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<b>MUSIC, POLITICS &amp; PHILOSOPHY; HOW MUSIC IS PERCEIVED AS A POLITICAL TOOL<sup>1</sup></b>			
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### ABSTRACT

Music is utilized by politicians as a means to reach the masses, conveying their messages succinctly and boosting their images. The state also employs music to preserve some of its memories. However, music and musicians have often suffered at the hands of politicians, particularly when the music turns to criticize politicians or challenge the established norms in the state or society. Thus, music can serve as either an ideological tool in the hands of the state or a symbol of critique that incurs state oppression. Historically, various examples illustrate the significant role that music can play in the dissolution and collapse of a political organization, as well as in its establishment and construction. From philosophers like Plato, More, and Campanella to rulers and politicians like Khomeini, the significance of music in statehood has been mentioned. This study argues that this perspective can be seen as a projection of totalitarian thought within the mentioned historical lineage. In this context, although music is perceived as a seemingly harmless activity that is inherently non-political and dependent on the preferences of individuals or groups, some thinkers consider it a disruptive force capable of unsettling social order and harmony. It may even encourage people's indifference, disobedience to political power, or outright rebellion. Consequently, it is viewed as a phenomenon that requires control and censorship.

**Keywords:** Music, Politics, Censor, Philosophy & State.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Music, as it is widely understood today, consists of a combination of several components, including rhythm and lyrics, among others. It goes through rhythm and harmony to compose sounds in a unified manner (The American Heritage, n. d.). In the field of philosophy, music has garnered significant attention due to its purported importance in the social and political lives of humans. Thus, Greek philosophers, especially Plato and Aristotle, wrote in their monumental works about the effects of music and the reasons for allowing certain types of music to influence individuals within the state, as well as those that should not be permitted.

Consequently, music plays a significant role in shaping the state; hence, politics and music share a closely interconnected relationship in the discourse about creating normative standards in statehood. Although politics and music seem to influence each other, as evidenced by the extensive discussions of Greek philosophers (also exemplified in the interview of Iran Islamic Revolution Leader Ayatollah Khomeini), the exact sound of Greek music remains unclear to researchers (Baker, 1984) due to incomplete surviving writings on the subject. However, music

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was the unifying elements of dance, melody, and poetry according to the ancient Greeks (Henderson, 1957). Music was perceived as a gift from the Mousai (the goddesses attributed to arts and letters) to humanity, thus holding a significant association with ritual, educational, and recreational practices (Lippman, 1963). Nevertheless, contemporary conceptions of music share significant similarities with those of ancient Greece. This resemblance is evident in some of the effects highlighted by Ayatollah Khomeini in his 1979 interview with Oriana Fallaci and in the writings of certain Renaissance thinkers. They discuss the considerable impact of music on the human soul, capable of inducing either vice or good in people. Because of this, Khomeini and philosophers like Socrates and Plato share the same idea of prohibiting music that instills vices among humans in the state.

The paper explores how politicians have extensively used music to benefit their elections, enhance their image and personality while in government, the rationale behind censoring music, the role played by music and musicians, and the viewpoints of certain philosophers regarding music and its potential negative effects. Additionally, it delves into the hint of totalitarian thinking in the perception of music by ancient and Renaissance thinkers. The subsequent section through to the conclusion of the paper is divided into five parts. The first part discusses the relationship between politics and music, while the second addresses how the philosophical perspectives of some philosophers have influenced the perception of music. The third part delves into the notable interview between Khomeini and Oriana Fallaci (conducted shortly after the Islamic revolution) about music, interpreting it through the lens of Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Moving forward, the fourth part examines the trace of totalitarian thought in how music has been perceived. Finally, the conclusion wraps up the paper.

## **2. POLITICS AND MUSIC**

### ***2.1. The Influence of Music & Musicians in the State***

Over the past few years, music and politics in the political landscapes of several states have surprisingly maintained a complex love-hate relationship. Politicians have utilized music to capture attention at their campaign rallies, while also resorting to banning music that critiques their governing style or sheds light on the often unfavorable political climate of the state. The significance of music in politics, similar to its role in filmmaking, lies in its ability to serve as a vehicle for conveying messages to the public, shaping a positive image of politicians, and outlining their plans.

In this pursuit, political campaigns have prominently featured various musical instruments and popular musicians within their respective states. This approach not only helps convey the politicians' message but also attracts the supporters and fans of these musicians, thereby expanding the base of political support. Additionally, music's emotional impact, tied to both joyful and somber memories, influences how politicians navigate these emotional triggers. Music's powerful capacity to convey messages to the masses or the electorate is pivotal (Street, 2003).

Throughout the history of different states, examples abound that underscore the intricate relationship between politics and music. During the 2001 elections in the UK, the Liberal Democrats employed Stephen Gately's song, while the Labour Party utilized the Lighthouse Family's "Lifted" (Street, 2003). Music has a unique way of evoking specific images and associations, similar to politicians' photo opportunities with pop, film, or soap stars (Street, 2003). Music is also wielded as a propaganda tool by politicians. Linda Colley (1992) explicitly

mentions how the tune of 'God Save the King' was employed throughout British history to legitimize monarchic rule.

The Horst Wessel song was compulsory in schools during the Nazi rule in the 1930s and formed part of daily rituals for the youth (Michel & Wippermann, 1991). The Soviet Union similarly harnessed music by establishing the Jazz Orchestra in 1938, funded by the state with a significant sum, and supporting musicians during World War II to boost military morale (Frederick, 1983). Both the US and Britain incorporate music into military training to maintain soldier morale.

Another notable example is South Africa during the Apartheid era. The authorities promoted rural tunes through Bantu radio networks while censoring urban music, fostering a sense of nationhood (Muff, 1981). In Ghana, the lead-up to national elections is known as the 'cocoa season' for musicians, as politicians align themselves with popular music and pay artists to compose campaign songs. These compositions, like Daddy Lumba's 'Nana is a Winner' during the 2012 National Elections, often capture mass attention and contribute to the rise of certain musicians' fame.

Politicians may also bolster their popularity through songs that praise them, as seen with President Mobutu of Zaire in the late 1960s and 1970s (Mark, 1996). Furthermore, musician endorsements can significantly sway votes, as exemplified in the 2020 US elections where both Trump and Biden garnered support from various musicians. Biden's endorsements from influential figures like Beyoncé, John Legend, Lady Gaga, Eminem, Taylor Swift, and Cardi B, contrasted with Trump's support from artists like 50 Cent and Lil Wayne (Kaufman, 2020).

While musicians' endorsements do not always dictate election outcomes, they hold a notable influence. Music frequently encourages youth participation in general elections as well. During the mid-1990s in the UK, a coalition of musicians and comedians united to sing the 'Rock the Vote' tune (Simon & Street, 1992).

In a fascinating study, Peter Wicke (1992, p. 81) argues through case studies that music and musicians played a pivotal role in the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the GDR. He highlights three factors: the state's oppression of rock music led people to use it as a form of resistance, rock musicians encoded political discussions into their songs using metaphors, and musicians possessed influence due to their financial standing.

Instances of clashes between the state and musicians are not uncommon. One such case is that of Eisler, who faced the Committee on Pan-American Activities (HUAC). He was accused of aiding the Communist regime's infiltration of the Motion Picture Industry through his songs. Eisler's beliefs, such as "Music should not turn a deaf ear to the chaos of its time," were reflected in his compositions (Eisler, 1978, p.197). Ultimately, the committee deported him due to inaccuracies in his visa applications. He later became the composer of East Germany's national anthem, where he resided until his passing away.

## **2.2. Censorship**

In situations where music tends to critique politicians or popular norms, it is often censored by the state. These forms of censorship take various shapes, sometimes involving national security concerns, and other times involving the maintenance of public morality, among other reasons. For instance, during the Stalinist regime, there were attempts to ban saxophones in the USSR during the 1920s (Frederick, 1983). Musicians were also persecuted due to the music they performed and identified with. In both regimes, jazz was prohibited and seen as a dissonant

instrument offensive to the soul (Michel & Wippermann, 1991). In the era of Apartheid in South Africa, the Broadcasting Corporation scratched certain records to prevent their airing, as these songs were believed to evoke sentiments of nationhood (Street, 2003).

One frequently cited instance of censorship is that of the Taliban regime before the invasion of Afghanistan. Under the Taliban's interpretation of Islamic law, music was banned from 1996 to 2001. Music was seen as a corrupting influence on the youth, spreading immoral behavior through the personalities of musicians and the lyrics themselves.

Iran, renowned as the birthplace of some of the earliest complex musical instruments, boasts of a rich musical heritage dating back to archaeological findings. The Oxus civilization of Iran, spanning from 2250 to 1700 BC, is associated with several musical instruments such as gold, copper, and silver trumpets. Despite this illustrious musical history, Iran has continued to ban what is often referred to as Western music, ostensibly in the name of protecting and promoting public morality. This ban gained significant traction after the 1979 revolution (Lawergren, 2016).

As for China, yellow music (a specific genre) is deemed erotic and therefore indecent by the Chinese authorities. During Mao Zedong's reign, it was prohibited due to its erotic nature and its perceived connection to American jazz music. This ban served as an outlet to express anti-American sentiments after the Korean War. More recently, musicians have faced visa denials and other repercussions due to their songs. Some songs address the issue of Tibet's independence, such as the cancellation of Noel Gallagher's concerts after his participation in a Free Tibet concert in New York (Wong, 2009). Furthermore, musicians have been banned from entering China following performances, with instances like Justin Bieber's ban in 2017 citing his behavior as the reason (Philips, 2017).

Even in Western democracies, songs critical of the political environment have faced censorship. For example, in the UK, the 1977 single "God Save the Queen" by the Pistols, which critiqued the monarchy and government, was refused airtime by several stations and was banned by the BBC (History, 1977). Canada and Australia both maintained regulatory bodies that oversaw the content broadcasted by TV and radio stations, including music. However, direct state censorship of music is considered a unique feature not often found in Western democracies, where the emphasis on free speech and expression is deeply ingrained. While music censorship may not be directly implemented by the state, it is influenced by the state due to its regulation being entrusted to music-related entities. For instance, the Parental Advisory-Explicit Content label was voluntarily adopted by the US music industry. This initiative emerged from Mary Tipper Gore's activism – she was the second lady of the US between 1993 and 2001 – through the formation of the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) in 1985. The PMRC published the "Filthy Fifteen," a list of fifteen songs deemed immoral, obscene, or indecent due to their references to drugs, sex, alcohol, and violence. This advocacy for rating systems for music ultimately led to the creation of the Parental Advisory label. Some retailers, like Walmart, chose not to stock music lacking this label. These factors, among others, contribute to music censorship, even though it might not be a formal state policy or decision (Cole, 2010).

In Turkey, from the 1970s until nearly the 1990s, Arabesque music was banned from the State Channel and Radio Corporation (TRT) because it was considered "indecent music style" or "not sufficiently modern for Turkish citizens." Arabesque music had gained immense popularity among urban poor populations who had migrated from rural areas to cities as a source of inexpensive labor (Stokes, 1992).

### 3. DOING PHILOSOPHY AND MUSIC

Music is not only connected to politics, but it also holds significance for philosophers. In his book *"The Republic,"* Plato discusses a wide range of topics that affect the state and what should concern the state, such as justice, the selection of leaders, leadership qualities, raising of citizens, among other things, through the voice of his teacher Socrates. One crucial aspect that Socrates deems vital in shaping the citizens of the ideal state is music. Socrates mentions how music could corrupt individuals and lead them toward immoral deeds (further explored in the following section discussing Socrates's ideas about music).

Aligned with the style and ideology of Plato's ideal city (or Socrates's), some Renaissance philosophers followed suit in their conception of an ideal state or city-state. Through their philosophical contributions to politics and statehood, they formulated an ideal state akin to Plato's concepts in *"The Republic."* A significant commonality among these works is the role of music and its influence on the state.

In 1516, Thomas More authored *"Utopia,"* wherein he delved into how music affected the senses, stirred passions, and shaped the mind with impressions (More, 1516). More adds that music is skillfully adapted to have an impact on individuals in various circumstances, such as soothing the mind during times of grief or turmoil (More, 1516).

Another noteworthy philosopher is the Italian Tommaso Campanella, known for *"The City of the Sun."* This work adopts a style similar to Plato's *"The Republic,"* both idealizing states characterized by seamless social and political relations, devoid of unnecessary divisions among people. Campanella's perspective on music within the state is intriguing. He suggests that in *"The City of the Sun,"* music serves as a remedy for those suffering from intense fevers. However, milder fevers are treated with cheese bread or sleep, accompanied by music (Campanella, 1602). Thus, according to Tommaso, music provides a cure for citizens in *"The City of the Sun."*

A significant aspect of music in Tommaso's text is that he places the importance of learning music on par with grammar, logic, physics, medicine, astronomy, and other fields of knowledge. He views music as a crucial element in the lives of citizens, exerting substantial influence. Consequently, music warrants diligent study and attention, much like other scientific disciplines (Campanella, 1602).

Both the works of these esteemed philosophers contribute to the perceived importance of music in the state. Essentially, this underscores that in envisioning a state, music should not be neglected due to its undeniable impact on the population. It is essential to note that the concepts of an ideal state presented in both works rest upon the unity and harmony of the state. In other words, strict codes of conduct prevail within society, and the regulation of music assumes a highlighted role in both texts. Regulating music is deemed crucial for cultivating virtuous citizens, given its power to potentially instigate immorality or taint minds, thus leading to corrupt behavior. As both texts draw inspiration from Plato's *"The Republic,"* the subsequent section delves into a thorough discussion of music and its effects on a state's citizens, alongside Khomeini's perspective on music.

### 4. KHOMEINI AND THE PHILOSOPHERS ON MUSIC

After the overthrow of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the final monarch of the Pahlavi dynasty, during what is now known as the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini, who was in exile in France, returned as the Supreme Leader. Through a referendum, he

transformed Iran into the Islamic Republic, effectively establishing a theocratic state. Ayatollah Khomeini assumed a pivotal role in Iranian politics upon taking up this lifelong position. An interview conducted after the revolution between Khomeini and Oriana Fallaci provides insight into his perspectives on politics, morality, and governance (for the complete interview transcript, refer to *The New York Times*, 1979). Oriana Fallaci, an Italian journalist renowned for her interviews with global leaders such as Henry Kissinger, Yasser Arafat, Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi, Muammar Gaddafi, and, during the Vietnam War, South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu and North Vietnamese General Vo Nguyen Giap.

Before the interview, Oriana Fallaci spent ten days in Qom, dressed in a chador, awaiting the opportunity to interview the 79-year-old Supreme Leader. The interview commenced on September 12 when she entered Faizeyah, a religious school where Khomeini addressed his audience. Fallaci initiated the conversation with a broad array of questions, ranging from morality and democracy to religion. In this exchange, Khomeini expressed his views on music and its impact on morality.

During the interview, Ayatollah Khomeini remarked, "even music dulls the mind," explicitly suggesting the significant influence of music on human behavior. This sentiment aligns with the perspective of Plato, who asserted, "more than anything else rhythm and harmony find their way into the inmost soul and take the strongest hold upon it." In Plato's ideal city, education starts with gymnastics and music, with the latter catering to the soul while the former to the body (Plato, 1963/c 375 BC, p. 312). Khomeini further stated that due to music's pleasurable and ecstatic nature, similar to drugs, it has the power to cloud the mind and induce a state resembling sleep.

Plato also examined the pleasurable aspects of music in his writings. He posited that humans naturally perceive and enjoy rhythm and melody. Moreover, individuals are drawn to specific rhythms and melodies, driven by the pleasure these elements offer (Plato, 1963/c 375 BC, pp. 405-8). Recognizing the potential influence of music's pleasure on the youth, as Khomeini highlighted, Plato suggested that music must be evaluated based on the pleasure it provides, as the finest music should delight the well-educated individual.

Khomeini's analogy between Music and Drugs carries profound implications. Similar to how drugs can alter an individual's mental state, music possesses the power to sway behavior, either positively or negatively, through repeated exposure. Plato's concept of music affecting the soul through emotional imitations resonates with Khomeini's assertion of music's capacity to shape behavior.

Khomeini warned about music's potential to negatively impact youth, poisoning them and dulling their patriotic sentiments. This notion corresponds with Plato's belief that music can either expose individuals to vice or, at its best, nurture virtue. Plato suggested that certain music should be censored to ensure the well-being of the state. Khomeini's stance on music aligns with this perspective.

A key moment in the interview came when Khomeini responded to Fallaci's inquiry about specific types of music, including Bach and Verdi. Khomeini's response, "I do not know those names. If their music does not dull the mind, they will not be prohibited," mirrors Plato's view on censorship. Both Khomeini and Plato emphasize that the state or ruler should decide what forms of music are permissible.

The interview also highlighted the diversity of music genres, including those that uplift the spirit, such as marches. Plato acknowledged similar distinctions between different musical

modes and their effects on the soul. He preferred modes like Dorian and Phrygian, which aligned with his vision of spirited yet controlled music, conducive to nurturing virtuous behavior.

In conclusion, the interview between Ayatollah Khomeini and Oriana Fallaci sheds light on Khomeini's perspective on music's impact on morality and behavior. His views find resonance in Plato's writings, where music's role in shaping the soul and character is extensively explored. Both thinkers underscore the importance of censorship and state control over music to safeguard the moral fabric of society. This intersection of ideas underscores the enduring relevance of this discourse, even as it finds application in modern contexts, such as the recent censorship of the hip-hop genre in the Russian music industry.

## **5. MUSIC, POLITICS, PHILOSOPHY, AND THE INKLING OF TOTALITARIAN THINKING**

The desire to make everyone equal or homogeneous without considering the differences that exist among them is synonymous with a totalitarian style of rule. Benito Mussolini's concept of "totalitario" in the early 1920s, which he used to characterize the Italian state at that time as "all within the state, none outside the state, and none against the state," provides the primary thesis for totalitarian governance. This same style of governing is observed in later or contemporary states such as the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin, Nazi Germany under Hitler, and China under Mao Zedong (Britannica, 2021).

However, even prior to Mussolini's understanding, there had been inklings of homogeneous governance or rule within philosophical discourses, and this can be easily associated with music—given that music has the potential to be enjoyed by the masses. The relationship between music and politics is very close, making it easy for music to be suppressed when it critiques or displeases political leaders. Censoring music doesn't always stem from the content's immorality or profanity; it can also result from a direct conflict with the character of the person in power. While profane music might indeed promote immoral behavior through its content, the rampant censorship of music and musicians can lead to politicians infringing upon individuals' freedom of expression, especially when songs appear to critique their personality and government.

The ability of music to significantly influence emotions and sometimes even facilitate healing underscores its particular significance. In essence, music deserves attention due to its remarkable effects. According to the Louis Armstrong Center for Music and Medicine at Beth Israel Medical Center, a study was conducted on 272 preterm newborns who were 32 weeks or older across 11 mid-Atlantic neonatal critical care units (NICUs). To assess the impacts of music, three different forms of music were employed: a lullaby chosen and performed by the baby's parents, an ocean disc simulating womb sounds, and a gato box, a drum-like instrument. Certified therapists played the two instruments live, synchronizing the music with the babies' breathing and heartbeats. While the gato box, Ocean CD, and lullaby all lowered the babies' heart rates, singing was the most effective. The ocean disc aided sleep, the gato box improved sucking behavior, and singing the lullaby increased the instances of newborns staying quietly alert. "There's something about music—especially live music—that stimulates and engages the body," concluded Loewy, a music therapist whose work significantly influenced music's use in Alzheimer's treatment. Clinical studies have shown music to have a notable impact on Parkinson's disease, stress, and sadness. Patients who listened to music experienced healing (Novotney, 2013).

There's an aspect of music that renders it potentially beneficial or even threatening to human nature, as philosophers have discerned. The totalitarian tendencies in the thinking of figures like Socrates and later Renaissance thinkers, regarding music, are evident in their emphasis on state control over what citizens hear. Drawing a comparison between music and drugs, this perspective grants the state or society a similar authority to control music as it does with drugs. However, this can easily lead to the infringement of freedom of expression or speech, as determining what is fit to be heard becomes subjective, unlike drugs whose effects are readily apparent to the public. Socrates' discourse on music, when aligned with the pragmatism of political leaders, cultivates an environment conducive to totalitarian government. When leaders (according to Socrates) curtail new music styles, restrict certain rhythms, and prohibit music from critiquing political leaders, it gradually paves the way for totalitarian governance.

This totalitarian thinking extended to the writings of Renaissance thinkers, as seen in works like Plato's "Republic," "The City of the Sun," and "Utopia." What remains consistent across these texts is the expectation that citizens in the state conform to homogeneity—their behavior, lifestyle, actions, and restrictions should be uniform and controlled by the state. The challenge lies in determining where the boundary should be drawn while regulating what qualifies as music to be sung or heard, thus empowering political leaders to act in a totalitarian manner.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Music and politics mutually influence each other significantly, although politics may wield the authority to censor music when it does not align with its favor. Musicians have had and continue to experience their prime when elections approach, as these are times when they can garner substantial fame or even monetary benefits by supporting and endorsing politicians through music crafted to promote their campaigns. Conversely, musicians and music struggle when they do not align with or favor those in power. Music is employed to raise awareness, succinctly convey politicians' messages, and most importantly, enhance the public image of politicians positively and favourably.

The sentiments expressed by Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran's Islamic Revolution Leader, during his interview about the effects of music, largely coincide with Plato's perspective on music. Both Khomeini and Plato concur on the notion that music deeply impacts the innermost soul and influences it, with Khomeini suggesting that music's adverse effects can negatively affect the youth just as Plato posited. They also agree on the necessity of censoring harmful songs within the state or political sphere to shield people from adverse consequences. Furthermore, they acknowledge the diverse range of music types and their respective effects on individuals' souls. An exhaustive examination of both viewpoints underscores the pivotal role of politics in the realm of music's effects. Given that a state comprises diverse societies, the well-being of each individual contributes to the collective welfare of the state or city. Hence, the evaluation of what constitutes good or bad music cannot be left solely to individuals; it falls under the jurisdiction of political leaders. Politics, therefore, assumes a significant role in both Ayatollah Khomeini's and Plato's discourses concerning music and society.

The conceptualization of the state and the influence of political philosophies on music, as discussed by Socrates, More, and Tommaso in their respective books, possess a totalitarian inclination. These philosophers expect the state to exercise control over various aspects of music, including sounds, rhythms, and lyrics. Socrates/Plato holds conservative views and is apprehensive about musical innovation. He believes that changes in musical form and rhythms hold vital implications for the nature of the state and society. Remarkably, music and drugs share, as proposed by these philosophers, comparable influences on the human soul.



Consequently, music should be regarded as a subject of utmost importance, necessitating study and regulation within the state.

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