



Contemporary Researches on Islamic Revolution



Sound as Politics: Aesthetics, Cassette Tapes, and the Redistribution of the Sensible in the Islamic Revolution of Iran

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Scientific Research	Objective: Drawing on Jacques Rancière's theoretical framework, this study examines the role of the cassette tape in the Islamic Revolution of Iran as an aesthetic-political object. The central research question is: 'How did sound and the cassette tape, within the context of the Islamic Revolution, redistribute the sensible by disrupting the police order governing the distribution of sound and speech, thereby facilitating the emergence of political subjectivity and the formation of a new configuration of politics?' This question is situated within a broader conceptual necessity: understanding the Islamic Revolution cannot be adequately explained merely by reference to classical theories of revolution; rather, the ontological layer of sensory, auditory, and perceptual transformations must also be examined. This dimension has received comparatively limited attention in existing scholarship.
Article history: Received: 2025-12-04 Received in revised form: 2025-12-28 Accepted : 2025-12-28 Available online: 2026-10-24	Methodology: Adopting an analytical-theoretical approach and drawing on the foundational concepts of Jacques Rancière's thought, including the redistribution of the sensible, the police order, and politics, this study analyzes the position of cassette-tape media in the transformations associated with the Islamic Revolution.
Keywords: Islamic Revolution, The Sensible, Rancière, Cassette Tape, Police Order.	Findings: The cassette tape functioned as an apparatus for the redistribution of the sensible: "A phenomenon capable of shifting the boundary between legitimate and inaudible voices and enabling political action by bodies and subjects whom the Pahlavi police order had relegated to marginal positions." It enabled these subjects to move from the status of silent bodies to that of subjects endowed with logos. The findings indicate that this transition constituted the political moment in the Rancièrian sense: a moment in which the police order governing the distribution of sound was disrupted and equal participation in the political field became possible. Unheard discourses became legitimate political speech. This new discourse carried a form of aesthetics of revolutionary speech that, through a different language, constructed a new order of hearing and understanding and brought the lived experience of suffering, resistance, and faith into the public sphere.
	Conclusion: An examination of the role of cassette tapes demonstrates that this medium generated a political moment in the Rancièrian sense: a moment in which the police order governing the distribution of sound was disrupted and, through the redistribution of the sensible, transformed the possibilities for political agency. This perceptual and auditory transformation played a key role in the formation of a new configuration of politics during the Islamic Revolution of Iran.

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Introduction

Sound, in its ontological and phenomenological dimensions, extends beyond a purely physical phenomenon to serve as a simultaneous manifestation of presence and distance. Each sonic event opens time and space as concrete and lived domains for the subject, shaping perceptions of reality (Ihde, 2007: 185). This experiential quality of sound underpins its significance in social and political contexts. In the political sphere, sound fulfills essential roles: it legitimizes authority, mobilizes society, and organizes collective experience. Its power lies in the ability to unite individuals, reproduce social order, and transform the relationship between individuals and collectives during critical historical moments. Sound not only transmits messages but also produces a shared, tangible, and affective experience that shapes collective thought and emotion (Way, 2019: 475).

Under revolutionary conditions, sound surpasses its function as a communication tool and becomes a medium for consolidating collective identity and shaping historical experience. This influence is not limited to physical presence; by permeating both public and private spaces, sound reproduces political experience across multiple layers of society. As a political mediator, sound is not simply a carrier of content but also generates collective presence and participation, enabling individuals to share a common experience even without physical co-presence (Attali, 1985: 150).

The advent of the cassette tape introduced a technological rupture in the sonic domain. It separated sound from the singular moment of its production, transforming it into an object that could be stored, transmitted, and reproduced. This innovation liberated sound from linear temporality, rendering it an active presence. The cassette's political significance resided in this rupture: "Activities previously dependent on physical proximity, such as sermons, speeches, and protests, could now be reproduced in thousands of copies without the speaker's presence." This development entailed not only message transmission but also the reproduction of collective experience, thereby reinforcing networks of solidarity, anger, hope, and shared identity (LaBelle, 2010: 145).

In contemporary Iranian history, the impact of this sonic rupture on the redistribution of audibility and the opening of new political horizons became especially pronounced during the years preceding the Islamic Revolution. The cassette tape functioned not only as a technology but also as a mechanism for redistributing political power. It emerged as a crucial medium for transmitting messages and facilitating political communication between the populace and the revolutionary leader, particularly during his exile. In this context, sound during the Islamic Revolution represented a concrete and ontological political act that challenged established power structures. The significance of this phenomenon

is underscored by an American journalist's remark that the Shah's gravestone should read: "He forgot the cassette tape." (Farqati, 2003 AD/1382 SH: 64) Hamid Algar similarly identified the cassette as the technological symbol of the Iranian Revolution (Algar, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 135). Due to its central role, European journalists referred to Imam Khomeini's movement as the "Cassette Revolution." (Forati, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 99) In this context, Hemelweit asserts:

"The most striking and innovative use of electronic media for political messaging and communication to date was Imam Khomeini's use of audio recordings in orchestrating the 1979 Iranian Revolution." (Himmelweit, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 18)

Ultimately, during the Islamic Revolution of Iran, sound fundamentally altered perceptions of the political sphere and created new opportunities for participation and resistance.

From this perspective, the study of the cassette tape extends beyond technological history to encompass a revolutionary moment that disrupted the prevailing sensory order and enabled the emergence of a new political arena. Interpreting the cassette tape phenomenon during the Islamic Revolution through Jacques Rancière's theoretical lens, this article addresses the following question: 'How did sound and the cassette tape, within the context of the Islamic Revolution, redistribute the sensible by rupturing the police order governing sound and speech, thereby facilitating the emergence of political subjectivity and a new configuration of politics?'

In analyzing the event of the Islamic Revolution, attention should not be confined solely to economic causes or social structures; rather, the Revolution must be understood as an aesthetic rupture and a fundamental reconfiguration in the distribution of the sensible. This study demonstrates how a sonic medium, the cassette tape, through political agency, became an instrument for fundamentally transforming the aesthetics of politics in Iran and, consequently, redefining the relationship among sound, technology, the sensible, and politics.

Within the context of the Islamic Revolution, the cassette tape functioned precisely as an aesthetic-political technology that challenged the configuration of the sensible established by the Pahlavi regime. Through its capacity to reproduce and disseminate sound in the absence and secrecy of the speaker, this technology liberated the possibility of being heard from the state's media monopoly. It redistributed it to those sectors of society that had been rendered unheard and invisible.

A Rancièrian reading gives this study particular methodological and theoretical significance and addresses precisely the gap that traditional analyses have been unable to fill. The purpose of adopting this theoretical framework is to

move beyond purely content-oriented analyses and examine phenomenologically how the sensory structure of Iranian society was reconfigured on the eve of the Revolution. Rancière's theory elevates the study of the cassette tape from the level of a mere instrument for transmitting messages to the domains of political philosophy, aesthetics, and the configuration of the sensible. It explains how a material instrument could challenge the perceptual foundations of power, because Rancière defines politics as a redistribution or reconfiguration of the sensible.

Ultimately, this study is of vital significance for contemporary political sociology because it not only analyzes a historical event but also elucidates the importance of the perceptual foundations of the political subject in diverse political processes and within the context of contemporary media.

1. Theoretical Foundations: Rancière and the Redefinition of Politics within the Aesthetic Sphere

To understand the role of sound and auditory media in political transformations, it is necessary to turn to theories that do not regard politics merely as a field of institutional action and power relations, but also as a domain of perception and sensory possibilities. In this regard, the thought of Jacques Rancière occupies a unique position. Through his redefinition of the relationship between politics and aesthetics, Rancière introduces a fundamental transformation in this field. In his view, politics is transformed from a concept centered exclusively on power into a process that reorganizes perception, subjectivity, and the possibility for the emergence of voices that have been excluded from the dominant order (Caiazza, 2022: 86). In other words, for Rancière, politics does not occur solely within formal sites of power; it also manifests itself within the field of society's sensory experience, and any transformation in these domains has the potential to alter power relations.

Rancière has centered his intellectual project on rethinking the relationship among politics, aesthetics, and human perceptual experience. This approach constitutes an important point of departure in the transformation of contemporary political philosophy and political sociology, as it demonstrates that political changes emerge not only at the level of formal institutions and structures but also at the level of society's sensory and perceptual experience, where the boundaries of seeing, hearing, and speaking are redefined. It is for this reason that the question of *logos*, that is, who is capable of speaking, constitutes a central axis of the concept of politics in his thought (Janicka, 2020: 123).

If, as Rancière himself explicitly states in "Ten Theses on Politics," his concern throughout his political and historical inquiries is to draw attention to the

aesthetic dimension of political experience (Rancière, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 21). If politics is inherently and inseparably connected to aesthetics, this relationship can be understood through the key concept of the distribution of the sensible. Politics is inherently aesthetic and begins at the point where it starts framing what exists and what can be seen, while simultaneously engaging in a distribution and division concerning a particular form of perception, one that appears to have been structured, rendered intelligible, and made visible (Tajik & Siavashpour, 2000 AD/1399 SH: 42).

Within this approach, politics emerges as an interruption of the dominant perceptual order. This order, which Rancière calls the distribution of the sensible, consists of a set of invisible rules that determine what is audible and visible and who has the right to speak. In other words, the sensible encompasses everything that society recognizes as capable of being seen, heard, spoken, and felt, and it establishes the boundary between legitimate subjects and subjects without a share. The sensible is not a natural given but rather a form of organization of collective experience, an order that prespecifies the limits of what can be seen, heard, and said. In subsequent interpretations, this concept has been explained as the horizon of possible perceptibility (Deranty, 2010) and as the sensory economy of power (Rockhill, 2014).

In this context, Rancière places politics in opposition to the police order. He understands politics not as the activity of institutions and state power, or what he calls the police order, but, as noted above, as an act of dissensus and a reconfiguration of the sensory frameworks that define society (Davis, 2010: 81-83). The police order constitutes the primary framework that determines temporal and spatial divisions and each individual's or group's share of the common. It encompasses the distribution of roles and positions. Within this order, some voices are heard as speech and discourse, whereas others are heard merely as noise or sound. The police is responsible for distributing the sensible (Rancière, 2004: 8).

For Rancière, politics is precisely the act that disrupts this police order. At its core, politics is always an act that produces dissensus within the distribution of the sensible, because it is only through this rupture that those who were previously regarded merely as producing noise become speaking subjects and challenge the police order of the visible and invisible (Rancière, 2015 AD/1394 SH:60). Politics emerges when those who have no share enter the common sensory field and make themselves visible and audible. Accordingly, from Rancière's perspective, politics is not an exercise of power or an attempt to acquire it; rather, above all, it means disrupting the established social order of a society, carried out by groups, classes, or subjects who are not recognized within the existing order.

If the distribution of the sensible constitutes the hidden geometry of society, a geometry that makes participation in politics, art, and public discourse possible and draws the boundaries between appearance and disappearance, meaning and meaninglessness, and speech and silence, then the redistribution of the sensible is precisely the moment when the police order undergoes a rupture. The boundaries of collective experience are reorganized anew (Rancière, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 59). In this way, the horizon of what is considered possible, visible, or sayable is transformed.

Consequently, the redistribution of the sensible is not merely an aesthetic concept but also a way of understanding politics as a radical act. This act challenges structures of exclusion and silence by creating new modes of perception and relationality and opens new possibilities for collective presence and action. Žižek argues that Rancière's approach constitutes a postmodern framework for the politics of resistance, one saturated with aesthetic phenomena (Žižek, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 472).

In this regard, it should be emphasized that aesthetics, for Rancière, is not a domain separate from politics; rather, it is itself one of the mechanisms of politics, because aesthetics, like politics, is concerned with organizing the senses and shaping the possibilities of perception and collective participation. Aesthetics, contrary to the conventional understanding of art and beauty, is a system that organizes sensory and perceptual experience of the world. It is the regime, through which sensory experiences are organized, and the boundary between what can be articulated and what remains silent is established.

Accordingly, aesthetics in Rancière's thought can be regarded as the ground upon which politics in its genuine sense emerges: "When a voice, a mode of perception, or an excluded subject disrupts the existing sensory, ideological order and creates the possibility of a new experience of reality." (Rancière, 1992: 63) Within this framework, any medium or technology capable of transforming the boundaries of hearing, speech, and perception can function as a political agent in the Rancièrian sense and open up a political possibility.

2. The Cassette Tape: The Mechanics of Rupture and the Reproduction of a New Auditory Experience in Iran

Discussing the cassette tape in relation to the mechanics of rupture and the reproduction of a new auditory experience is grounded in the fact that the emergence of the cassette tape in Iran was not merely a technological transformation in the field of sound reproduction. Rather, it represented the introduction of a new form of the mechanics of rupture into the sphere of Iranian auditory experience. This mechanism possessed a socio-cultural character that created new

possibilities for the lived political world of Iranians.

By separating sound from the scene of its production and distributing it across dispersed spaces of everyday life, the cassette made possible a new form of listening, a form of listening that was no longer constrained by official time and space and therefore possessed the capacity to produce a new relationship between the listening subject and the social world (Sterne, 2003: 274).

This experiential transformation constituted the reproduction of a new auditory experience: "The emergence of a form of listening in which listening was not a consumptive act but an aesthetic-political form of participation." The mechanics of rupture became operative precisely at this point: "The cassette transferred the experience of listening from the official scene of address into the invisible and micro-level spaces of the followers' life-world." This transfer was not merely a relocation of sound but a rupture in the aesthetics of the existing order, because sound was no longer subject to the official rules governing the distribution of messages and could, in small rooms, marketplaces, automobiles, and informal gatherings, generate a rhizomatic network of listening.

Within this framework, the mechanics of rupture refer to the material and aesthetic processes through which the cassette shifted the boundary between legitimate and illegitimate voices and between audible and excluded speech, thereby removing the production of sound from the monopoly of official powers. In pre-revolutionary Iran, the cassette transcended its status as a technical object and became an agent of disruption in the established order governing the circulation of sound. By providing the capacity for home recording, inexpensive reproduction, and invisible transmission, this medium produced a rupture in the official auditory regime. This rupture resulted not merely in a change of content but in a transformation of the way sound itself was experienced (Manuel, 1993: 22).

Unlike print media such as leaflets and clandestine pamphlets, which primarily confronted power at the level of meaning, the cassette intervened in auditory apparatuses. It transformed the conditions of possibility for being heard. Its agency therefore lay in rearranging the relations among sound, body, and space, such that sound circulated outside institutional channels and within repeatable auditory situations. Accordingly, examining the cassette tape in relation to rupture and auditory reproduction makes it possible to understand its role in reconfiguring the sensible and shaping political subjects, a role that, in the context of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, constitutes one of the most significant examples of the redefinition of the politics of sound in contemporary history.

2.1. The Police Order and Audible Sound during the Pahlavi Era

In the contemporary history of Iran, the Pahlavi monarchy gradually established an order that can be described as a police order of sound. This arrangement constituted a system whose ultimate objective was to architect and controls the domain of perception, an order that was based not merely on political surveillance but also engineered the sphere of the sensible in all its dimensions, from the media to collective memory. Within such a mechanism, the neutralization of oppositional voices functioned not as a tactical measure but as an aesthetic-security project: "A project aimed at redefining what could be heard, what was permitted to resonate, and what had to disappear into enforced silence."

Particularly after the 28 Mordad coups, the coup government led by Zahedi, with the support of military and security forces, was tasked with suppressing every voice and every possibility of being heard at its inception. This was not merely a political act but also an aesthetic act, that is, the removal of sound from the domain of the sensible. When a journalist was arrested, his voice was eliminated not only in the present but also in the future, because the memory of society was being erased.

Within the imperial police order, sound as a macro-level phenomenon was organized through national radio, state television, and official speeches. It was a voice that flowed from the center to the periphery, from the top downward, and from a single political body toward subordinate collective bodies (Mbembe, 2019: 24).

Within this order, some voices were defined as audible and others as inaudible; some as sayable and others as unsayable. Under the Pahlavi order, official sound was disseminated exclusively through the National Iranian Radio and Television. This institution was not merely a media organization but the direct expression of the Shah's body. The Shah's voice was the official voice and the only audible voice in the public sphere. Radio and television constituted the apparatus for reproducing the power of the Pahlavi ideology of archaic nationalism, defining the place, time, and very nature of what could be heard even before a voice was produced.

In Rancièrian terms, this order assigns bodies to predetermined places and attributes specific activities to each of them (Rancière, 2010: 17). The Shah's body was the body of the speaker; the people's bodies were the bodies of passive listeners. With the establishment of SAVAK in 1343, this mechanism entered a more complex phase (Shahedi, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 48), a phase that can be described as the engineering of the voiceless.

SAVAK functioned as a surveillance-aesthetic apparatus, placing not only actual voices but also potential voices within its field of visibility. The control of

dissident activities inside Iran was accompanied by a network monitoring newspapers, associations, student groups, and intellectual circles. Yet its mission did not end there. SAVAK extended the auditory boundaries of Iran beyond the country's borders. The monitoring of the political activities of Iranians abroad, particularly students and activists, demonstrated the emergence of a transnational sonic order, an order in which even voices produced in Europe or the United States were classified in advance as unauthorized.

This may be described as the division of the world and the aesthetics of the sensible during the Second Pahlavi era. In this process, SAVAK's Third Directorate played a central role (ibid: 523). This directorate, which was responsible for controlling revolutionary and political activities, effectively created an auditory-security classification system: "An apparatus that determined which voices were dangerous, which were insignificant, and which were tolerable. This classification was not based on the intrinsic nature of speech but on its relationship to the structure of power, a relationship rooted in a deeper logic than repression: The logic of the distribution of the sensible."

Another key mechanism of the Pahlavi police order was exile. In addition to detention and imprisonment, there was a consistent policy for extinguishing the flames of political struggle: exile. Exile constitutes a form of geographical censorship that renders a voice inaudible not by eliminating its content but by removing the speaker's body from the shared space (Sznajder & Roniger, 2009: 11). When a cleric or journalist was exiled to a deprived city or to another country, his voice was removed from here and displaced to there.

Within the police order of the sensible, this "There" constituted a heterotopia (Mendel, 2011: 160), a space in which the voice existed but remained invisible and inaudible. In Rancièrian terms, exile constituted a spatial division of the sensible.

Another of the most complex layers of the police order of sound involved not the silencing of voices but the production of substitute or artificial voices. By establishing two ostensibly opposing parties, the New Iran Party and the People's Party (and, later, even the single-party Rastakhiz system), the Shah created a form of artificial voice whose function was to perform the appearance of opposition. The People's Party was assigned a dual mission: on the one hand, to present a critical image of the government and, on the other, to attract and neutralize genuine opponents.

This constituted a form of reproductive censorship, a form of censorship that did not merely eliminate but substituted. This substitute voice functioned as a mediator that prevented the emergence of a genuine opposition and replaced it with a controlled framework. Within this context, in Ranciè's terms, the peo-

ple did not enter politics as liberated spectators but only at the symbolic level (Rancière, 2004: 167). Their voices had already been placed within a closed framework whose purpose was to naturalize the police order without disrupting the sensory distribution of power. This arrangement created an order in which authorized voices could be heard, but not as voices from below; rather, they functioned as regulated echoes of power.

2.2. The Cassette Tape, the Network of Sound Circulation, the Expansion of the Horizon of the Sensible, and the Reproduction of Aesthetic-Political Experience

Through its capacity for reproduction and dissemination across different spaces, the cassette tape made possible the creation of an extensive network of speech and sound. This network disrupted the traditional boundaries of audibility and expanded the horizon of the sensible. In this way, revolutionary speech transcended the level of local speech and created a multilayered, networked space of sonic presence that placed the listener in interaction with the political world and constructed this possibility across multiple levels of society.

This network stood in complete opposition to the centralized and vertical network of state control. The cassette tape transferred the auditory experience from centralized broadcasting to rhizomatic reproduction. This dispersal amounted to the simultaneous creation of thousands of political centers in spaces that the police order had defined as nonpolitical and private.

The cassette tape thus succeeded in disrupting the dominant aesthetic-political order of the Pahlavi era.

Although cassette tapes were also available to other opposition groups, their political agency did not derive merely from the accessibility of the medium; rather, it depended on the way the voice was situated within existing social networks, the speaker's symbolic capital, and its capacity for collective recognition. This symbolic capital, that is, the speaker's religious and social credibility, enabled the voice, within the context of the Islamic Revolution, to function not merely as a carrier of a message but as a source of collective appeal and mobilization. Thus, the rupture that emerged was not the result of media monopoly, but rather of the simultaneity of the medium, the voice, and the social contexts through which it was accepted and echoed. This technology gave voices, music, and political statements that had previously been invisible or unheard and excluded from the official sensible an opportunity for extensive dissemination and reproduction and, ultimately, for generating transformations in the cultural and political spheres of society (Simon, 2022: 45).

From this perspective, the cassette tape can be regarded as a medium in

which politics and aesthetics operated simultaneously: “Politics through breaking the monopoly over sound and disrupting the existing order of the sensible, and aesthetics through creating new modes of listening, reception, and transmission.” In this way, the cassette created conditions under which discourses that had previously been excluded from the public sphere could once again emerge. In other words, the cassette transformed exclusion into the possibility of appearance, and appearance into the possibility of repetition. It was this repetition that consolidated the rupture and transformed it into a relatively stable condition within the auditory sphere. Here, the medium functioned as a mechanism for producing an independent auditory memory. The cassette tape liberated sound from this overarching narrative, and this event constituted not merely a technological change but a rupture in the distribution of the sensible. The cassette did precisely this: it opened a space for the voices of clerics, revolutionaries, and the masses within an order that regarded their voices as insignificant. The mosque, as a place of worship; the home, as a private space; and the bazaar, as a site of exchange, were transformed through the sound of cassette tapes into spaces for the reproduction and organization of political discourse and for the shifting of the boundaries of the sensible.

3. Cassette Tapes and the Redistribution of the Sensible in the Revolutionary Moment

This section analyzes and elucidates the ontological depth of the process through which cassette tapes, through the aesthetics of revolutionary discourse, redefined the boundaries of space, time, and the political body in the revolutionary moment and effectively brought about a redistribution of the sensible. In this way, the aesthetics of revolutionary discourse and the circulation of sound through cassette tapes played a strategic role in the redistribution of the sensory space while also providing a basis for a new experience of collective presence and a new configuration of politics, in the Rancièrian sense, within the public sphere.

3.1. The Aesthetics of Revolutionary Discourse on Cassette Tapes

The aesthetics of revolutionary discourse on cassette tapes constituted the construction of a new auditory order. This new discourse created an alternative sensory horizon in which the voice of resistance and the lived experience of the oppressed appeared in the public sphere as legitimate and audible voices. It traversed the boundary between the private and public spheres. It generated a new perceptual horizon for political action at both the micro-level of the life-world and the macro-level of the public sphere.

Cassette tapes carried narratives that, rather than relying on official analy-

ses, emphasized the lived experience of suffering and oppression, including imprisonment, torture, poverty, and injustice. These narratives, often infused with deeply religious or epic tones, encoded legitimate grief, sorrow, and anger and transformed them into a shared collective affect. The emphasis on narratives of victimhood and martyrdom in these tapes connected individual experiences of oppression to a broader political and theological conception. This transformed the oppressed individual from a passive victim into a moral agent whose voice possessed undeniable political legitimacy. For example, the widespread circulation of cassette tapes containing Imam Khomeini's speeches and the narratives of political prisoners elevated the voices of the oppressed beyond the level of mere noise. Through the meticulous reproduction of memories of imprisonment, torture, and victimization in the form of epic and religious narratives, these voices were transformed into a coherent and legitimate discursive order that was heard in homes, mosques, and bazaars and acquired political and social legitimacy. Whereas, within the order of police discourse, all of these voices were regarded as inaudible, cassette tapes transformed these voices, at an ontological level, into an unavoidable form of truth.

The police order sharply separated the domains of religion and politics. By restricting religious activities, censoring religious discourse, regulating religious ceremonies, determining officially sanctioned preachers, controlling networks of religious propagation and print media, employing court-affiliated clerics, and re-writing the content of school textbooks on the basis of the ideology of Pahlavism, the Pahlavi regime sought to give this separation an operational and structural form. The aesthetics of discourse on cassette tapes, however, altered this separation. In this format, religious discourse was no longer confined to the pulpit or to officially sanctioned rituals; rather, it resonated as a form of political discourse in streets, homes, shops, and micro-level social networks. In doing so, it effected a redistribution of the sensible in which religious concepts became capable of functioning as political agents.

Revolutionary discourse on cassette tapes deliberately and consciously distanced itself from the language of official literature and the bureaucratic structures of dominant discourse. This avoidance was not merely a stylistic choice; it constituted an aesthetic-political means of declaring non-belonging to the prevailing police order. The aesthetics of revolutionary discourse did not define the world according to the police logic of Pahlavism; rather, it represented the world through an ontological binary founded upon good and evil (Zickmund, 2003: 31). The oppressed masses and authentic Islam were perceived as the forces of good. At the same time, the ruling regime and its foreign supporters were represented through the notions of the Great Satan and arrogant domination. Terms such as

tyranny, the “Yazid of the age,” and the infidels were employed directly to refer to the ruling power and its agents (Abdolkarimi, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 253).

Through its choice of traditional and religious vocabulary, revolutionary discourse introduced a new aesthetics into the sphere of the sensible. This linguistic rupture lay at the heart of the redistribution of the sensible through cassette tapes, because it demonstrated that those who had previously been unheard were now, through a different language, demanding their right to appear within the public sphere. Terms such as independence, freedom, and justice were redefined through their direct association with Islam, divine government, and the struggle against arrogant domination (Azarmi, 2025 AD/1404 SH: 23). This generated an epistemic-aesthetic rupture in the listener, who could no longer understand the world according to the dictates of the police order.

Accordingly, the aesthetics of revolutionary discourse in the form of cassette tapes succeeded in redistributing the sensible in Iran; that is, it removed sound and the right to political speech from monopoly and enabled a greater number of people, in different places and through diverse modes of expression, to speak about politics. Through repeated references to Shi‘i myths and political culture, revolutionary discourse connected the political present, that is, the struggle against the Shah, to sacred time, namely the event of Karbala (Eshqi, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 154). This created a new perceptual horizon for action in which present suffering was understood not as meaningless but as possessing transcendent and historical significance.

Speeches emphasizing revolutionary interpretations of religion, political Islam, and the necessity of Islamic government, which were distributed through cassette tapes, constituted the ideological and substantive core of the Islamic Revolution. Above all, this content served to disrupt the secular discursive order of the Pahlavi state (Madani, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 207) and redefine the relationship between religion and politics. These voices created a new sensory configuration in which politics became a sacred and religious matter (Fischer, 1980: 136), while the separation of religion from politics came to be regarded as a deviation. This type of discourse challenged the dominant regime of meaning by rereading religious concepts within the horizon of political action and positioned the sacred as a source of legitimacy for resistance and for the redefinition of social power.

In the final analysis, an examination of the content of cassette tapes demonstrates that this medium carried a discursive order in which two layers of meaning operated in an interwoven manner and, taken together, contributed to the reconstruction of revolutionary subjectivity and collective mobilization. The critique of the Pahlavi power structure was articulated in a rhetorical, affective, and evocative form and, drawing on concepts such as justice, resistance to oppres-

sion, and the rejection of political dependency, portrayed the Pahlavi system as an illegitimate order incompatible with human dignity. This mode of expression engaged the listener not only through a critical understanding but also through a sense of moral participation in the process of protest. At the second level, cassette discourse redefined the religious–political identity of the people.

Within this redefinition, religion was no longer merely an individual or ritual sphere; rather, it became a framework for understanding the role of the Muslim individual in the public sphere, the manner in which power should be confronted, and the desirable model of political organization. Through this discourse, the idea of Islamic government was presented as a legitimate, ethical, and emancipatory alternative, and the audience came to perceive itself not merely as a witness to oppression but as the bearer of a historical–religious identity that called upon it to construct a different order.

For people whose traditional understanding of religion had largely confined it to the *Mihrāb* and ritual practices, this discourse produced a fundamental transformation of identity: “From a passive and domesticated Muslim into a historical subject and a builder of society.” At the same time, this discursive aesthetics, functioning as a systematic theoretical framework, gave the revolutionary struggle a structural objective rather than reducing it to a momentary protest. By drawing on trans-historical and ethical elements, revolutionary discourse enabled the emergence of a new configuration of politics and, through symbolic representations such as the connection with Karbala, endowed this new configuration of politics with a trans-historical and ethical dimension. This act expanded the horizon of the sensible to such an extent that it was no longer possible, within the police order, to reduce political opponents to rioters or disorderly elements.

3.2. The Cassette Tape and the New Configuration of Politics on the Eve of the Revolution

Rancière locates the distinctive character of politics in moments of rupture that disrupt the police order of the state, moments in which the sensible order and the prevailing distribution of sound and visibility are experienced not as stable arrangements but as temporary and mutable scenes, and in which politics emerges at the intersection of the auditory and the sensory, in the form of dispersed yet equal collectivities. In such a scene, politics is no longer the product of institutional will or a centralized program; rather, it is an event that takes shape in the interval between sound and listener, between lived experience and moral belief, and between the historical past and the social present. By breaking with official space and time, the cassette tape created these intervals. It extended the field of struggle beyond class and institutional boundaries into the realm of the sensible

and collective morality. It was here that each listener became not merely an audience member but an agent and participant in the emergence of a new politics, transforming the order of power in the moment of collective experience.

Accordingly, the cassette tape was not merely a medium for transmitting messages but a philosophical technology of the emergence of politics (Hirschkind, 2006: 53), an instrument for redistributing the sensible, and a mechanism that enabled the formation of equal subjects and communities within the revolutionary moment. When the voice reproduced on cassette tapes materialized in the coordinated chants of millions of people in the streets, the prevailing rule governing the distribution of sound and visibility was fundamentally dismantled. This was the new configuration of politics in which the redistribution of the sensible is recognized as a fundamental condition for any form of social and political transformation.

Accordingly, in the revolutionary moment, politics was no longer defined as an instrument or objective of institutions and governments; rather, it was an event that took shape through sound and listening, while collective experience was simultaneously redistributed.

By providing this dispersed and borderless experience, the cassette tape demonstrated that politics is manifested not in power itself but in the human encounter with oppression, participation in justice, and the recreation of collective sensibility. Ultimately, this medium provided the setting for the emergence of new subjects, the redefinition of radical collectivities, and the formation of a politics that rested not on structure but on lived experience and ethical sensibility. Politics became a sphere in which every utterance, every narrative, and every repetition of sound constituted a challenge to the existing sensible order. From a Rancièrian perspective, these moments represent precisely the situation in which politics, as an event, takes shape at the intersection of ethics, sensibility, and collectivity; political subjects are born not through institutional will but through individual and collective encounters with discourse and sound.

Historical examples of this process are concrete and illuminating. Cassette recordings of the speeches of Imam Khomeini, Ali Shariati, and Martyr Morteza Motahhari circulated fluidly and diffusely yet on a wide scale, from Najaf to Tehran and from *Hosseiniyehs* to small neighborhood homes. Through listening to and reinterpreting these discourses, audiences found themselves within a new ethical-political horizon and extended the field of struggle beyond official and organizational constraints. This experience demonstrates that when revolutionary discourse is combined with an audio technology such as the cassette tape, it can generate a new configuration of politics, the emergence of equal collectivities, and a redistribution of the sensible on an unprecedented scale, transforming the

revolutionary moment, in a philosophical-historical sense, into an experienced, ethical, and collective event.

Thus, sound in the Iranian Revolution constituted an act of creating a new reality: a reality in which voices that had previously been unheard were not only made visible and audible but themselves became the foundation upon which a new political field was established.

4. Sound, Cassette Tapes, and the Emergence of Political Subjectivity in the Islamic Revolution

By becoming engaged in political action, the demos, rather than being a pre-determined subject emerges as a political subject through an action that generates dissensus (Rancière, 2010: 27). Accordingly, those who are uncoun- ted within the police order emerge as political subjects once they participate in dissensual action (Yousefikhah et al., 2023 AD/1402 SH: 210). Within Rancière's theoretical framework, political subjectivity is not a fixed essence but an event that takes shape in the gap between the established order and newly emerging possibilities of being heard. It is an event that manifests itself through subtle yet fundamental shifts in the sphere of the sensible. This subjectivity emerges when what had been defined, within the police logic governing the distribution of roles, places, and voices, as inaudible or deprived of a share in *logos* suddenly acquires the possibility of appearing and presents itself as the bearer of a political voice.

In the context of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, what appeared within the sensible as an alternative voice constituted an event that transformed the boundaries of audibility and generated new forms of political subjectivity. Political subjectivity, within this framework, is the event of the formation of an emergent "We," a "We" founded not on established social identities, whether class, ethnicity, or gender, but on the shared experience of participating in a sensory redistribution. This identity emerges through a transformation in the perceptual configuration of the social world, whereby silent bodies, dispersed voices, and marginal lived experiences become connected within a collective and participatory network, and their presence within the auditory and perceptual sphere of society becomes consolidated.

From this perspective, political subjectivity is continuously in the process of becoming; it is fluid and dependent upon moments of rupture rather than being a stable possession belonging to a particular group. Its emergence should therefore be understood as the intersection of suppressed sensory energies and new possibilities for the circulation of meaning, an intersection that, in the context of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, acquired the possibility of embodiment through sound and cassette tapes (Sefat, 2023: 67). Thus, political subjectivity, in this reading, is not the product of an external institution but emerges from the experience of

being heard and from reorganizing the shared sensory world. This experience can fundamentally transform the boundaries of participation, agency, and collective self-awareness.

Accordingly, within the context of the Islamic Revolution, the cassette tape functioned as a tool for producing a radical political subjectivity. This apparatus belonged neither to the upper classes nor to the monopoly of official organs of power. With its mechanical and reproducible structure, the cassette entered the field of the reproduction of subjectivity and enabled a new sequence of possibilities for being heard. In cassette form, sound broke with the police system governing the distribution of speech and silence. What was supposed to remain silent began to circulate and became a vehicle for constructing the political subject. The agent who recorded their voice on a cassette tape and the listeners who secretly reproduced it both moved beyond a condition of mere passivity and became active political subjects. The act of transmission and reproduction itself constituted a form of protest and a disruption of the order of spatial and auditory segregation.

Within Iran's revolutionary environment, suppressed voices, including those of the clergy and religious authorities, intellectuals, and students, through their reproduction on cassette tapes, moved into the position of intervening subjects. They were not merely heard; rather, being heard itself became a political act that transformed the system of meaning in the relationship between speaker and listener. Previously voiceless subjects experienced themselves as bearers of political truth. In other words, the act of listening to and relistening to recorded speeches generated a form of political homogenization among listeners: individuals who perhaps had no direct social connection with one another became, at the level of the sensible, an auditory community organized around a shared experience. This auditory community constituted precisely the form of subjectivity that the police order failed to recognize, because it introduced new divisions into the field of perception.

This process was able to define the identity of an aware Muslim subject as a new political aesthetic in opposition to the politically ignorant subject within the Pahlavi police order. Through cassette tapes, subjects transmitted words and political messages, shifted public opinion in their favor, and contributed to creating the conditions for the Iranian Revolution of 1979 (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1994: 24). From this perspective, the Islamic Revolution can be understood as a field in which sound destabilized the boundaries of the sensible and constructed the emergence of the subject. The voice recorded on cassette tape was the voice of an absent subjectivity that, through technology, imposed an effective presence at the very heart of the prevailing order.

This voice was no longer merely a sound; it had become speech or discourse that laid claim to truth, justice, and the redistribution of power. Political subjec-

tivity, within this framework, constituted the very act of declaring the presence of those who had previously been classified as bodies lacking the legitimacy to speak. Thus, through the cassette, sound became a subjective event, an event in which ordinary individuals, those who had no share in *logos* within the police logic, experienced themselves not merely as audiences but as participants in political action. The new subject that emerged in this way was the product of a form of sensory redistribution.

Thus, rather than functioning as a passive medium, the cassette tape became a threshold for the formation of a new political subjectivity, a subjectivity that appeared not through bodily presence in the streets but through auditory participation in the political field. Ultimately, by connecting the prohibited religious voice with active bodies in the streets, the cassette tape, at the revolutionary moment, brought to completion a form of subjectivity that had broken down the boundary between the private sphere, the space of clandestine listening, and the public sphere, the space of demonstrations. This new subjectivity constituted an aesthetic-political rupture that called for a redefinition of the entire map of the sensible within society.

Conclusion

Through sound and cassette tapes, what occurred in the Islamic Revolution of Iran went beyond a political transformation or a transfer of power. Here, sound emerged as an ontological event that disrupted the prevailing order of the sensible, opened a new horizon of perception, presence, and political participation, and became an active element in the redistribution of the sensible and the construction of a new political subjectivity.

Within Jacques Rancière's theoretical framework, politics occurs when what is regarded within the police logic as invisible, inaudible, or deprived of a share in *logos* acquires the possibility of appearing and transforms the sensory configuration of the social world. The cassette tape was a technological object capable of reconstructing the boundaries of listening, speaking, gathering, and acting, bringing into the political field voices that had no place within the dominant discursive order. The cassette tape was not merely a medium but an aesthetic-political technology that, by breaking with official time and space, liberated sound from the monopoly of power and redistributed it through a rhizomatic network of homes, mosques, bazaars, and automobiles. This redistribution transformed unheard sound into speech, silence into testimony, and passivity into subjectivity. This discourse, through its religious-political language, its connection between the sacred past and the political present, and its combination of Shi'i worldview with concepts such as justice, the rejection of domination, and resistance, opened

a new horizon of collective perception.

Accordingly, religious discourse, which the police order had confined to officially sanctioned rituals, now appeared as a discourse capable of shaping politics. Within this horizon, politics took shape not in the form of an institution or official structure but through the shared experience of listening, repetition, and participation. This experience broke down the boundary between the private and public spheres and generated new subjects who had previously had no place within the police order.

Thus, the Islamic Revolution can be understood as a moment of fundamental reconfiguration of the sensible, a moment in which sound, technology, and politics converged not only to overthrow a government but also to transform the ways of living, listening, and being in the world.

In this account, the cassette tape is no longer merely a tool; it presents itself as a historical actor that, with each rotation, once again shifts the boundaries between the possible and the impossible, reminding us that politics continues to be born in listening ears, in the voice that is reproduced, and in collectivities that refuse to remain silent. The simple acts of listening, re-recording, or transmitting a cassette themselves constituted forms of participation in politics as an event, forms of participation that transformed the sensible and disrupted the auditory boundaries of the police order. From this perspective, the cassette was not merely a carrier of sound but also a carrier of a kind of political action that, through the mechanism of listening, organized bodies and minds within a shared context.

The emergence of political subjectivity likewise originated precisely here. Within a Rancièrian horizon, the political subject is not defined in advance; it appears at the moment when suppressed voices begin to speak and disrupt the sensible order. The cassette tape made such a moment possible. The voices of clerics, intellectuals, students, political prisoners, and other marginalized groups, through their reproduction on cassette tapes, became voices of truth and involved listeners in an ethical–political experience. The auditory community generated by these cassettes constituted the formation of a political “We,” a “We” formed not according to class or established social relations but on the basis of participation in a perceptual and ethical redistribution. Consequently, the Islamic Revolution can be regarded as a historical example of how a simple and inexpensive medium can transform the configuration of the sensible and, through this sensory displacement, generate a new political subject, equal collectivities, and a new configuration of politics.

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