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Urban rhythmanalysis in Mahsa Mohebali's *In Case of Emergency*

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In this essay, the focus is on Mahsa Mohebali's novel In Case of Emergency, which provides a powerful portrayal of the lives of women and the youth in Tehran, under a regime that represses its citizens. Through the lens of Henri Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis, this essay examines how Mohebali portrays the unpredictable, deviant, and playful nature of city spaces. The protagonist, Shadi, disrupts the controlled, surveilled, and oppressed city by producing her own arrhythmic patterns. Mohebali's depiction of Tehran as a character itself highlights its polyrhythmic nature, which encompasses eurhythmic, isorhythmic, and arrhythmic spaces all at once. This portrayal challenges the authority's grip over the lives and experiences of its citizens, and reveals a more nuanced and complex city. Despite the regime's attempts to suppress individuality and restrict citizens' lives, the novel presents a world where the unpredictable and deviant still exist, albeit in the hidden corners of the city. In portraying a trembling and earthquake-hit Tehran as another protagonist, Mohebali succeeds in offering a glimpse of a more multifaceted Tehran that is crisscrossed by and composed of a multitude of rhythms.

Keywords: rhythmanalysis, Henri Lefebvre, Mahsa Mohebali, Tehran, gender, urban spaces, private spaces.

Introduction: the impact of the Islamic Revolution on women's lives in Iran

Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the state and the clergy have imposed strict regulations on women's lives and social-spatial environments in Tehran and Iran as a whole. Prior to the revolution, many women in Iran lived relatively modern and westernized lifestyles, but these freedoms were drastically curtailed after the new regime came to power. Asef Bayat states that, overnight, women's rights "to be judges, to initiate divorce, to assume child custody, and to travel abroad without permission from a male guardian" were taken away (2007, p. 162). In particular, during the early years of the Revolution, women faced discriminatory measures in terms of education and employment opportunities which forced many of them to either stay at home, retire early, or enter into informal occupations or family businesses (Bayat 2007, p. 162). As Ali Akbar Mahdi writes, "[w]omen, who had a significant role in the opposition and successful overthrow of the Shah, were the immediate losers in the newly established Islamic government" (2003, p. 51). He observes that women suddenly found that they were "limited to their husbands, their bodies to the home, and their roles to a trustee of the family" (2003, p. 56). Another significant change resulting from the Islamic Revolution was the

imposition of hijab, or headscarf, which became mandatory for all women in public spaces. Furthermore, women were no longer allowed to mingle with men in public areas, which further restricted their access to social spaces. In terms of employment, Zahra Nejadbahram writes that, after 1979 "[t]he existing gendered employment system has led some women to internalise society's limitations" (2012, p. 88) and these "conservative traditions, patriarchal attitudes and gender divisions of labour continued to create obstacles to women occupying high positions" (2012, p. 73). Additionally, as Saeid Golkar states, to establish a devout and observant society, the Islamic Republic of Iran has implemented an extensive range of plans, laws, and organizations (2015, p.75). One of them is "the morality police" whose duty "is to impose order and discipline and to enforce Islamic codes of behavior, such as the wearing of the hijab (veil) by women in public streets, workplaces, and parks, and the prohibition of male-female fraternization" (Golkar 2015, p. 75). Farhad Rezaei further explains that the morality police have the right to admonish citizens, impose fines, and arrest individuals who are deemed to be improperly dressed according to the state-imposed Islamic dress code (2019, p. 42). These restrictions pushed many women back into the domestic sphere, significantly impacting their everyday lives and rhythms, and shaping everything from their personal interactions to their employment opportunities.

However, women in Iran have persisted in resisting these constraints and finding ways to navigate their social-spatial environments, thereby asserting their agency and autonomy. Over time, a number of women have adopted a more playful and ironic approach to their prescribed roles, lifestyles, and appearances to subvert the all-encompassing rhythms that are imposed upon them by the undemocratic government. Bayat states that Muslim women under authoritarian regimes may, consciously or without being aware, defy, resist, negotiate, or even circumvent gender discrimination—not necessarily by resorting to extraordinary and overarching "movements" identified by deliberate collective protest and informed by mobilization theory and strategy, but by being involved in ordinary daily practices of life, by working, engaging in sports, jogging, singing, or running for public offices. (2017, p. 161)

Women under strict rules tend to resist gender discrimination through everyday practices, thus, challenging the dominant discourses that seek to control their bodies and actions. Lisa Wade also argues:

> Often [women of Islamic regimes] are living under extreme conditions, but it's important to also be exposed to the ways in which individuals find ways to wrest autonomy from rigid rules through ingenuity and creativity. This wresting of autonomy, further, is often part and parcel of the culture, allowing for far more flexibility than outside observers are sometimes capable of seeing. (2010)

Both Bayat's and Wade's observations offer a nuanced understanding of the ways in which women in Iran are able to resist and subvert the constraints imposed on them by the state and the clergy, thus, highlighting the agency and resilience of individuals in the face of oppressive systems. As Bayat further remarks, "The prevailing perception of Iranian women as helpless subjects trapped in the solitude of domesticity and hidden under the long black chador proved to be an oversimplification" (2007, p. 168). Likewise, by adopting a rhythmanalytic approach through Lefebvre's framework, this essay argues that Mahsa Mohebali's novel contests the common portrayal of Tehran as a strictly controlled and planned city. In the novel, women are not completely subject to patriarchal codes, beliefs, and laws. Tehran provides a space for women to assert their true selves, their feelings, and their desires. By utilizing rhythmanalysis, it becomes clear that the protagonist's patterns cannot be reduced to the templates imposed by the state, religion, or male dominance. Rather, Tehran is depicted as a city with multiple cadences, where individual rhythms often clash with those of the state, society, family, and religion. In essence, the essay suggests that Tehran offers women some level of autonomy to express themselves in ways that defy the usual expectations placed upon them.

Lefebvre's rhytmanalysis

The main character and narrator of *In Case of Emergency*, Shadi, can be described as a practitioner of Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis. She explores the different areas of Tehran and offers a different perspective of the city's subjective, emotional, traditional, unorthodox, public, and private rhythms. This idea of

exploring the rhythms of the city through an individual's perspective is precisely what Lefebvre's concept is all about. Rhythmanalysis provides a framework for understanding how social and spatial environments are shaped by rhythms, and how power relations are manifested and contested in urban spaces. By analyzing the patterns of the city, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of how individuals negotiate and resist these forces in their daily experiences. With this notion in mind, the following section explores Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis.

According to Lefebvre, "everywhere there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm" (2004, p. xv). Lefebvre's statement is significant for understanding how rhythms shape our daily lives and the spaces we inhabit. It is through rhythmanalysis that we can uncover the often hidden rhythms that structure our existence and begin to understand how they impact our experiences of the world. In the context of Tehran, understanding the rhythms that shape women's lives is crucial for comprehending the ways in which they are able to resist patriarchal codes and norms. Shadi provides a valuable example of how women can perform rhythmanalysis to uncover the complex and often contradictory cadences of their city, which in turn can enable them to challenge and subvert dominant power structures. Rhythms are based on the lived aspects of cities, which are in constant movement. Lefebvre is interested in not only the static space but also the temporal, corporal, and experimental processes of its production. According to him, "the act of rhythmanalysis," thus, "integrates… things – this wall, this table, these trees – in a dramatic becoming, in an ensemble full of meaning, transforming them no longer into diverse things, but into presences" (2004, p. 23).

Hence, a rhythmanalyst is an individual who is always on the move and possesses the ability to tune into the pulse of different environments such as a square, a marketplace, or a busy street (Lefebvre 89). Lefebvre points out that a rhythmanalyst "calls on all [his/her] senses... [He/she] thinks with [his/her] body, not in the abstract, but in lived temporality… [He/she] must simultaneously catch a rhythm and perceive it within the whole" (2004, p. 21). Lefebvre, thus, emphasizes the embodied and sensory nature of rhythmanalysis. It is not merely a mental exercise but a fully immersive experience that requires the analyst to be attuned to

their surroundings and their own bodily rhythms. This approach allows for a more holistic understanding of the rhythms of a city and how they intersect with those of the individual. By engaging with the city in this way, a rhythmanalyst is able to uncover the nuances of everyday life that may be overlooked by traditional forms of analysis. To catch the flows, stops, and currents of the city, Lefebvre writes, the practitioner of rhythmanalysis must be carried away with it: "to grasp a rhythm it is necessary to have been grasped by it; one must let oneself go, give oneself over, abandon oneself to its duration… In order to grasp this fleeting object, which is not exactly an object, it is therefore necessary to situate oneself simultaneously inside and outside" (2004, p. 27). This idea of being attuned to the pulse is significant because it requires a deep immersion in the environment being analyzed. The rhythmanalyst must not only observe the flows but also feel them and become a part of them. This approach allows for a more holistic understanding of a city, including the subtleties that may be missed by an outsider. As such, rhythmanalysis becomes a valuable method for understanding the multi-layered rhythms of a city like Tehran, where individual rhythms intersect with the patterns forced by the regime, religion, and patriarchal society. The focus of a rhythmanalyst is on the interplay of various temporal interactions and the ordering of spaces, whether harmonious or discordant, and what they can reveal about the city, its inhabitants, and the overall state of affairs.

Lefebvre categorizes rhythms into four types: polyrhythmia, eurhythmia, isorhythmia, and arrhythmia (2004, p. 67). According to him, "polyrhythmia is composed of diverse rhythms" (2004, p. 67). In spatial terms, it refers to the coexistence of diverse spaces that overlap or clash with one another. On the other hand, eurhythmia denotes a state of harmony and balance between rhythms, where they complement and reinforce one another (Lefebvre 2004, p. 67) and "unite with one another in the state of health" (Lefebvre 2004, p.16). Isorhythmia, refers to the "equality of rhythms" (Lefebvre 2004, p. 67) as well as the "linear, unirhythmic, measuring/measured state time" (Lefebvre 2004, p. 96). As van Veen notes, "[i]n the case of cities, it is the apparent lack of difference that signals the isorhythm of the City" (2010, p. 180). He goes on to contend that the city's unity is maintained by hiding conflicting rhythms, and spatially, the city creates divisions and

exclusions through a coherent sense of sameness (2010, p. 180). Finally, arrhythmia is "a pathological state" in which there is disruption and conflict between rhythms. "In arrhythmia, rhythms break apart, alter and bypass synchronization," states Lefebvre (2004, p. 67). The concept of arrhythmia highlights the potential for conflict and disruption within urban spaces and the effects that these disruptions can have on the city's inhabitants. While Lefebvre sees arrhythmia as a pathological state marked by the disruption and conflict between rhythms, the present essay argues that it can also be viewed as a positive force. In the context of Tehran, arrhythmia is employed as a political strategy by Shadi to challenge the city's isorhythms.

Consequently, the everyday spaces of Tehran are not characterized by predictable and homogeneous patterns, but rather a complex interplay of erratic, deviant, harmonious, and conflictual cadences that are evident throughout the novel. By employing Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis as a theoretical framework, this essay shows that Shadi disrupts and redefines the social, religious, and moral rhythms of Tehran through her own irreverent and impulsive arrhythmic energies, and, ultimately, contributes to the reader's unlearning of stereotypical images of Iran, Iranian women, and Iranians in general.

Uncovering Tehran's rhythms in In Case of Emergency

In 2008, *In Case of Emergency* was published in Iran and faced a ban in 2010. After being reissued in 2016, the novel was translated into English by Mariam Rahmani in 2021. The novel examines a single day in the life of Shadi through her interior monologues and dialogues with her family members, strangers, and friends. The story begins with an earthquake that strikes Tehran, causing Shadi's night to be interrupted by tremors and the screams of her family. The earthquake serves as a catalyst that allows readers to gain insight into Shadi's arrhythmic perspectives, appearance, language, and behavior, which are in opposition to the state-sanctioned isorhythms.

Shadi does not conform to stereotypes of physical, mental, or emotional characteristics, as she acknowledges herself: "My reflection in the mirror would do for a gnarly close-up of a mental patient: short spiky hair, jaundiced face, dark

circles as black as bruises" (Mohebali 2021, p. 13). In this quote, Shadi challenges the conventional beauty standards and reveals her nonconformity to societal norms. Her relationships with her family members are fraught with tension, particularly with her mother, a former revolutionary-turned-housewife who has been using digital prayer beads since the earthquake. Shadi is often harshly critical of her mother. She observes wryly: "And like a sparrow she trembles in [Bobak's] arms. So this is what's become of the self-proclaimed guerrilla who used to pass out samizdat and trek through switchbacks packing a gun?" (Mohebali 2021, p. 5). Although Shadi is also responsible for taking care of their hysterical mother and packing up the necessary items, she shows no interest or concern, leaving it all to her brother Bobak. As Neda Miladi explains, Shadi is "someone who isn't affected by warmth of family bonds and is not in the mood for getting emotional at all. In the middle of horrifying foreshocks, the character, slipshod and numb, savors opium, enjoys her elevated mood, and terrifyingly does not care about anyone or anything" (2018, p. 134). The quote suggests that Shadi's character is apathetic and detached. She turns to opium instead of being emotionally invested in her family's safety and well-being. This further emphasizes her arrhythmic behavior and mindset, which deviates from the expected societal norms of familial care and concern during a crisis. She, moreover, holds irreverent views and does not respect authority, as is evidenced by her thoughts when her brother urges her to pack up and leave with them:

> Look, boy, you gave it your all. Tried to keep the family together, carried your mother in a palanquin. But now it's time to fuck off. I don't have the patience for you anymore. I want to lie right here until another thousand earthquakes hit and the roof rains down on me and all the bricks and beams fall down and crush me. And it's nobody else's goddamn business. (Mohebali 2021, p. 8)

The use of profanity is prevalent throughout the narrative, with the protagonist frequently employing words like "bitch," "shit," "damn," "sonofabitch," and their variations. Rahmani, in the "Translator's Note," states that Shadi mocks "the respectability politics of Iran" (2021, p. 161). Her use of arrhythmic language is a deliberate expression of her frustration to conform to any structured rhythm imposed by either the state or the culture.

Shadi's personal arrhythmias extend to her experimentation with drugs such as opium, which contributes to the creation of her own rhythms in the city, even during the night of the earthquake's foreshocks. "I haven't moved," she declares, "I mean, I was high all night. And I floated even higher every time the bed caught a wave. Like a boat or maybe a cradle. Or no, like a coffin. That's what it is now, a coffin stuffed with wet sheets. If I can just stay still" (Mohebali 2021, 3-4). In fact, addiction to drugs is a major public health issue in Iran. As noted by Mehdi Moradinazar et al., according to "the World Health Organization (WHO), Iran has the highest rate of opium abusers in the world, and opium use in Iran is three times the global average" (2020, 2). Furthermore, "about 2 million people use illicit drugs [on] a daily basis in Iran, which is about 2.7% of the population" (Mehdi Moradinazar et al. 2020, p. 2). The statistics on drug addiction in Iran are alarming, with high rates of opium use and daily illicit drug use among a significant portion of the population. However, as Rahmani notes, Shadi's drug abuse constitutes "a politics of refusal": "the refusal to work and love - both family and friends - in the usual ways" (2021, p. 154). This highlights the ways in which she resists societal norms and expectations.

Furthermore, the protagonist exhibits a lack of decorum and cleanliness, displaying behaviors unbecoming of a young woman. She neglects her hygiene; sometimes she stinks of alcohol and her body emits a bizarre odor: "The wet on my body is cold… Smells like shit – no, not quite. Smells like moldy leftovers. Smells like rotten oranges. Smells like an alcoholic's diarrhea. Smells like cheese. Like mulberries. Like smoke. Like raspberries" (Mohebali 2021, p.127). Her unconventional behavior can be seen as a way of asserting her own agency and resisting societal norms. "Abject," usually signifying something improper and unclean, is a term that refers to anything that disturbs "identity, system, order," rather than suggesting an inherent lack of health or hygiene (Kristeva 1982, p. 4). It is the state of being cast off, continues Kristeva; it is "the disruption of social reason and the conventional identity. Neither a subject nor an object, only defined as being opposed to an I, the abject represents the taboos of the subject and its culture" (1982, pp. 1-2). The concept of the abject is important to understanding Shadi's behavior and body odor in the novel. Through her use of drugs, including

smoking pot, cigarettes and drinking alcohol, Shadi creates her own arrhythmic way of life, while also posing a "threat" to the reproduction of the orderly and homogenous social rhythms of the city. Evidently, through constructing bodily arrhythmias, she defies the idealized isorhythmias of femininity, perfection, and traditional gender roles. Her refusal to conform to these societal norms allows her to resist being subject to them and create a sense of agency and independence for herself.

As Shadi realizes that her opium supply is running low, she embarks on a journey across Tehran to find her suppliers. Before venturing out, however, she cross-dresses in order to challenge the prescribed gender norms and to assert her autonomy over her own body and actions: "I put on my army jacket and pull my black beanie down to my eyebrows," (Mohebali 2021, p. 35), she says defiantly. Typically, in Iran, a woman's movement outside the home is restricted without the permission or presence of her husband or father, and they must cover themselves with a chador or veil. However, for Shadi, seeking permission from Bobak or Ashkan is out of the question, especially when she runs low on opium and sets out to find her suppliers. Instead, by wearing a beanie and hence cross-dressing, she takes control over the definition of feminine clothing and roles. Most significantly, she breaks down the traditional gender binary of public men and private women. In Iran, as noted, women are often excluded from the rhythms of the city, relegated to private spaces and expected to fulfill certain duties as wives, mothers, and daughters. Shadi subverts these expectations and reverses the practices associated with these spaces, rhythms, and roles. According to Haleh Esfandiari, disobeying the dress code serves as a political statement and a form of resistance:

> The dress code has become a principle battleground between the state and women, and the battle over dress has assumed political significance. Through the dress code, the state endeavors to define and symbolically control the role of the women. By flaunting the dress code, women not only seek to score points against the authorities; they also strive to assert autonomy over their own persons (1997, p. 133).

Through her act of cross-dressing, Shadi gains a sense of spatial liberation, visibility, and access to the public spaces of Tehran. As Lefebvre emphasizes, "In

order to analyse a rhythm, one must get outside it. Externality is necessary; and yet in order to grasp a rhythm one must have been grasped by it, have given or abandoned oneself 'inwardly' to the time that it rhythmed" (2004, p. 88). Defying the traditional isorhythmic patterns set by society, Shadi moves through Tehran's gendered barriers with ease. As she ventures out into the streets, she lights up a cigarette and hitches a ride on a stranger's motorcycle. She converses with men and shares tea with them, demonstrating that it is the random, spontaneous interactions between individuals that shape the rhythms of the city, rather than the prescribed isorhythmic structures set by the state. Additionally, the novel highlights Shadi's eclectic taste in music, such as Mohsen Namjoo, Reza Sadeghi, Soheil Nafisi, Mozart, Bach, Tom Waits, and Mayhem, a Norwegian black metal band (Mohebali, 2021, p. 158). Her act of listening to Western music is highly subversive as it goes against the cultural norms of Iran where Western music is not approved. The authorities in Iran view music in general as a source of corruption and impure activity that could lead individuals astray from the tenets of faith and encourage immoral behavior. As Hussein Rashid asserts, music can trigger individuals to stray from the path of faith or lead them to indulging in immoral acts such as drinking ("Music and Islam"). By embracing both Eastern and Western music, Shadi not only disrupts the city's regularizing rhythms but also enriches, electrifies, and animates otherwise uninteresting and monotonous rhythms. The city becomes, as Tim Edensor states, "a site for the enfolding of multiple rhythms," which produce "a tension between the dynamic and vital, and the regular and reiterative" (2010, p. 10). Tehran, thus, evolves over time, as it becomes a site for multiple rhythms to coexist and interact and produce a dynamic tension between the regular and reiterative on one hand, and the dynamic and vital on the other.

Throughout the narrative, Shadi depicts Tehran as a city pulsating with a "Bandari beat," a type of music and dance originating from the southern coast of Iran ("Bandari Music"). This rhythm, characterized by its lively, energetic, and celebratory tempo that alternates between fast and slow tempos ("Bandari Music") adds to the overall frenzied atmosphere of the city, which is teeming with panicked individuals desperate to escape. Public spaces are described as disorderly and disorienting, with a palpable sense of chaos permeating the air. Shadi's

observations, therefore, illustrate the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of urban rhythms, which are shaped not only by social norms and expectations but also by the unpredictable and spontaneous actions of individuals. As Shadi reports: "A thousand cars and creatures and monsters and motorcycles are all tangled up in a knot" (Mohebali 2021, p. 88). She then adds, "Shariati Street's packed. What are all these people even doing here? It's like everyone in the world's set up camp right here. Curses aimed at mothers and sisters spin through the air along with screams and shouts" (Mohebali 2021, p. 37). As a rhythmanalyst, Shadi is, in Lefebvre's words, "always 'listening out', but [she] does not only hear words, discourses, noises and sounds; [she] is capable of listening to a house, a street, a town as one listens to a symphony, an opera" (2004, p. 87). Her goal is to understand how the music is composed, who performs it, and for whom (Lefebvre 2004, p.87). In this context, residents of Tehran produce arrhythmias that are disorganized, discordant, and disorderly, reflecting the intricacies of their lives and the turbulence of their relationships. The arrhythmias produced by Tehranis are not just a result of chaotic and hectic city life, they are the result of "'alienation in regard to nature and earth," and their "loneliness during tough times" (Miladi 2018, p. 132). The cacophony produced by Tehranis are also influenced by deeper emotional and existential struggles, such as disconnection from the environment and a loss of connection to traditional ways of life. The idea of loneliness during tough times also implies a sense of isolation and struggle that seems to be unique to those living in Tehran.

Additionally, there is a group of audacious and defiant youth who aim to seize power over the city. At one point, as Shadi notices, a throng of "boys and birdlike girls" crowd Narmak Square, cheering: "'Whose city our city, and you can't take it back! Whose city our city, and we're here to paint it black!'" (Mohebali 2021, p. 75). This protest has broader societal or political implications that indicate a desire for change or a push for greater agency among young people. Simultaneously, the riot police work to uphold the standardized and uniform rhythms of the city: "Riot cops stand at the gates rapping their batons against the railing. Every now and then they yell at the boys to quit squirming and sniveling," reports Shadi (Mohebali 2021, p. 137). As Lefebvre states, "public space, the space of representation, becomes 'spontaneously' a place for walks and encounters,

intrigues, diplomacy, deals and negotiations – it theatralises itself" (2004, p. 96). Rhythmanalysis acknowledges that spaces used for symbolic purposes, such as public squares, can transform into dynamic stages for various social and political activities, as people move and interact within them. In this sense, Shadi's rhythmanalysis considers how the pulsations, movements, and energies of Tehran animate and shape the meaning and use of its spaces, and how they can become a theatrical representation of the city itself.

Continuing down the street, Shadi further observes a boy playing a sitar while singing a ghazal, and she takes note of the irregular soundscapes of the city: "The sound of screaming. The sound of supplications. The sound of heartbreaking cries. The sound of children wailing. The sound of women screaming" (Mohebali 2021, p. 141). She draws attention to the acoustic landscapes of the city, which includes various types of sounds, from the harmonious notes of the sitar to the chaotic cries, and screams of the people. The contrasting perceptions of the earthquake and the city between Shadi and the other Tehranis also reinforce the theme of the novel, which is about the subjective and diverse, thus, polyrhythmic experiences of the city's inhabitants.

However, while most residents of Tehran perceive the earthquake and the resulting city disruptions as unsettling arrhythmias, Shadi perceives the vibrations as eurhythmia - a harmonious relationship between diverse rhythms:

> The earth shudders and the shudders ripple through my body. They start at my fingertips and run through my shoulders and groin and damn! Let the Bandari begin. Mother Earth must be down there shimmying her big meaty breasts. The tremors speak to me. Speak to me. Speak to me. I feel like it's my first time ever lying on the grass. I suckle at its scent. The earth settles down, a pause in a long sentence. I close my eyes, walk my fingers through the grass. Smells like rain. The smell of wetness, the smell of trees. I wish I could sink, pour into the earth and dance with her. Let the tremors crawl through my body. I don't want them to stop. I want to lie right here on this grass forever sucking on its wetness. I want my breasts to shiver with her shivers and make waves. (Mohebali 2021, pp. 42-43).

In this passage, Shadi is depicted as embracing and savoring the rhythms of the earthquake. As the tremors shake Tehran, she feels a sense of happiness coursing through her body and experiences a euphoric blend of rhythms from the

earth, nature, her own body, and the city. As a skilled rhythmanalyst who deeply immerses herself in the rhythms of urban spaces, Shadi illustrates that despite the continuous states of arrhythmia experienced in Tehran – both positive and negative – the city and its social body are inherently polyrhythmic, with a range of regular and syncopated rhythms, downbeats and offbeats, building up to a climactic whole.

After lying down on the ground, Shadi gets back on her feet and heads to the apartment of her dealer friends. However, in Tehran, it is forbidden and punishable to mix with members of the opposite sex in private settings, which is known as khalwat. This term encompasses activity carried out by two or more individuals of the different gender who are not closely related to each other and "are together in any private place under circumstances that may give rise to suspicion that they might engage in immoral activity" (Ismail 2016, p. 906). Despite the khalwat rule, Shadi physically assists her friend Ashkan when she finds him unconscious in the bathroom. From the text, it can also be deduced that Shadi has had previous encounters with her many male friends, Mazyar, Emo Ali, Latif, Rahim, and Siamak at the same apartment, despite the prohibition of khalwat in Islamic law. This means that her own rhythms that are at odds with the moral rhythms of the city, highlighting her rebellious nature and desire for freedom. Additionally, Shadi is unafraid of engaging in homoerotic moments with her friend Sara, as evident in the passage: "[Sara] pulls my beanie off and digs her fingers into my scalp" (Mohebali 2021, p. 96), she describes, and then continues as follows:

> The ground slips out from under our feet. She lays her head on my chest and covers her ears... Sara trembles in my arms. She's like a fish with just a thin veil of fat wrapped around her delicate bones. An earthquake isn't so bad with Sara in one's arms. I hug her harder. […] [She presses] her lips to my forehead. "My little piece of shit." The cool wet of her lips lingers on my forehead. I close my eyes… She cracks up again and digs her nose in my hair. (Mohebali 2021, pp. 97, 101)

Despite the chaos of the earthquake, Shadi finds comfort in holding Sara. Her focus on Sara's lips, eyes, and soft white hands, as well as the rhythms of her body and emotions, and the way they touch each other, all work together to challenge not only the traditional boundaries of femininity and normative heterosexuality, but also the social and cultural norms that are prevalent in the city.

Conclusion

In Case of Emergency showcases a young woman's rebellion against the rigid social, religious, and moral expectations of her culture and city, which adhere to regular, predictable, and inflexible rhythms. She defies the limitations imposed upon her by creating her own impulsive and irreverent energies that deviate from conformity, chastity, modesty, and order. She successfully bends religious and state rules and gender roles by indulging in music, drugs, cross-dressing, using vulgar language, breaking the laws of khalwat, and neglecting gender-based duties, all of which are either illegal, viewed as sin, or frowned upon in Iran to varying degrees. By producing polyrhythms through her own critical arrhythmias and eurhythmias, as well as the unhealthy arrhythmias of other Tehranis, Mohebali's protagonist not only challenges the rigid isorhythms of her city but also reconstructs and redefines them to some extent. Therefore, the multifarious rhythms depicted in this novel contribute significantly to dismantling stereotypical images of Iran, Iranian women and Iranians, who are usually depicted as voiceless, faceless, static, and assimilated. Mohebali captures the city with rhythms of conflict, repression, and struggles, as well as triumphs, thus, she presents readers with a stirring image of Tehran's constant craving for liberating and nonconformist rhythms.

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