Voicing the Subaltern and Inspiring Change: Critical Discourse Analysis of the Autobiographical Song by the First Iranian Female Rapper

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Persian rap since its popularity in Tehran in the early 2000s has been used by marginalized groups to voice their opposition and resistance to the status quo. Although this genre of music is male dominated, Iranian female rappers have found their place in it. However, the situation for Iranian women in rap is much dire than men. The historical subordinated status of women in Iran, the prohibition of women singing in public according to the Islamic laws, and the illegality of rap music in Iran due to its resisting and critical language, all lead to the interlocking oppression of Iranian female rappers and make them potential agents of counterpublic discourse. This research looks at the first Iranian female rapper’s autobiographical song, “Salome’s Tale,” and examines in what ways the language of this song shows the characteristics of a counterpublic discourse and introduces the rapper as a counterpublic agent.

Rap emerged in the 1970s in the United States of America, and by the 1980s it became popular in urban areas throughout the United States (Baker, 1993). Since its emergence, it was detracted for the moral panic it caused in society. Soon, it became clear that Rap songs are filled with derogatory language and they voice opposition or resistance to the status quo and the hegemonic culture in the United States. Rap, which was mainly started by African Americans in the United States, became a form of counterpublic expression, complementing other traditional speaking formats to address injustice, inequality, racism, and discrimination against this group of people (Dawson, 2001). Rose (1994) argues that rap was the reaction of black and Hispanic youth to their plight of living in postindustrial...

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America. Thus, poverty, police brutality, unemployment, marginalization of minorities, and oppressed groups have been the precursor of rap culture in the first place.

Although rap music has been often associated with urban male culture, “females have been involved in the history of this music since its early years” (Keyes, 2000, p. 255). By the 1980s, female rappers distinguished themselves in a culture that was considered male dominant. Famous rappers like MC Lyte, Queen Latifah, and Roxanne Shanté rose to prominence in the United States. Rose (1994) argues that black women rappers were struggling to define themselves and confronting each other, their male counterparts, and dominant American culture. According to Keyes (2000), rap for black female rappers has been a “platform to refute, deconstruct, and reconstruct alternative visions of their identity” (p. 265). Female rappers sought space, empowerment, and identity for themselves and other women through rap music (Keyes, 2000). Using rap as a vehicle for constructing identity and empowerment emerged in other cultures too, and it became “the most profound and the most perplexing cultural, musical, and linguistic movement of the late 20th/early 21st century” (Alim, Ibrahim & Pennycook, 2008, p. 3).

Persian/Iranian rap, like American rap, started as a male dominant art, but soon women found their place in it. Their historical subordinated status in Iran, the prohibition of women singing in public according to the Islamic laws, and the illegality of rap music in Iran all lead to the interlocking oppression for Iranian female rappers and make them potential agents of the counterpublic. In an interview, Salome MC, the first Iranian female rapper, mentions that rap is a platform of talking about daily and street life (Neil, 2014). She continues that the real life in Iran has never been smooth and just for women.

The goal of this research is to examine the first Iranian female rapper’s lyrics in her autobiographical song, “Salome’s Tale,” through the lens of the counterpublic concept and its characteristics. Counterpublics have the potential of bringing counter-voices to the dominant culture and change society over time. Asen (2000) argues that counterpublics can open up “wider publics to a more diverse range of participants, perspectives, and modes of engagement” (p. 139). It is important to analyze whether the language of female rappers in Iran is fertile with the counterpublic potentials of change and reform for the Iranian society and women’s right in this country. To this end, the question driving this research is in what ways the language of the song “Salome’s Tale” shows the characteristics of a counterpublic discourse and introduces the rapper as a counterpublic agent. In this paper, first, I discuss the history of rap in Iran. After elaborating on the counterpublic concept and its characteristics, the sample and method of this research are justified. Finally, the analysis, discussion, and conclusion are presented.
Persian Rap and Female Rappers in Iran

Iranian rap became popular in Tehran in the early 2000s. Rapper Soroush Lashkary, known by his performing name of Hichkas (Nobody), was one of the first famous rappers in Tehran (Neil, 2014). Hichkas is referred to as the father of Iranian rap (Dagres, 2013). Iranian rap or Rap-e Farvi has become ubiquitous in Iran, and it is growing to be one of the most popular music genres among the youth. Persian rap emerged as underground music in Iran, and unlike pop music, it never became legalized or funded by government cultural institutions. Iranian rappers record their songs in their homes or private spaces, and they are reliant on the Internet to gain income and followers (Khosravi, 2008).

It is argued that Persian rap has been most affected by African-American rappers such as Tupac (Keir, 2010). The issues that were common in Tupac’s rap like poverty and problems with police are pervasive in Persian rap songs. Although Persian rap can be seen as a legacy of African-American rap and especially rappers such as Tupac, it has evolved beyond the Western tradition to appropriate itself to issues that are directly related to Iranians: criticizing the government’s repression, showing injustice in society, and calling Iranians to take action and change the status quo.

Every form of art in order to be officially distributed in Iran should get permission from the Ministry of Guidance. Despite the popularity of rap in Iran, rappers’ songs get scarcely approved by this ministry. Iranian rappers work unofficially, and they get arrested whenever their work crosses specific forbidden lines like singing about political issues or showing women without wearing a proper hijab in their music videos. Overall, the reasons to arrest rappers are arbitrary, and the government’s reactions are unpredictable. Iranian officials accuse “Iran’s underground rap scene of spreading profanity and poisoning young minds” (Sayah, 2010). Rappers are always under strict surveillance and they are routinely subjected to the risks of being arrested and incarcerated (Ferani, 2010). However, despite all the limitations imposed on this genre of music, its evolution and popularity among the youth reveal the failure of the government to prohibit it and shows that underground music in Iran differs remarkably from the government cultural policies.

Dagres (2013) argues that rap’s popularity in Iran is due to the societal pressures imposed by the government on Iranians and the financial problems stemming from U.S. sanctions and the foreign policy of the Iranian government. Rap music can be made by using few musical instruments, and although a rapper should know how to make good flows and a general understanding of Western music is required in this field, this kind of music is not heavily based on musical knowledge (Lauden, 2011). In this regard, rap in Iran, like in other countries, is not just for middle-class singers and it has become a medium for less privileged groups. The fact that rap music is popular with less privileged people, and it is not
limited by musical knowledge as much as other kinds of music, make it a significant platform to express objections and criticisms. Keir (2010) argues that rap, since its emergence in Iran, has been influenced by social and political problems, and therefore it is a “musical form of protest” in society.

Although pursuing a rap career in Iran is a challenge for all rappers, the situation for women is much worse. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, different restrictions have been placed on women including their singing. At the beginning of the Islamic Revolution, all singing for women became prohibited, but after a while, they were allowed to sing in bands, and female singers’ concerts for all-women audiences have been tolerated (Elmjouie, 2014). However, the process of gaining permission for such concerts has not been easy, and female singers are under too much pressure before their concerts.

When it comes to female rappers, this more than 30-year-old prohibition for women singing becomes aggravated by the fact that rap has been banned in Iran. And rap lyrics are filled with obscene and oppositional words and phrases and iterating them is more of a taboo for women than men. Since the 1960s and 1970s Iranian society has faced rapid modernization, but it is still inherently a traditional and patriarchal society. While male rappers feel more freedom to talk about sexuality and use vulgar phrases and words, the female rappers are restricted in expressing themselves, not only because of legal restrictions but also for the social stigmatization they are subjected to. In this regard, the lyrics of Iranian female rappers rarely address sexual issues and instead they are filled with criticism about social and political restrictions on women, such as the obligatory hijab (Keir, 2010).

Overall, despite all these restrictions for women, rap music is not just the domain of men in Iran. Salome MC is the first Iranian female rapper (Chopra, 2008). Justina and Sogand are other well-known Iranian female rappers. Some of them are in Iran, some have started their career abroad and live there. Some others, such as Salome MC, have left the country to pursue their career in better situations and are in exile due to their critical verses. According to political and gender restrictions in Iran, the language of female rappers can show how they construct their own counter-hegemonic identity, empower themselves, and illustrate female agency in a traditional and patriarchal society.

Female rappers in Iran, due to being women in a patriarchal culture and being rappers in a traditional society, have the potential of being counterpublic agents. Their lyrics can be a venue for expressing their oppositional stance, their exclusion from the dominant public sphere, and an illustration of their efforts to counter the dominant public narrative by introducing new perspectives. These women have the potential of being the voice of bigger counterpublics, which oppose male-dominance, religiosity, and other social and political problems that lead to the suppression of people and especially women in society.
The concept of the public sphere, which was initially used by Jürgen Habermas in his book “The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,” has been criticized by many scholars since its emergence (Fraser, 1992). Scholars such as Joan Landes, Mary Ryan, and Geoff Eley argue that the bourgeois public sphere, despite its claim to be accessible for every citizen, since the beginning, has been based on significant exclusions. Landes believes that gender was one of the most important exclusion criteria at that time.

The salon culture of the new republican public sphere was not women-friendly, and the republicans stigmatized such a feature in a salon as being “artificial, effeminate, and aristocratic” (Fraser, 1992, p. 114). The construction of the style of “rational, virtuous and manly” in the public sphere contributed to this discrimination and resulted in “the formal exclusion of women from political life” (Fraser, 1992, p. 114). However, the exclusion of marginalized groups, such as women and minorities, from the public sphere never meant that they did not have their own public or political life. As Fraser (1992) argues, in the case of elite bourgeois women, they had their civil society based on their philanthropic and voluntary actions, and their activities finally led to publicly contesting “the exclusion of women from the official public sphere and the privatization of gender politics” (p. 116). Furthermore, these exclusions became the precursor of the emergence of competing counterpublics in a society that many of its residents did not have access to the dominant bourgeois public sphere.

Fraser (1992) defines counterpublics as “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (p. 123). Likewise, Friedman (2016) argues that counterpublics exist whenever “people meet to contest their subordination through individual and community growth” (p. 15). Counterpublics emerge “as explicitly articulated alternatives to wider publics that exclude the interests of potential participants” (Asen, 2000, p. 424). The formation of counterpublics in a society shows the critical awareness of participants who want to reconfigure the status quo and power through their potential emancipatory practices. To this end, counterpublics “set themselves against wider publics and their discursive exclusions” (Asen, 2000, p. 426).

The emergence of counterpublics in a society is the beginning of discursive contestation, and it can be seen as a positive step toward equality in stratified societies (Fraser, 1992). Even the limited power of a counterpublic group has the potential of making its marginalized members feel united as a part of a small public, and thus make them hopeful and ambitious of change and reform. Fraser (1992) argues that counterpublics “function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment” (p. 124). In other words, counterpublics not only unite marginalized members but also provide them with the power to act against a hierarchical society and promote their statuses in it. Moreover, as the public sphere is a space of forming
social identities, the counterpublics are not just the spaces of voicing marginalized people’s opinions; rather participation in them means constructing one’s cultural identity through symbolic modes of expression such as discourse and style (Fraser, 1992). Pason, Foust, and Rogness (2017) consider identity making as an important function of counterpublics, and argue that identity, as “a fluid performance,” “is an important rhetorical achievement within social struggle” (p. 10). Therefore, challenging the hegemonic discourse of society by counterpublics is a step toward the bigger goal of shaping a different and empowered identity for subordinated groups.

Counterpublics can also play a fundamental role in bringing matters of their concern to the public arena and even publicize issues that are not initially deemed worthy of the public attention (Fraser, 1992). For example, the feminist counterpublic discourse was successful to make the issue of domestic violence a public concern. Feminists, through discursive contestation, pushed society to consider domestic violence a crime and to take serious measures in that regard.

Asen (2000) argues that the counter feature of counterpublics should be sought “in participants’ recognition of exclusion from wider public sphere and its articulation through alternative discourse practices and norms” (p. 427). In this regard, a counterpublic sphere is viewed as “a site of resistance,” which has been founded based on a desire for change and criticism (Hauser, 2001, p. 36). Moreover, Fraser (1992) states that counterpublics “function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics” (p. 124). Based on these perspectives, counterpublics can be analyzed by considering various articulation modes they use to acknowledge the discrimination and oppression that they are confronted with. They can also give their members instructions to stand up against their entrenched inferior status in society. When it comes to Iranian female rappers, their rap lyrics can be their venue for expressing their exclusion from the wider political, religious, or patriarchal culture and they can use rap lyrics to articulate solutions to these problems and inspire suppressed groups to shape their own identities beyond these restrictions.

Fraser (1992) argues that counterpublics might be successful to offset the discursive privilege, but they can rarely overcome that entirely. Therefore, the discourse that they use to overcome their exclusion is more critical in making their oppositional identity than bringing change to society, at least for the short term. In the case of Iranian female rappers, their lyrics can be interpreted as what Fraser calls “parallel discursive arenas” (p. 125) where members of marginalized groups create counter-discourses to formulate oppositional identities and challenge power relations in their favor. For various limitations that women in general and rappers specifically are confronted in Iran, Iranian female rappers are expected to be the voice of opposition and instruction for the subaltern groups whose identity and destiny are determined by others. In this research, in order to
examine Salome MC’s lyrics, critical discourse analysis (CDA) is used. In the following section, the sample and method are discussed.

**Sample and Method**

In critical discourse analysis, language is viewed simultaneously as the agent and product of social construction. Machin and Mayr (2012) state that “language both shapes and is shaped by society” (p. 4). Therefore, language is influenced by power relations and based on the interests of communicators, it is constructed in a certain way (Kress, 1985). Rogers (2013) argues that CDA “refers to approaches in a wide net of discourse analyses that explore power, domination, liberation, and privilege” (p. 67). CDA considers discourse as socially constructed and imbued with power (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2015). It not only shows how language is affected by power relations but also illuminates the ways by which language can act as a force for change.

Wodak and Meyer (2013) define CDA as “fundamentally interested in analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power, and control as manifested in language” (p. 10). The purpose of CDA is to examine implicit or explicit power relations and to analyze the ideological goals that a discourse serves (Machin and Mayr, 2012). Van Dijk (1993) argues that the focus of CDA is on the role that discourse plays in the “(re)production and challenge of dominance” (p. 249). These accounts of the CDA show the relevancy of this method to the study of rap lyrics that can be potentially oppositional and critical of dominant publics and hegemonic power relations.

This research analyzes the song “Salome’s Tale” to elucidate the ways in which the language of the song is associated with counterpublic discourse and is used to enact a counterpublic agency for the rapper. Salome MC and this specific song were chosen for this paper due to several reasons. Salome MC has been the first and for a long time the only Iranian female rapper and she is an inspiration for other Iranian female rappers. She started her artistic career in Iran and, after a while, left the country in autumn 2011 to study printmaking in Japan and to continue her rap career (Khaleeli, 2011). Therefore, she is well familiar with the culture and domestic issues of Iran and, due to living in another country, she has the freedom of acknowledging her objections openly. Moreover, Salome MC states that she was inspired by the work of rap artists “who represented marginalized groups and non-mainstream ideas” (Holland, 2018). Therefore, her rap lyrics have a sociopolitical identity coming from her critical perspectives and her conviction to express them. This song of Salome MC as seen in its title talks about the life of the rapper and introduces her to the audiences. If Salome MC seeks to be acknowledged as a counterpublic agent, she should introduce herself in this way in this song that acts as her autobiography. It should be mentioned that although this song is in Persian, the rapper released its translation in English on the
Internet in the album "I officially exist," and that translation, which is in the appendix of this paper, is used for this study.

The method of this research is based on Fairclough’s (2015) critical discourse analysis steps. According to Fairclough, critical discourse analysis should be done in three steps: analysis, interpretation, and explanation. First, the song lyrics are read several times to answer ten questions that Fairclough asks about the language of a text. In the analysis section, the focus is especially on classification schemes, rewordings, metaphors, and expressive, relational, and experiential values of words. After micro-analyzing the language of the song, in the interpretation section, more general questions about the topic, purpose, and relations that the rapper tried to establish in her song are analyzed. In the explanation section, based on the results of the analysis and interpretation, power relations apparent in the song are investigated. According to Fairclough (2015), power relations are shaped by three levels: societal, institutional, and situational. The language of the song is investigated to find the cues of each structure of power relations and to understand the position of the rapper toward them.

Fairclough (2015) argues that the interpreter of a text brings her/his background knowledge to interpretation. Fairclough calls this feature members’ resources (MR). As the interpreter of the language of this rap song by an Iranian female rapper, I should mention that I am also a woman from Iran. Due to being raised in that country and having lived there as a woman, I am familiar with the situation of Iran and the limitations that exist for women. Therefore, although I am not a rapper or musician, my interpretation of this song is not an outsider’s interpretation from a different culture or country. Also, as an Iranian woman, I am interested in finding out how rap is used by female singers to address their struggles and in examining the potentials that this genre of music can bring to my country.

3-Step Analysis: Analysis, Interpretation, and Explanation of The Song “Salome’s Tale”

The in-depth analysis of Salome MC’s song shows that the rapper uses the language of her song to differentiate between herself and society, between concepts that she considers worthy and reprehensible, and between different kinds of obstacles she has faced in her life. Furthermore, by using rewordings and metaphors, she shares her feelings and values with her audience and assumes they have had the same struggles. Finally, Salome MC after establishing common ground with her audience uses the language of this song to guide them on how to overcome social and political oppression.

In the song “Salome’s Tale,” the rapper talks about herself versus the society she was raised in. She discusses the way she decided to go against society and its rules and to change her course of life and destiny. There are some verses describing the way she sees society and people and some verses that she talks about her
journey of rebelling against society’s expectations. The pronoun “I” that refers to the rapper and “they” that refers to people or society members play an important role in making this classification.

They made me get on this train long time ago / when I was too defenseless to say: hey now that I exist let me choose what I insist to be.

The choice of words by the rapper also distinguishes between things she finds valuable or reprehensible. Individuality is a concept that the rapper values. She admonishes society for oppressing this feature and imposing pre-determined identities and limitations on its members. She shows her negative view of this feature of society by her choice of words: antagonized, dehumanized, and herd. She is also proud of going against norms and limitations, especially by singing hip hop, and again her choice of words—to step beyond, Growing, reasoning, carry on—shows her positive perspectives.

Before I realized my individuality enfolded/ antagonized by social rules, dehumanized by modern tools, I was told, You are a girl, you are a Turk / Just one in the whole fucking herd.

Not an easy choice but for my own sake/ had to step beyond family, society, and state.

Growing ideologies of my own, reasoning to carry on non-stop / I found out I am not alone… / when I came across people who were spreaders of the word… by hip hop.

The rapper also classifies the obstacles she has faced in life into two different groups. First, she talks about societal obstacles in the form of norms and traditions.

They made me get on this train, long time ago / When I was too defenseless to abstain, They all chicaned/ With mind control, cajolery, no truth told, I grew old / Before I realized my individuality enfolded / Antagonized by social rules, dehumanized by modern tools, I was told: You are a girl, you are a Turk / Just one in the whole fucking herd / This is the book, that is the roof of all things you can do.

The second group of obstacles she mentions are political obstacles and economic problems rising from those.

And there was the government, that controlled everything… / From bowing to employment, from education to health, the poor getting poorer and the rich getting more wealth… / I was taught that dictatorship is bad, and was inclined to agree / Just to find out a few years later… / It is a one-man-authority in my country / Such hypocrisy, through theocracy.

The rapper uses rewording to highlight the issues she considers important. In various phrases, she argues that she had to follow certain norms and identities and society made her be a person who did not have any say in it.
They made me get on this train, long time ago / When I was too defenseless to say: Hey, now that I exist let me choose what I Insist to be.

They made me get on this train, long time ago / When I was too defenseless to abstain.

I was constrained by defined good and evil, like I don’t have a brain, be one with the rest or be a misfit / fly from the nest or stay and fit.

The rapper also by using different phrases argues that she decided to change her destiny and go against the restrictions that society had set for her.

Not an easy choice but for my own sake / Had to step beyond family, society and state.

Growing ideologies of my own, reasoning to carry on non-stop.

See I had to cut my own feet off to realize that, I can make my own tracks to ride.

Salome MC uses several metaphoric expressions to talk about society and herself. The phrase “They made me get on this train long time ago,” refers to choices that society made for her. She says that she was told that “this is the book, that is the roof of all things you can do.” The euphemistic expressions of book and roof also refer to the societal limitations and constraints she had to face. In the last section of the song, she says “I had to cut my own feet off to realize that, I can make my own tracks to ride.” This phrase is also a euphemistic expression of the sacrifices she had to make to free herself and shape her own identity. Since she mentions this phrase at the end of her song after talking about hip hop, “When I came across people who were spreaders of the word... by Hip Hop”, it also refers to the struggles she had in finding and pursuing this music genre.

The rapper after talking about the limitations that society has caused for her and elaborating on her decision to change the course of her life, advises her audience about how to bring change to their own lives. Thus, the rapper assumes that her audience is in the same situation that she has been in, and they seek her instructions to fight for their own identity. Most of the sentences are declarative, and the goal of the author is mostly informative. There is just one imperative sentence that directly addresses the rapper’s audience. This comes at the concluding part of the song after the rapper has already talked about her life or her journey of rebellion and defiance to establish her credibility with the audience.

Good seeing the big picture, it will work in a lecture / But don’t forget where you are, change won’t come with a rupture / Generally against authority of states, get it.

But had to start locally and change won’t come in a haste / It comes with patience, it comes with sacrifice, it comes with pain.

As the analysis of the language of this song shows the female rapper talks about her life experience and uses this topic to elaborate her choice of going
against society’s expectations and restrictions. The purpose of this song is not only introducing the rapper to her audience but also to criticize a society and a political system that restrict individuals and set limits to their individuality. The rapper also wants to express that change is possible and motivates her audience to find their own self and go beyond “the book” or “the roof” that has been predetermined for them. Salome MC in this song also challenges assumptions about her political intentions and argues that her goal is just finding her true identity.

_It is not about questioning the authority / It is not about challenging the system / Not even about fighting for our libertics / It is about finding the answer to a very basic question… Who am I?_

The power relations at societal, institutional, and situational levels are all challenged by the discourse of this song. The rapper talks about two different obstacles which she has faced in her life. One obstacle is being born in a traditional society with pre-determined identities and destinations for its members. By her choice of words and phrases, she shows the power imbalance regarding her relationship with society: “They made me,” “I was too defenseless,” “Just one in the whole fucking her.”

The other obstacle comes from a government “that controlled everything,” and, consequently, living under an economic system which was against its people: “The poor getting poorer and the rich getting more wealth.” In this way, the rapper shows the institutional power imbalance that affected her life. The rapper also talks about the sacrifices she chose to make to free herself from the constraints and limitations she was facing. She mentions her experience of coming across “people who were spreaders of the word… by Hip Hop.” An experience that made her understand she is “not alone.”

_Growing ideologies of my own, reasoning to carry on non-stop / I found out I am not alone… / When I came across people who were spreaders of the word… by Hip Hop._

As seen in her lyrics, Salome MC implies that she found Hip Hop when she decided to grow ideologies of her own. After advising her audience to stand up for themselves and be patient regarding their goals, Salome MC asserts that “[she] had to cut [her] own feet off” “to make [her] own tracks to ride.” While part of her struggles comes from societal and institutional power imbalances, the other part comes from her rap career and the circumstances or limitations she has had to face in that regard.

**Discussion**

Salome MC in this song talks about her life and elaborates the societal and political constraints she has faced. In this way, she claims to have a subordinated position in society and empathizes with her audiences who are in the same situation.
One of the most essential features of counterpublic groups is their acknowledgement of their exclusion or subordination (Fraser, 1992). Therefore, Salome MC by acknowledging her marginalized position takes the first step to become a counterpublic agent.

As Friedman (2016) argues, resistance or contesting subordination is another important trait of a counterpublic discourse. In this song, Salome MC talks about her decision to defy her pre-determined identity and to find herself through rap. Because of that, she sees herself a step ahead of her audience and tries to persuade them to fight for their own identity and who they are.

As mentioned before, counterpublics function as training grounds for subordinated groups (Fraser, 1992). A counterpublic agent is also expected to direct her/his audience to resist broader public ideologies and direct them to challenge power relations in society. Likewise, Salome MC advises her audience to act individually and go beyond social norms and expectations. She even gives them specific directions by mentioning that change should “start locally” and it “won’t come in a haste.”

Overall, Salome MC uses the language of this song to create what Fraser calls a “counter-discourse” (p. 123). The song “Salome’s Tale” acts as a counter-discourse that first acknowledges the oppressed position of the rapper and her audience and goes further to target the political and social power relations as the main culprits for this subordination. Finally, it directs the audience to formulate an oppositional identity and act against the dominant power relations.

Brouwer (2006) argues that an oppositional stance, a discursive position, and an inward-outward conversation are prominent features of counterpublics. Likewise, the language in this song is used to voice a discourse of objection, to be an autobiographical narrative to self-identify the rapper as a member of a marginalized group, and to lead her audience to trigger a change in their attitudes toward social and political limitations. Bringing change and encouraging people to pursue change is a critical goal of counterpublics (Asen, 2000) and, consequently, counterpublic agents such as Salome MC.

Pezzullo (2003) argues that counterpublic discourse might try to direct attention to relations of power and by highlighting them pave the way to criticize the imbalance of power in a society. In accord with this view, Salome MC in her autobiographical song talks about power relations in the Iranian society, politics, and her personal life as a girl and rapper. She criticizes her subordinated position due to these power structures and shows to her audience that those limitations could not stop her from pursuing her beliefs. Overall, not only Salome MC expresses her criticisms of the power relations and directs her audience’s attention to them but also advises her audience to challenge and transform them.
Conclusion

A counterpublic sphere is “a site of resistance” (Hauser, 2001, p. 36). While the causes of its emergence are different in each society, it is always considered “an arena for hearing proscribed voices, expressing proscribed ideas, and entertaining the alternative reality” (Hauser, 2001, p. 36) that can exist or exists in a community but has been suppressed by the dominant order. Counterpublics can be as explicit as militant actions and as subtle as minority groups who care about their own rights. However, they are never without power and consequence. Hauser writes, “their discourse speaks, if ever so subtly, of an alternative reality to that of the majority culture and their exclusion from its processes of decision making that bear on their lives” (p. 37). Scholars of counterpublic argue that publicity is the first step toward equality, and, therefore, counterpublics by voicing the discourse of subordinated groups take the first steps of a more inclusive and just society (Felski, 1989; Fraser, 1992; Warner, 2002).

Warner (2005) argues that the function of counterpublics is “poetic world making,” or what he calls “the performative dimension of public discourse” (p. 114). Through creating and circulating an oppositional or novel discourse, counterpublics make an alternate vision and worldview for their members. Over time, the discourse created by counterpublics can have the power to influence the dominant public and change the entrenched stereotypes and biases. Rap lyrics sung by the Iranian female rapper is an example of a subaltern group member making a discourse different from the dominant public in a traditional and autocratic society. Counterpublics are shaped when a segment of society cannot find its voice and aspirations expressed in the dominant public sphere (Hauser, 2001). Analyzing the language of the song “Salome’s Tale” shows that this rapper also comes from a suppressed segment of society and aspires to be the voice of subaltern groups who can identify with her story and to guide those people to overcome exclusions they are subjected to.

References


Appendix

Salome’s Tale (English Original)

Lyrics/Performance: Salome Mc (reproduced with permission of the artist)
Beat: Delavar
Mixing: Armada
Length: 03:25

Intro

They made me get on this train,
Long time ago
When I was too defenseless to say:
Hey, now that I exist let me choose what I insist to be
But no shit,
you cannot resist against living with
all them pre-decided rules and pre-recycled tools to be
understand, analyze, to see
If we are homo-sapiens evolved of self-replicating molecules
or sperms of Adam’s and Eve’s ovules
(If it is) better to set ourselves rules, based on personal values, or just practice
the written, living in habitués
It is not about questioning the authority,
It is not about challenging the system
Not even about fighting for our liberties
It is about finding the answer to a very basic question... Who am I?

Verse 1

They made me get on this train long time ago
When I was too defenseless to abstain,
They all chicaned
With mind control, cajolery, no truth told, I grew old
Before I realized my individuality enfolded
Antagonized by social rules, dehumanized by modern tools, I was told: You are
a girl, you are a Turk,
Just one in the whole fucking herd...
This is the book, that is the roof of all things you can do...
With no further due...
And there was the government, that controlled everything...
From housing to employment, from education to health,
The poor getting poorer and the rich getting more wealth....
Reigning trading, banking, the whole economy
Not to mention religion, defining blasphemy,
The way it would do them good, not you or me
I was taught that dictatorship is bad, and was inclined to agree
Just to find out a few years later... It is a one-man-authority in my country Such
hypocrisy, through theocracy

Verse 2

They made me get on this train...
I was constrained by defined good and evil, like I don’t have a brain Be one with
the rest or be a misfit
Fly from the nest or stay and fit
Not an easy choice but for my own sake,
Had to step beyond family, society and state
Growing ideologies of my own, reasoning to carry on non-stop
I found out I am not alone...
When I came across people who were spreaders of the word... by Hip Hop
I was religious I was nihilist, I was existentialist
Libertarian socialist, anarchist, anti-capitalist
Good seeing the big picture, it will work in a lecture
But don’t forget where you are, change won’t come with a rupture generally
against authority of states, get it
But had to start locally and change won’t come in a haste
It comes with patience, it comes with sacrifice, it comes with pain
See I had to cut my own feet off to realize that, I can make my own tracks to ride