study in Musical Analysis* (London, 1962), and Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, ed. Gerald Strang with Leonard Stein (London, 1967).
[123] See Nooshin, 'The Processes of Creation', 137–43.
[124] Nicholas Cook, *Music: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 1998), 70.
[125] It is interesting to note in this regard that although many of the authors mentioned earlier worked closely with practising musicians – Ella Zonis with Ruhollah Khaleqi, for example; Bruno Nettl with Nur Ali Borumand; Jean During with Dariush Talai and Dariush Safvate; while Manuchehr Sadeghi is himself a performing musician – their writings include little discussion of cognitive aspects of performance.

performing musicians shape and structure individual phrases and complete *gusheh*s using compositional principles and techniques such as exact and varied repetition, sequencing and various types of extension and contraction. All of these appear to be learnt by pupils during training and subsequently applied creatively in performance. The resulting tightness and consistency of musical construction will be illustrated in the examples presented in Appendix A below, which are all taken from performances (rather than canonic *radif* versions) of *dastgāh Segāh* (see Appendix B). This section will consider what such examples tell us about the kinds of compositional choices and strategies at work in the performance of *Segāh* and the implications of this for our understanding of the underlying creative processes.[126] A *dastgāh* performance comprises a progression of modally related pieces known as *gusheh*s, and it is these which form the main conceptual unit of improvisation in *musiqi-e assil*.[127] In other words, whilst musicians exercise some choice in the selection and arrangement of *gusheh*s, it is within each *gusheh* that the main 'compositional' work takes place. The following analyses will therefore focus on individual *gusheh*s of *dastgāh Segāh* (particularly *zābol* and *mokhālef*) rather than complete performances of *Segāh*.[128] In fact, much of the analysis will be at the level of individual phrases, although the whole of *gusheh zābol* will be considered in the analysis of Examples 7 and 9 towards the end of this section. As I have discussed elsewhere, it is important to note that like the other central *gusheh*s of *Segāh*, *zābol* and *mokhālef* are defined

[126] Whilst it is clearly not possible to present a detailed introduction to *musiqi-e assil* here, nor to examine aspects of the tradition such as learning processes and performance contexts (for which the reader is referred to Zonis, *Persian Classical Music*, During, *La musique iranienne*, and Farhat, *The Dastgāh Concept*), for the purposes of this discussion it is necessary for the reader to have some understanding of the terms *radif*, *dastgāh* and *gusheh*. As explained earlier, the *radif* is the complete canonic repertory of *musiqi-e assil*, memorized precisely over many years (usually in a number of related versions), and this knowledge forms the basis for later creative performance. The *radif* itself comprises 12 *dastgāh*s, which are collections of modally related pieces known as *gusheh*s. The number of individual *gusheh*s varies according to the *dastgāh*, but there are usually between 25 and 30 *gusheh*s in each *dastgāh*. An improvised performance usually remains within one *dastgāh*, although there is a technique known as *morakab navāzi* in which musicians use modally related *gusheh*s as 'bridges' to move between *dastgāh*s. In performance, musicians select and present a number of *gusheh*s from the chosen *dastgāh*. The length of a performance depends on a number of factors including context, the number of *gusheh*s selected and the extent of the musician's improvisations. Typically, nowadays, a performance will last somewhere between 30 minutes and an hour. Whilst performances may include 'precomposed' ensemble compositions, particularly at the beginnings and ends of performances, the discussion of this article will focus on the central section, known as *āvāz* (literally 'voice', 'song', a term used to refer to both vocal and instrumental renditions), which is usually performed solo (or with a vocalist accompanied by a solo instrumentalist) and generally constitutes the main part of any performance. In the case of ensemble performances, instrumentalists usually take it in turn to play solo and to accompany the vocalist (where there is one) in the *āvāz* section.

[127] A useful analogy to the *dastgāh/gusheh* relationship is the series of modally related pieces in a Baroque suite. However, a *dastgāh* performance also involves a gradual rise in pitch (through the progressively higher tonal centre of each successive *gusheh*), with the music reaching a pitch climax towards the end of the performance before returning to the opening 'home' mode of the *dastgāh* at the end. Therefore, a complete *dastgāh* performance is usually 'arch-shaped' in contour.

[128] Named after a town in south-eastern Iran, *gusheh zābol* is usually performed immediately after the opening *darāmad* section in *Segāh*; *gusheh mokhālef* is usually heard about halfway through the *dastgāh*.

primarily through their modal character,[129] a few characteristic
melodic patterns and, in the case of *zābol*, a distinctive opening phrase.
Musicians are therefore relatively free in the performance of these
*gusheh*s and unlike the shorter, more predefined *gusheh*s of *Segāh*, such
as *maqlub* and *hazin*, there is little in the way of identifiable melodic or
rhythmic material which is common to different performances.[130]

The analyses below will focus on a specific compositional principle
which I have called 'extended repetition', and will explore the
ways in which musicians use extended repetition as a compositional
tool in performance.[131] Found in all 12 *dastgāh*s of *musiqi-e assil*, and
often (but not always) lasting for a complete phrase, extended repeti-
tion functions partly as a tension-building device in the music. In its
most basic form (extended repetition type A^1)[132] an initial idea
(usually a motif or a short phrase) is stated, repeated and then
extended on the third statement, usually up to a pitch climax and down
again (often through a sequence), to complete the phrase. The first
section of the phrase (1) establishes the musical material, the second
(2) serves to build up tension through repetition (and often variation),
and this tension is released in the extension (3) and climax of the third
section and the eventual descent to pause. As the examples discussed

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[129] In the case of *zābol*: *shāhed*: G; *āqāz*, *ist* and *finalis*: E-*koron*; main tetrachord: E-*koron* to A-
koron. In the case of *mokhālef*: *shāhed* and *āqāz*: C; *ist*: usually C, but phrases may end on G or
A-*koron*; *finalis*: G; main tetrachord: G–C. In *musiqi-e assil*, the octave is divided into 17 intervals,
and the scales include pitches known as *koron* (approximately half-flat), such that E-*koron* lies
between E♮ and E♭. For example, on the highest string of the *tār* (long-necked lute), the whole-
tone intervals C–D, D–E, F–G, G–A and A–B are each divided into three: e.g. C, D♭, D-*koron*, etc.
However, it is important to note that these 'microtones' are never used on their own, but only in
combination with other intervals to create intervals slightly larger than a semitone or a minor
third. The semitone (E–F and B–C) is therefore the smallest interval in this music. For detailed
discussion of the history of, and debates over, the scale systems of Iranian music, see Farhat, *The
Dastgāh Concept*, 7–18. As already stated, Iranian music has a rich vocabulary of technical termi-
nology relating to aspects of mode. These are as follows: *shāhed* (literally 'witness') indicates the
tonal centre of the *gusheh*; *āqāz* (literally 'start') indicates the pitch on which phrases within the
gusheh usually begin; *ist* (literally 'stop') refers to the pitch with which phrases usually (but not
always) end; *finalis* is used by some writers (but not by musicians) to indicate the final pitch of a
gusheh. For further discussion see Nooshin, 'The Processes of Creation', 171–2.

[130] The aim here is not to analyse *zābol* or *mokhālef* (nor to discuss the relationship between
radif and performance), for which the reader is referred to Nooshin, 'The Processes of Creation',
238–44, 267–9 and 273–5, and 'The Song of the Nightingale', 102–10. For further transcriptions
of complete *gusheh*s see 'The Song of the Nightingale', 81–3, 87–9 and 104–6. With the exception
of Example 10, all the transcriptions in this article are from live performances or studio record-
ings, and are my own.

[131] Since this level of compositional detail is rarely discussed by musicians (or written about in
the literature), I have developed my own terms and categories for discussing and distinguishing
between different compositional techniques. See Nooshin, 'The Processes of Creation', 292–307,
for an explanation of the ways in which I have identified and categorized different types of
extended repetition (A^1, B^1, and so on). The aim was not to replicate musicians' cognitive
processes, but, on the basis of many years of studying this music, to identify and suggest possible
reasons for patterns which emerged during analysis. Extended repetition is also discussed in
Nooshin, 'The Song of the Nightingale', 91–102, where the examples provide evidence for the
abstraction of material and techniques mentioned above. Nettl and Foltin are the only authors to
mention this technique: 'Typically, a motif may be repeated twice, perhaps at different pitch
levels, then expanded, after which a section of the expanded form is subjected to treatment similar
to that described for the first motif' (*Daramad of Chahargah*, 33). However, there is no discussion
of how the technique is applied or varied by musicians in the context of specific performances.

[132] See Nooshin, 'The Processes of Creation', 292–5.

below will illustrate, however, the basic structure of extended repetition is found in many different permutations as musicians apply further general principles 'abstracted' from elsewhere in the repertory. This process is particularly apparent in performance versions of *gusheh*s such as *zābol* and *mokhālef*, which are relatively free in their structuring. Whilst extended repetition is found both in the canonic *radif* and in performance, it is interesting to note that this compositional principle tends to assume a more basic form in the *radif* in comparison with the more complex permutations often found in creative performance.[133]

Examples 1(a)–(b) present phrases 'extracted' from *gusheh mokhālef* in two different improvised performances of *Segāh*.[134] Different performances of *mokhālef*, a *gusheh* with relatively free structure whose identity rests largely on aspects of mode, rarely share specific identifiable phrases or melodies. However, whilst the two phrases in Examples 1(a) and (b) are clearly different, there are some important similarities. First, both phrases serve to emphasize the tonal centre of *mokhālef* (C). Secondly, and more significantly for the purposes of the current discussion, although the basic melodic material is different, both phrases are constructed using the same principle of extended repetition (as described above). In both cases, the phrases are extended using the whole of the initial idea (1) (extended repetition type B^1): (1) is stated and repeated (2), following which the phrases are extended (3), the extension comprising further repetitions of (1) (indicated as (1), (2) and (3) in the notation), this time without a pause between each statement. After this, each phrase moves through a series of sequential patterns (even sharing certain motifs), Example 1(b) reaching a pitch climax on the upper G and both phrases eventually resolving: Example 1(a) on the *ist* of *mokhālef* (G), and Example 1(b) on the *shāhed* (C).

Comparing these phrases with those in Examples 2(a)–(e), all taken from different improvised performances of *Segāh*, a number of interesting patterns emerge.[135] As in Example 1, all of the phrases in Example 2 are structured using the principle of extended repetition, but there are some important differences. In Example 2(a), for instance (in which (1) is very similar to the opening of Example 1(b), featuring the same prominent motif (x)), (1) is repeated and the phrase extended (3), but this time the extension is formed not from the whole of (1) (as in Examples 1(a) and (b)), but from its first four notes only (in other words, motif (x); extended repetition type B^3). In Examples 2(b) and (c), once again the basic principle of extended repetition is used, but in both cases the extension is based on the ending of (1) (extended repetition type B^4). In Example 2(d) the

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[133] See Nooshin, 'The Song of the Nightingale', 109–10.
[134] See sound clips 1–2 at <www.jrma.oupjournals.org>. Extracts from performances 1 and 2 (see Appendix B) respectively.
[135] See sound clips 3–7 at <www.jrma.oupjournals.org>. Extracts from performances 3, 2, 4, 5 and 6 (see Appendix B) respectively.

phrase extension is based on a contraction of (1) (extended repetition type B^2), and in Example 2(e) it is formed from the middle of (1) (extended repetition type B^5). What these examples suggest is that, intersecting with the principle of extended repetition, another principle is at work in creative performance whereby musicians can select either the whole or a part of the initial idea (1) – the beginning, the middle section, the ending or a contraction – as a basis for the phrase extension. Moreover, (1) can range from a short motivic pattern (as in Example 2(e)) to a longer phrase (as in Example 1(b)). In the course of analysis, I found many such examples in different performances (and different *radif*s) of *Segāh* and in the context of very different musical material.

Furthermore, even where phrases share the same type of extended repetition, musicians are able to exercise further compositional choice, as illustrated in Examples 3(a)–(e).[136] Example 3(a) is from the same performance as Example 2(a), but from a different *gusheh* and therefore at a different pitch level: both phrases share the same opening idea (slightly varied) and both use extended repetition type B^3 (extension based on the opening of (1)). However, Example 3(a) draws on a longer section of the opening of (1), whilst (as noted above) Example 2(a) uses only the first four notes (see Example 4). So, even where two phrases are structured around extended repetition type B^3, the musician can decide how much of the opening to use for the phrase extension. Moreover, in Example 3(a) Shafeian varies (2) in relation to (1), using extended repetition type $B^{3(i)}$.[137] Another variative dimension is a technique known as *zir-bamm* (literally 'high-low'), which is a shifting of octaves often used in performances on *santur* (hammered dulcimer), an instrument whose structure allows this to be achieved rapidly. Similarly, returning briefly to Example 2, it is interesting to note that whilst Examples 2(b) and (c) share the same type of extended repetition (B^4, in which the extension is based on the ending of (1)), what we hear as section (1) in Lotfi's performance (Example 2(b))[138] itself forms the phrase extension in Malek's (in varied form and in particular using a variant of motif (y); see Example 5).

Example 3(b) shows yet another variation of type B^3 (extension based on the opening of (1)), in which Farhang Sharif varies motif (x) and prolongs (1) using a variety of motifs; moreover, the phrase is extended on (2) rather than (3) (type $B^{3(ii)}$). Similarly, Examples 3(c), (d) and (e) are all structured using technique B^1 (extension based on the whole of (1)), but in each case this basic principle is varied: in Example 3(c), (2) is varied in relation to (1) (type $B^{1(i)}$); in Example

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[136] See sound clips 8–12 at <www.jrma.oupjournals.org>. Extracts from performances 3, 7, 8, 8 and 9 (see Appendix B) respectively.

[137] Superscript (i) indicates that statement (2) of the initial idea is varied in relation to statement (1). Superscript (ii) indicates that the phrase extension occurs on (2) rather than (3).

[138] This section is almost identical with section (1) in Example 1(b), from the same performance (and the same musician), apart from the fact that the main motif (x) (labelled as motif (y) in Example 2(b)) is slightly varied.

3(d), the extension occurs on (2) (type $B^{1(ii)}$); and in Example 3(e), the extension is delayed until (5), the initial idea being much shorter than many of the other examples presented so far (type $B^{4(v)}$).

Examples 1–3 illustrate the ways in which musicians use extended repetition as a general compositional principle, learnt during training (and through a wide range of musical experiences) and later applied in different contexts in creative performance. It is also worth noting at this point that some of the phrases in these examples share similar opening material (but continually varied so that no two are identical). Moreover, Examples 1(a), 1(b), 2(a) and 2(d) illustrate a particular kind of phrase often found in performances of *mokhālef* (but not in any of the *radif* versions of *mokhālef* I have analysed), in which the *shāhed* (C) is emphasized and musicians explore the tetrachord between the upper D and the lower A-*koron* (or G) using a variety of motivic patterns. Often employing a melismatic style known as *tahrir*, this generic 'phrase structure' serves to create tension, climax and release usually through extended repetition, and perhaps represents one of the ways in which musicians lend shape to a *gusheh* such as *mokhālef* which otherwise has little in the way of predefined melodic material. The use of extended repetition as a way of shaping phrases can also be seen in the examples from other *gusheh*s (particularly *zābol*). So, just as musicians draw upon various kinds of learnt and 'abstracted' compositional techniques in performance, the analyses suggest that such generic 'phrase structures' may also be learnt during training and later used creatively in performance.[139]

These examples have presented relatively straightforward instances of extended repetition in order to illustrate some of the fundamental principles at work. However, musicians often combine more than one type of extended repetition in performance. In Example 6(a), for instance, Lotfi extends the phrase using the first four notes of (1) (type $B^{3(i)}$), of which the last two notes are then used (and later varied) for the second extension (type B^4).[140] The repeated patterns become progressively shorter, thus adding further tension to the phrase (which can be seen in context by referring to the complete *gusheh zābol* in Example 7). Example 6(b), from a different performance by the same musician, shows a similar use of contraction: the phrase begins with a short repeated motivic pattern (a variant of (x)), of which a contraction forms the first extension (type B^2).[141] The first two notes of this pattern are then used for the second extension (type B^3). In Example 6(c), a contraction of the initial idea forms the first extension (type B^2), followed by a second extension using the first three notes of the last group of this pattern (type $B^{4(ii)}$).[142] As well as phrases such as

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[139] See Nooshin, 'The Processes of Creation', 319–44, for further discussion of this.

[140] See sound clip 13 at <www.jrma.oupjournals.org>. Extracts from performance 8 (see Appendix B).

[141] See sound clip 14 at <www.jrma.oupjournals.org>. Extracts from performance 2 (see Appendix B).

[142] See sound clip 15 at <www.jrma.oupjournals.org>. Extracts from performance 1 (see Appendix B).

these, which embody two or more consecutive extended repetitions, the analysed performances of *Segāh* included many interesting examples in which musicians used extended repetition in the context of other compositional techniques. For instance, in Example 1(a), after the extended repetition (I; type B^1), Payvar presents a three-stage descending sequence (II), which in turn leads into an extended repetition of type A$^{1(i)}$ (III), ending with a short three-stage descending motivic sequence (IV), and eventually a further two-stage descending sequence (V) to complete the phrase.[143]

The phrases in Examples 8(a)–(b) are presented by way of comparison with the preceding illustrations.[144] Both phrases are related to a number of the latter in their opening melodic material, but in neither case is the phrase developed using extended repetition. Instead, in Example 8(a), (1) is stated three times, transposed up a tone (beginning on G rather than F, using what I call transpositional extension) and then forms part of a descending sequence, followed by an ascending sequence based on a variation of the main motif of (1). Example 8(b) is from the same performance as Examples 2(a) and 3(a), and in this case (1) is stated twice (slightly varied the second time) and is followed by an idea (z) derived from (1). Motif (z) is then played in sequence and the whole pattern is repeated, leading up to a climax on the upper B♭ and a descent to rest on G. As far as the current discussion is concerned, what is interesting about these phrases is that the basic melodic material (in (1)) is closely related to a number of the earlier phrases (e.g. Examples 3(a) and (b)), but the musicians choose to develop the material using techniques other than extended repetition. It is examples such as these which provide evidence for the abstraction of learnt material and principles by musicians, as I have discussed elsewhere.[145]

The examples discussed above illustrate the ways in which musicians exercise compositional choice in generating phrases in performance, drawing on learnt and abstracted principles and techniques. In using extended repetition, musicians can decide whether to extend the whole or a part of (1), how many times to repeat the extended pattern, and so on. Moreover, there are many other aspects of generating such phrases which are open to choice – using different motivic patterns; varying (2) in relation to (1); extending the phrase on (2) (or (4) or even (5)) rather than (3); using *zir-bamm*; and so on. Musicians are therefore able continually to recombine ideas in the process of composing new phrases. However, it should be emphasized that such choices and patterns are never discussed during training and are rarely

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[143] Sequences are described here according to the number of 'stages' (or steps) involved (two-stage, three-stage, and so on).

[144] See sound clips 16–17 at <www.jrma.oupjournals.org>. Extracts from performances 10 and 3 respectively (see Appendix B).

[145] See Nooshin, 'The Song of the Nightingale', 96–7.

articulated by musicians.[146] As I have suggested elsewhere, it seems that through memorizing different versions of the *radif* and through other musical experiences, musicians acquire a repertory of compositional tools and principles which can be applied in many different contexts and which are continually varied. Whilst some of the compositional decisions may well be made at the time of performance, the immediacy of the situation and the speed with which such choices have to be made suggest that musicians also draw on a largely subliminal body of knowledge (including motor as well as cognitive memory), accumulated over a lifetime of playing, which offers a kaleidoscope of myriad possibilities for variation and facilitates rapid composition in performance.

Examples 7 and 9 illustrate how phrases generated in performance through various types of extended repetition and the kinds of compositional techniques discussed above operate in relation to one another in a complete *gusheh* – in this case, *zābol*.[147] Example 7, from a performance by Mohammad Reza Shajarian (voice) and Mohammad Reza Lotfi (*tār*, long-necked lute) presents the characteristic opening phrase of *zābol* (starting on F/E-*koron* and moving up to emphasize G), which is usually followed by a section exploring the area between F and A-*koron*. This can be seen in Shajarian's second vocal phrase in Example 7 (at I) and the material is developed by Lotfi at II. He presents a short motif (p) which is repeated a further four times in a circular manner before turning into descending motif (q). This then becomes a four-note motif (r), which is repeated with each note stressed (r′) and moves into a quasi-sequential passage before the phrase ends with an allusion back to motif (r) in a descending scale pattern. The voice returns at III and eventually presents a section similar to that heard at II: a motif (s) is stated, followed by a passage in which (s) is repeated a further three times, before moving into a section based on motif (p) (but this time starting on B♭ rather than A-*koron*) (at IV). This section comprises a three-stage descending sequence (each stage ending with a reference to motif (s)): note how Shajarian decreases the number of statements of (p) at each stage of the sequence from three to two to one as the phrase approaches its resolution. The next phrase (the last vocal one) includes two more short sequential patterns, one of which is based on motif (r). Lotfi takes over the main melody line from Shajarian (at V) with a phrase already presented in Example 6(a) as an example of consecutive extended repetitions and motivic contraction. The opening idea of this phrase (t) is closely related to motifs (p) and (s) heard at the beginning of previous phrases and, like these, emphasizes the area between F and A-*koron*. Motif (t′) expands (t) slightly,

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[146] The only relevant terminology I have come across in this regard is the expression *motif gardooni* (literally 'spinning out/turning a motif'), which some musicians use to refer to the development of motivic ideas in performance (see Nooshin, 'The Processes of Creation', 150).

[147] In order to give the reader some idea of material in the canonic *radif*, which pupils spend so many years memorizing, Example 10 presents *gusheh zābol* from the taught *radif* of Nur Ali Borumand.

incorporating motif (r), and this is followed by the extended repetitions already discussed (see Example 6(a)). The final section of this performance of *zābol* comprises a series of sequential patterns incorporating various motivic patterns, including motif (r).

Example 9 presents *gusheh zābol* from a performance by Parviz Meshkatian (*santur*). After the opening phrase, Meshkatian explores the area between F and A-*koron* (at VI) just as Shajarian and Lotfi do in Example 7 (at I and II respectively), but using a different motivic pattern (u). In fact, this motif becomes the basis for much of the rest of the *gusheh*: at VI, (u) is used as the basis for the initial idea (v) (which ends with an inversion of (u), (u′)) in a phrase based on transpositional extension – (1)/(v) is repeated with a shift of octave (2), and is then played a tone higher (at 3), after which the phrase is extended (still using motif (u)) to a pitch climax on the upper C and a descent to rest on the *shāhed*, G. This is followed by a section in a loose 6/8 pulse (at VII) using a circular idea (w) which essentially consists of (u′) and (u). Motif (w) is repeated (again with an octave shift), leading into two consecutive B[1]-type extended repetitions, forming a series of undulating sequential patterns and gradually extending the pitch range upwards to a climax on C again and resolution on G. The passage which follows this (at VIII) essentially repeats the preceding phrase without the 6/8 pulse, and the climax on C is followed by a four-stage descending sequence based solely on (u′), leading into the final section of the *gusheh*. It is interesting to note how much of the material presented by Meshkatian in this performance is derived in various ways from (u) and (u′), first heard at VI.

This brief discussion of Examples 7 and 9 is intended to illustrate (in the context of a complete *gusheh*) the ways in which musicians draw on a wide range of principles and musical material in performance, bringing together compositional techniques, motivic patterns and phrase shapes learnt in different contexts and applied here to *gusheh zābol* with its specific modal structure and other characteristics. In particular, the shared motivic 'vocabulary' and the tension and release embodied in the various types of phrase extension (especially extended repetition) play an important role in lending coherence and shape to the *gusheh*.

The main aim of this section has been to give the reader some indication of the compositional nature of *musiqi-e assil* and of the extent to which Iranian musicians are involved in compositional choices, whether in preparing for a performance or at the time of performance itself. Whilst it has been possible to present only a limited number of examples from *dastgāh Segāh*, my work in this area has indicated similar findings in other *dastgāh*s. Returning to the earlier arguments of the article, it is clear that the performance of *musiqi-e assil* brings together both improvisational and compositional elements, but by separating music supposedly created during performance from that supposedly created away from it, the existing discourses require us to situate the music within one or the other essentialist category: there is no category which allows for music to be both improvised and composed.

This section will conclude with a brief postscript on the wider implications of extended repetition as a compositional principle. In the course of ongoing research, I have come across a number of parallels between the kinds of musical structuring found in *musiqi-e assil* and in other kinds of music (including predominantly notated traditions), and extended repetition serves as an interesting case in point. Providing within its structure a vehicle for tension and release in a phrase and embodying the three most fundamental types of development in *musiqi-e assil* – repetition, variation and extension – extended repetition is found not only in improvised sections of the repertory, but also in 'precomposed' (often notated) pieces. Moreover, extended repetition takes on added significance when one considers phrases such as those presented in Examples 11(a)–(c), which appear to be structured around the same principle of extended repetition as found in *musiqi-e assil*: types A^1, $B^{4(ii)}$ (in which the extension comes on (2) and is formed from the ending of (1)) and B^5 (in which the extension is formed from the middle section of (1)). In fact, I have found many such phrases in a range of musical traditions, all of which seem to share the structure of extended repetition in its various permutations. This clearly raises some important questions: does extended repetition satisfy certain fundamental aesthetic principles of anticipation and release? And, if so, what are the 'cross-musical' implications? Does this musical structure 'mean' the same thing in the illustrations in Example 11 as in *musiqi-e assil*? Whilst I am certainly not looking for what, a few years ago, might have been called 'musical universals', it may be that such patterns point to underlying connections between different music traditions, and of course between composition which takes place in performance and that which becomes embodied in a written score. And it would be a pity if adherence to some kind of politically correct cultural specificity should prevent us from exploring these 'compositional parallels'.[148] Tenzer is one of the few contemporary scholars to have attempted such an undertaking, drawing direct structural comparisons between a Balinese piece – *Wilet mayura* – and four other pieces from jazz and Western art-music traditions.[149] Whilst it is not possible to pursue this particular avenue in greater detail here, the phrases in Example 11 clearly lend further weight to the process of questioning how our seemingly innocent discourses have historically foregrounded difference and 'otherness' and allowed little space for connections and similarities.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Not all dualities are automatically or consistently oppressive. . . . Nonetheless, binary thinking must clearly be understood as a historical, not just a conceptual, phenomenon, the consequences of which have too often been inhumane or worse. . . . we risk allying ourselves with the cultural agenda

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[148] Tenzer, *Gamelan gong kebyar*, 427.
[149] *Ibid.*, 419–32.

of domination whenever we embrace a duality, however abstract or depoliti-
cized, that repeats the logic of alterity. The energies of valuation have high
voltage; a duality is a treacherous instrument to ply.[150]

In this article I have argued that current discourses of musical creativity
are predicated on a series of dualisms which have served to reify certain
aspects of music-making and to reinforce implied essential differences
between pairs of categories such as improvisation and composition,
improvisation and performance from a notated score ('interpre-
tation'), 'aural-oral' and notated traditions, and so on. Exploring the
profound impact of such discourses on the ways in which musical
creativity is conceptualized in Iran and drawing on specific examples
from the repertory of *musiqi-e assil*, I have sought to question the domi-
nance of these discourses and to suggest that they are bound up with
the history of colonial exploits and orientalist thinking, the repercus-
sions of which are still very much with us today. Not only are such
discourses limiting, they also carry a heavy burden in terms of how we
understand and represent musics outside the mainstream 'norm' of
Western classical music, since it is these musics which are usually associ-
ated with the 'other' half in each dualism. Above all, these discourses
are implicated in an exercise of power over those traditions
represented, written about, categorized, circumscribed and, one might
argue, controlled in this way.

Whilst fully acknowledging a greater awareness of the composition–
improvisation interface among musicians and scholars today than in
the past – indeed, many musicians are using that interface creatively –
nevertheless there remains a strong conceptual division, with notated
composition still generally regarded as the norm and music which
lacks a notational 'identity' grouped together under the category of
improvised (which still invokes post-1960s orientalist associations).
Moreover, these categories continue to reinforce an ideology of separ-
ation and to draw on a quasi-colonial vision of the world in which
certain kinds of music-making and ways of thinking about music are
privileged above others. And, of course, it is in the nature of an
ideology to be both transparent and normative as it presents its insid-
ious 'regime of truth'. Just like essentialist notions of race or culture,[151]
essentialist discourses of creativity emphasize difference rather than
similarity. As Agawu argues, 'on epistemological grounds . . . the
us/them dichotomy is an illusion; on moral grounds, its use is indefen-
sible'.[152] These dichotomies represent what Tenzer calls 'a regrettable
ascendancy of convenience over complexity. . . . Western culture
invented these representations, and it has also responded to and
reproduced them in diverse ways, thus reinforcing them.'[153] We
therefore need

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[150] Kramer, *Classical Music*, 38–9, 41.
[151] See Adam Kuper, *Culture: The Anthropologists' Account* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 247.
[152] Agawu, 'Representing African Music', 261.
[153] Tenzer, *Gamelan gong kebyar*, 434. Tenzer makes these comments in the context of discussing
the ways in which Bali is promoted as an exoticized tourist destination.

to ask how both music and musicology may inventively undo the logic of alterity they are also historically fated to reproduce. What are the possibilities of opening out the categories of self and other so that they appear, like the musicological dualities mentioned [earlier] . . . not as the first principles of a conceptual or political order, but as temporary limits in a dynamic, open-ended process?[154]

As Williams observes,

such binary oppositions and the alterity on which they depend cannot readily be eradicated except by sophisticated theoretical means. Nonetheless, by coming to understand how the structuring of othering works, interpreters will then at least be in a position to envisage musical subjectivities more porous to the imaginary.[155]

In conclusion, I would argue that there needs to be a wider recognition of the political implications of, and the constraints to understanding imposed by, our musicological discourses. In seeking to understand the connections between processes separated by the existing essentializing and deterministically oppositional discourses, we may begin to unravel some of the most fundamental tenets of our discipline and particularly those informed by notions of alterity, essentialism and privilege. Perhaps then we may find ways of thinking and talking about music which are truly inclusive.

APPENDIX A

MUSICAL EXAMPLES

Note on the music transcriptions
In transcribing the music from performance into notation I have used a modified form of staff notation with the aim of conveying the sound of the music as closely as possible to the reader. Unmeasured sections are notated without barlines or note stems, both of which would be redundant. Instead, the horizontal layout of the pitches and the phrase markings indicate relative lengths of sustained pitches and rests. However, it should be noted that this is not a time-based notation. A transcriber clearly works according to his or her analytical needs, and since the main focus of this study was not the temporal aspects of the music, the system used served the current analytical purposes adequately.

All the examples are notated using the treble staff, and the following additional symbols are also used (some of these following conventional five-line staff notation symbols):

koron, approximately a quarter-tone flat (for example, A-*koron* lies between A♮ and A♭).

riz (tremolo). This is the only use of note stems in the unmeasured sections of music.
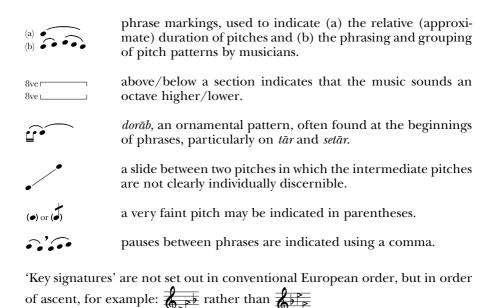
a pitch which is slightly sharp or flat.
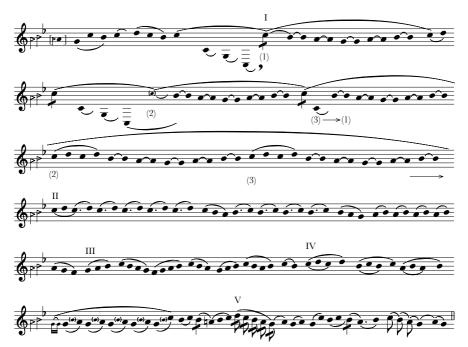
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[154] Kramer, *Classical Music*, 49.
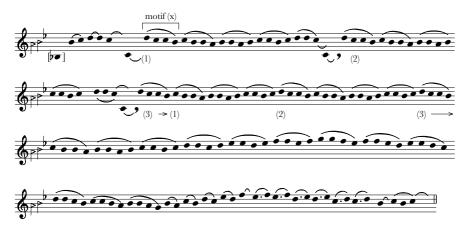[155] Williams, 'Musicology and Postmodernism', 391.

(a)
(b)
phrase markings, used to indicate (a) the relative (approximate) duration of pitches and (b) the phrasing and grouping of pitch patterns by musicians.

8ve ⌐▔▔▔┐
8ve ⌐▁▁▁┘
above/below a section indicates that the music sounds an octave higher/lower.

dorāb, an ornamental pattern, often found at the beginnings of phrases, particularly on *tār* and *setār*.

a slide between two pitches in which the intermediate pitches are not clearly individually discernible.

(●) or (♩) a very faint pitch may be indicated in parentheses.

pauses between phrases are indicated using a comma.

'Key signatures' are not set out in conventional European order, but in order of ascent, for example: rather than

Whilst there is no concept of standard pitch in *musiqi-e assil*, *Segāh* is usually notated with either E-*koron* or A-*koron* as the *shāhed* (tonal centre) of the *darāmad*. For ease of comparison, all the examples in this article have been notated with E-*koron* as the *shāhed* of the *darāmad*. The actual pitch of the *shāhed* (of the *darāmad*) is indicated in square brackets at the beginning of each example.

Example 1

(a) Faramarz Payvar (*santur*), *mokhālef* (performance 1)

(b) Mohammad Reza Lotfi (*tār*), *mokhālef* (performance 2)

motif (x)

(a) Reza Shafeian (*santur*), *mokhālef* (performance 3)*

motif (x)

8ve

(b) Lotfi (*tār*), *zābol* (performance 2)

motif (y)

ending of (1)

Example 2

* Whilst it is interesting to note the pedagogic relations between musicians – in this case the fact that Shafeian was a pupil of Payvar – there is no attempt here to trace direct lines of transmission. Not only do pupils generally study with a number of different masters, resulting in a complex network of teacher–pupil relationships, but musicians also learn a great deal from the constantly changing performance tradition. It is therefore almost impossible to account for all of the sources from which a musician may draw in performance.

Example 2 continued

(c) Hossein Malek (*santur*), *zābol* (performance 4)

(d) Mohammad Reza Shajarian (voice), *mokhālef* (performance 5)

(e) Ahmad Ebadi (*setār*), *darāmad* (performance 6)

Example 3

(a) Shafeian (*santur*), *zābol* (performance 3)

(b) Farhang Sharif (*tār*), *zābol* (performance 7)

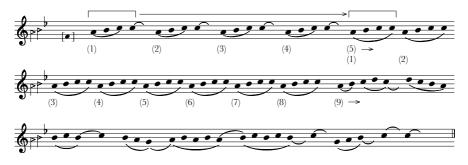(c) Shajarian (voice) and Lotfi (*tār*), *zābol* (performance 8)

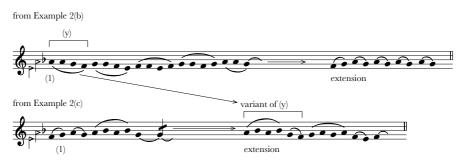## Example 3 continued

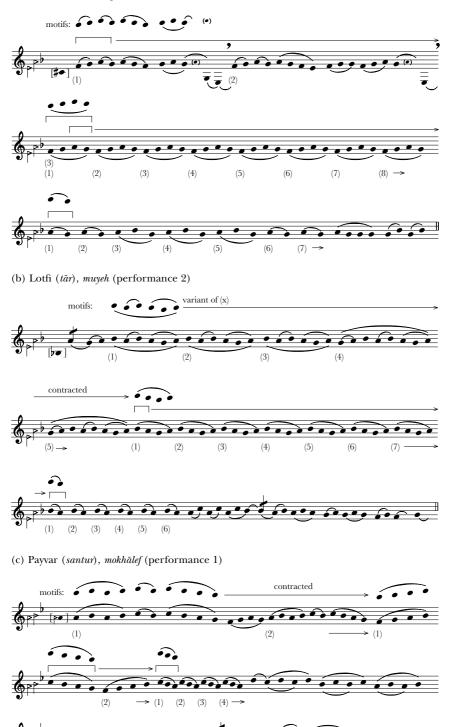(d) Lotfi (*tār*), *zābol* (performance 8)

(e) Khaledi (violin), *mokhālef* (performance 9)

Example 4

Example 5

Example 6

(a) Lotfi (*tār*), *zābol* (performance 8)

(b) Lotfi (*tār*), *muyeh* (performance 2)

(c) Payvar (*santur*), *mokhālef* (performance 1)

Example 7

Shajarian (voice) and Lotfi (*tar*), *zabol* (performance 8)

Example 7 continued

Example 7 continued

Example 8
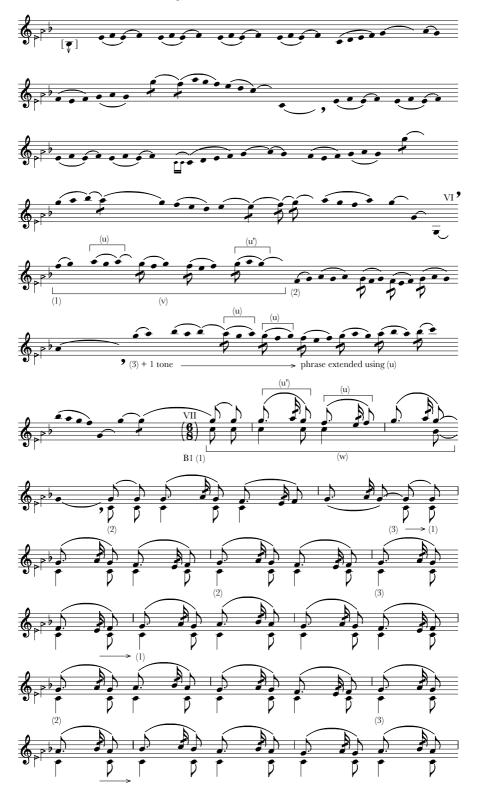
(a) Payvar (*santur*), *zābol* (performance 10)

(b) Shafeian (*santur*), *zābol* (performance 3)

Example 9

Parviz Meshkatian (*santur*), *zābol* (performance 11)

Example 9 continued

Example 10

Nur Ali Borumand (*tār*), *zābol, radif* †

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† Example 10 is a transcription of *gusheh zābol* from the *radif* of Mirza Adbollah in the version of Nur Ali Borumand (*tār*), recorded in 1972 by the Iranian Radio and Television Organization. Whilst a notated version of this *radif*, with transcriptions by Jean During (accompanied by the original cassette recordings) was published in 1991 (Jean During, *Le répertoire-modèle de la musique iranienne: Radif de tar et de setar de Mirza 'Abdollah, version de Nur 'Ali Borumand (avec la collaboration de Pirouz Sayar)*, Tehran, 1991), this transcription is my own.

Example 11

(a) from 'I Just Called to Say I Love You', Stevie Wonder, from the album *The Woman in Red* (1984); extended repetition type A[1]

(b) from the second half of *Ye Banks and Braes of Bonnie Doon*, Scottish melody (composer and date of composition unknown); extended repetition type B[4(ii)]

(c) from the overture to *L'italiana in Algeri*, Rossini (1813), bars 82–90; extended repetition type B[5]

APPENDIX B

PERFORMANCES DISCUSSED IN SECTION III

Performance 1. *Iran: Musique persane*, OCORA 57. Recorded in Tehran 1979, published in Paris 1984.

Performance 2. *Chavosh no. 9*. Recording of a live concert in Tehran, July 1977, published by Kanoon-e Honari va Fekri-e Chavosh, 1977.

Performance 3. Studio performance broadcast by BBC Radio 3, *c*.1987.

Performance 4. *Ostādān-e Musiqi-e Sonnati-e Irān* (*Masters of Iranian Traditional Music*) series, SARTMS, no. 10. Originally recorded and published in Iran as a commercial LP disc on the Āhang-e Ruz label before 1979; re-released as a commercial cassette in the USA in 1984 by C&G Inc. (380).

Performance 5. Commercial cassette recording published by Moasseseh-ye Honari va Farhangi-e Māhur (Iran), 1980; distributed outside Iran by the Farabi Cultural Institute, Finland.

Performance 6. *Barg-e Sabz* no. 165, commercial cassette recording of a studio performance originally broadcast by Iranian Radio in the 1970s; re-released in the USA in 1987 by Caspian Inc. (518).

Performance 7. From *Iranian Dastgāh: Modal Music and Improvisations*, Philips 6586 005. Performance recorded in Iran (date and place of publication not given, but probably before 1979).

Performance 8. *Golhā-ye Tāzeh* no. 147. Commercial cassette recording of a studio performance broadcast by Iranian Radio in the 1970s.

Performance 9. *Ostādān-e Musiqi-e Sonnati-e Irān* (*Masters of Iranian Traditional Music*) series, SARTMS, no. 21. Originally recorded and published in Iran as a commercial LP disc on the Āhang-e Ruz label before 1979; re-released as a commercial cassette in the USA in 1984 by C&G Inc. (376).

Performance 10. Live recording of a performance given at the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London), *c.*1966.

Performance 11. Commercial cassette, recorded and published in Iran, *c.*1984–5.

ABSTRACT

This article traces the discourses which have dominated the musicological study of creativity over the last 50 years or so, focusing on the concept of improvisation and its relationship to composition, particularly as applied to musics outside the notated Western tradition. Arguing that such discourses have served specific ideological purposes, the author illustrates the ways in which these continue to be implicated in an essentializing and orientalist exercise of power over 'other' musical traditions. Considering the specific case of Iranian classical music, the author discusses the impact of Western discourses on concepts of musical creativity in Iran and, through detailed musical analyses, illustrates the problematic nature of such discourses in the context of this musical tradition.