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Iranian Women, Inside or Outside of the Stadium? An Anthropological Study on Female Representation of National Identity in Iran

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Abstract

A controversial and comprehensive debate that has resulted in numerous discursive clashes in Iran pertains to the presence of women at stadiums during male soccer matches. Different discourse systems have expressed their own contradictory and opposite stances in terms of whether Iranian women have the right to attend such events inside or outside the stadium, ranging from different notions of ritual pollution and moral threats to gender equality and women rights in public spheres and spaces. When the debate is considered more in depth, a question arises about the female representation of national identity in Iran: What is the status and role of the female body in symbolic demonstration of the national body of Iranian society as a kind of social body? It seems that there is a discursive debate about the symbolic representation of female body in public sphere in Iran. To provide further insight into this question, ethnographic methods, participant observations and different models of interviews (focus and nominal interviews) were employed in the fields and cultural areas under study. The purpose of this article is to examine the systems of discourses about the allowance or prohibition of the presence of women at soccer stadiums and the cultural foundations and backgrounds that have given shape to these discourses over recent decades.

Keywords: ritual pollution; Iranian soccer; Iranian women; ritual equality; public sphere; bodily representation.

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INTRODUCTION

Ethnographic Report of Soccer and Iranian Women, Key Questions and Methodology

Sport, the face of which has been divided into modern and traditional shapes, always contributed to the definition of Iranian identity from the past to now (see Chehabi, 1995: 78-52; 1999; 2006a: 234-245 and see also Gerhardt, 2002: 36-44). In the contemporary era, modern sports have had a strong influence on the rise of new forms of identity and its expressions among Iranian different groups. These new forms not only differentiate modern sports from traditional sports, but modern sports also create new forms of identity that differ from the past forms. Soccer, at the heart of modern sports and as the most popular one, has been the source of new forms of identity and its emergent shapes (see Hassanzadeh, 2013: 42-44). This role of soccer is not confined to Iran since it can be seen in other countries such as Brazil, Italy, Argentina, Ireland, China, Scotland, African countries etc. (see Da Matta, 1992; Dal Lago and De Biasi, 1994; Brownell, 1995; Giulianotti, 1996a; 1996b; Finn and Giulianotti, 1998; Archetti, 1999; Fjeld, 2000; Alegi, 2004; Keim, 2003; Giulianotti, 2005; Alegi, 2010). The emergence of female soccer fans and soccer players ties women to nation building process and identity creation in Iran, which has come into view in a series of national events in recent decades (see Bromberger, 1995; 1998; 2010 and see also Hassanzadeh, 2002; Hassanzadeh and Asgari Khaneghah, 2002). In spite of women's interest in playing roles in soccer as fans and as players, to a large extent discursive clashes appeared over women's participation at stadiums as a focal point. This discursive clash motivated the present author to do a long and large period of research about women partaking in Iranian soccer. This research which led to this article and some other works (for example see Hassanzadeh; 2013; 2018), attempts to answer key questions as follow:

1. What is the discursive meaning of women's participation at stadiums and male matches from different points of view?
2. Why does a discursive clash exist over women's participation at stadiums?

3. How can anthropology help us to perceive these discursive clashes through fieldwork, ethnographic observations and anthropological interpretations?

In order to respond the above-mentioned inquiries, this study employed a long-term ethnographic-anthropological research from 1997 to 2018. As such, the author has taken part in public events of the 1998 World Cup in France (Iran-Australia qualification game and Iran-US world cup match, 1998, France), Iran Bahrain(Qualification Game for World Cup 2006 Germany), and the 2018 World Cup in Russia post-match events (Iran-Morocco and Iran-Portugal) in Tehran street events. Furthermore, the author attended club games such as matches between Esteghlal and Persepolis in 2006 to now include other field work for this research. Street soccer as the lovely game of young male children and teenagers in Tehran and Rasht comprised an additional field for this study. The research comprised participant observation, fieldwork and interviews with key informants, and holding nominal group interviews (see Bernard, 2011; 2015). The area of this research has been Tehran and Rasht.

Two overall forms of discursive behaviors related to soccer, and those observed in this study include liminal and carnival behaviors.

In the carnival forms that emerged after national team matches such as Iran-Australia, Iran-US, Iran-Bahrain, Iran-Morocco and even Iran-Portugal, women attended street celebrations, showed their happiness, danced, sang, painted their faces and dyed their hair with the colors of the Iran-national colors of flag (green, white and red), and participated in the cycles of song and dance in which a stopped parked car's tape loudly produced music. Like men, they stopped cars and invited car drivers and other occupants inside that car, to join the cycle of people. They blew horns, marched and paraded through the streets on foot or followed alongside in cars, hoisted and vigorously waved the national flag in their hands and cheered loudly.

However, on the liminal level, young boys, and male teenagers and men took part in the match festivities at stadiums; they broke formal norms by using slogans that included insulting contents, humiliated rivals, for example, making a

hole inside the symbol of opposite team such as red towel (Persepolis) or blue sack (Esteghlal). They fought and insulted each other, and a kind of literature exists among fans that uses profane sexual language which, including sexual words (see Hassanzadeh, 2013: 203-225).

In the female liminal forms that recently emerged in a highlighted shape (from about 2014 to now), female teenagers and young girls have disguised themselves as men in terms of their faces and clothes and have gone to the stadium in secret to show enthusiasm and passion to support their team.

The tables and figures below show the ethnographic findings:

**Table 1: Iran-Australia
Qualification game for World Cup 1998, France
Resalat Square and Street, Tehran**

Women's participation in the streets and public spaces
Singing songs
Dancing
Painting and coloring their face and hair in the colors of the national flag
Parading on foot or in cars

**Table 2: Iran-US
World Cup 1998, France
Enghelab Street and Square, Tehran**

Women's participation in the streets and public spaces
Singing songs
Parading alongside in cars
Blowing horns
Marching on foot

**Table 3: Iran-Bahrain
Qualification Game for World Cup 2006 Germany
Jenat Abad Street-Tehran**

Women's participation in the streets and public spaces
Singing songs
Parading with cars
Blowing horns
Dancing
Marching on foot
Partaking in the cycle of happiness
Painting faces and coloring hair with the colors of the national flag

**Table 4: Iran-Morocco
World Cup 2018, Russia
Yousefabad Street-Tehran**

Women's participation in the streets and public spaces
Singing songs
Parading alongside with cars
Blowing horns
Marching on foot
Dancing and Partaking in the cycle of happiness
Painting faces in the colors of the national flag
Young women wearing a clown wig instead of dying their hair
Circling around cars playing music

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**Table5: Male Liminal forms
Derbies between Esteghlal and Persepolis since 2006**

Impolite slogans
Humiliation of rival symbols
Verbal and physical fighting
Insulting
Mocking formal shapes and symbols
Painting and coloring their faces
Singing and dancing

**Table 6: Female Liminal forms
Match between Persepolis -Ra'ahan/ Persepolis-Sepidrud/ Persepolis-
Traktorsazi/ Persepolis-Esteghlal Khuzestan since 2014**

Dressing as men
Slogans and chanting
Showing fandom enthusiasm
Painting and coloring their face
Singing and dancing

According to the topic of this study, parallel to the fieldwork and ethnographic study, discourse embraced another key component. This research studies discursive expressions and utterances about women presence during sporting events.

DISCURSIVE BACKGROUNDS: MALE ROOTS OF IRANIAN SPORT?

To understand what have been observed in the field and discursive clashes over women's participation in stadiums, it is important to consider the discursive backgrounds of sport in Iran. When we talk about sport in Iran in a long history, the male image of sport mostly comes to view and female forms are rare and exceptional (see Pfister, 2005: 207-212; Bolukbashi, 2007; Delforush, 2012: 235; Hassanzadeh, 2013: 256-269; Nixon, 2016: 125). This male image not

only comes back to male roots of sport in a given country including traditional sports, but also stems from the relationship between the body and nationality in both stages. According to M. Bahar (1997) and others (see Chehabi, 2000; Ridgeon, 2007: 243-263; Chehabi, 2006b; Ensafpour, 2007; Yelda, 2012: 53; Abolhassani Taraghi, 2011), the most famous and ancient sport in Iran, Zurkhaneh, was male from its early days of emergence. Bahar (1997) describes a root and headspring of Mithraism as being part of the inception of this sport in which only men were allowed to participate. Owing to the coexistence of two groups of warlike and bodily symbols that were confirmed by anthropologists in different parts of the world (see Blanchard, 1995: 239-241), these sports bore a male image and had a masculine implication. In classic and traditional urban spaces, ethnic and local sports that are close to male meanings such as Lucho², Gile Mardi³, and Chukhe⁴ wrestling (see Moshtagh Khorasani, 2010: 75; Bromberger, 2011a; 2011b; Karimi, 2013; Hassanzadeh, 2013), shows two forms of symbolic meanings: war and bodily activity. As such, due to warlike meaning and symbols of sport, women were not a part of this activity. Thus, it seems, with the exception of some rare forms of nomadic shapes of sport in local areas of Iran such as female horseracing in northern Iran among the Taleshi ethnic group (see Hassanzadeh, 2002), women are absent in traditional outdoor sports and games insofar as sport has been traced in Iran's history of sport culture.

This border was not confined and restricted to "sport"; rituals portray the same scene. Male rituals like those that can be seen in Varza Jang⁵ or Shotor Koshan⁶, and others, uncover a kind of male-gendered rites in which women do not take part (see Bromberger, 2011a; Varahram, 2019). In other rituals, such as Moharam, women and men have been separated from each other. Men move forward, and women follow behind them at the back or women participate in

² A kind of ethnic-local wrestling in Mazandaran province.

³ A kind of ethnic-local wrestling in Gilan province.

⁴ A kind of ethnic-local wrestling in Khorasan province.

⁵ A kind of male ritual in Gilan province.

⁶ One of the Moharam rituals in Kabsan city.

separate spaces. In Taziye, men dressed in female clothes, play the role of women (see Beeman, 2011). These groups of rituals, as some examples, recounts mono-gendered spaces, or a divided space of rituals, as a familiar event in this country (see Torab, 2007). As such, women have mostly held some rituals in inside spaces in rituals in general and in rituals of reversal in particular (see Hassanzadeh, 2013).

In the ritual of reversal such as the ceremony of women ruling over the village⁷ (see Hassanzadeh and Ghandehari, 2002)) or the ceremony of Umar Koshan (see Varahram, 2019), men left the space of rituals or inside home, and women freely held their ceremonies, plays, games and rituals. Interestingly, some shrine records demonstrate how women did not allow men to come to the shrine, as these rituals belonged to women, and in case of their presence, men were ousted from the ritual space (see Dieulafoy, 1851/ 2006). Therefore, these qualities that rest on the separation of men and women in rituals in external, public and even inside-domestic spaces, have a strong background. This background mirrors a kind of formal Iranian worldview and culture that also emerges in sporting discourses in contemporary Iran. While the male-warlike meaning of sport has left a strong influence on this belief of gendered separation of space, mystic meaning of traditional conception of sport intensify it. The best example of this mystic function is the *Pahlavani* (ancient) sport in Iran, as a kind of male brotherhood. Traditional wrestling (*Zurkhaneh* sport) was held in the inside space in a holy place (*Zrukhaneh*), which implies mystic-religious meanings (see Beyzai Kashani, 1958; Behmanesh, 1971a; 1971b; 1971c; 1972; Floor, 1981: 87-88; Chehabi, 2006a; Tamjidi and Lotfalikhani, 2015: 405-406). In this sport, the *Pahlavan* (athlete) became ready to fight symbols of evil and sins (see Ensafpour, 2007) but modern wrestling (free-style wrestling), since the first Pahlavi has been enacted in external space (Mokhtari and Saber, 2002). The space of this sport has been outside closed and roofed space, which shows how modern wrestling has been given new meaning in Iran. E. Mokhtari and H. Saber (ibid) give an account of how male athletes of *Zurkhaneh* became upset when this

⁷ This ritual was held in villages such as Efus and Ab'ask.

sport was done on the pitch for first time in the first Pahlavi era. When Shaban Jafari took women and foreigners to Zurkahneh to see the ancient sport and its place, he was harshly criticized by religious-minded and traditional groups (see Chehabi, 2000). As it is evident, modern sports discourses were not in conformity with traditional sports in the Pahlavi era. According to Christian Bromberger (1998), the emergence of soccer as a modern sport coincides with symbolic clashes between this sport and traditional wrestling and even modern wrestling. Soccer and other modern sports show a new trend in Iran in which sports are played in public-external spaces in the shape of Amjadiyeh and Aryamehr stadiums (see Hassanzadeh, 2013; 2018).

The Pahlavi dynasty was strongly inspired by two discursive systems, praise of pre-Islamic Iran as a golden age, and showing Pahlavi kings as the heirs of Iran's ancient kings such as Cyrus the Great and Darius the Great (see Tehranian, 2008: 260) but at the same time, modernization as a value system was another discursive source that includes encouraging women to come out from inside-domestic spaces under the control of traditional-paternal forces and participate in public activities (see Hassanzadeh, 2013: 528-540). The best examples of this discourse were women partaking in a kind of military service known as Science or Hygiene Soldiers (*Sepahe Danesh/Sepah Behdasht*), and also scouting programs and school courses of sport (see Dolfani, 2003). Official state ceremonies such as 17th Dey (7th January) were also founded by the Pahlavi dynasty to emphasize women's outdoor and public roles through modern activities such as scouting and sports (see Aminzadeh, 1925; Fischer, 2003: 194; Afkhami, 2008: 240). Even the first Pahlavi was portrayed as the savior of women from the prison of homes and theaters were enacted with this theme (see Hassanzadeh, 2013: 528-540). Indeed, the usage of pre-Islamic myths and ideologies, gave rise to showing the Shah and his Crown prince as the leader of sport and the country, at the same time with the aim of portraying the Shah and Crown prince with a powerful bodies (see Hassanzadeh, 2013: 540-546; Kadivar, 2017: 344). To create the image of Iran, both modern and ancient discourses were combined. Interestingly, warlike and sporting images were fused with each other and the first Pahlavi was given a more warlike image with an emphasis on horsemanship when

compared to the second Pahlavi whose image was produced by state media, was tied to modern sports and modern warlike activities such as piloting, whereby a king can also fly an airplane or jet (see *ibid*). Because of its rich mythic and epic background, while male sport symbolism became dominant in elaborating sport and national identity, few female symbols such as Gorafrid of *Shahnameh* (the great book of Firdausi) took on the same role in terms of the justification of female sport in the Pahlavi period. It seems that women's sport was a formal-ideological and bottom-up program in the Pahlavi era and female fandom was not given a spontaneous-informal and bottom-up shape in this period.

EMERGENCE OF CARNIVAL AND NEW INVERSIVE RITUALS AFTER IMPOSED WAR (2 SEPTEMBER 1980 – 20 AUGUST 1988)

After the early years of the Islamic revolution, women were permitted to take part in sporting events and competitions in Islamic dress and later, Iran held Islamic international female competitions in 1993 (see Koushkie Jahromi, 2011: 125-131). The space of female sports had been separated from that of men, and only women were allowed to participate in female sports in normative forms (see Childress, 2011: 95-96; Hassanzadeh, 2013: 85-119; 2018; Kipnis and Caudwell, 2015: 44-45). This trend can be realized as the normative making of female sport, since the Islamic Revolution has always placed stress on Islamic women's covering as a criterion of piety. However, what remains as a controversial point is the behavior of women as fans not as sportswomen. This came into its discursive clash and climax when women wanted to take part in male sports in general and soccer stadiums in particular (see Kuhn, 2011: 106; O'sickey, 2012: 83; Honarbin-Holliday, 2013: 138-139). The enquiry that should be answered is how can this discursive clash be understood? What is the discursive background of this clash?

As already elaborated, prior to the Islamic revolution, women as ritual subjects took part in two forms of rituals, those in separate spaces from men and rituals tied to inside spaces in which men were absent. But state ideology agenda and ritual policies encouraged women to participate in ritual and ceremonial events, among them

modern sports in the Pahlavi era. The development of female sport was a state program, but female fandom could not spread and develop as fast as female sports state programs. It can be said that female fandom came to its maturity after the revolution. Since the end of war (1988) imposed by Iraq under Saddam on Iran, rituals of reversal and liminality returned (see Hassanzadeh, 2013: 269-289). Even in Iranian communities and Diasporas, this return has been confirmed (see Spellman, 2006: 47). One of the cultural changes after the Islamic Revolution includes the transformation of rituals meanings since some rituals of reversal went on to be eclipsed such as Umar Koshan (see Hassanzadeh, 2013: 309-320). Firstly, this return to rituals of reversal and inversion, appeared in holding rituals such as the fire feast (*Charshanbeh Suri*), which produced some clashes and then, due to the importance of soccer and its ties to national identity, soccer, too, becomes another scene of rituals of reversal and *carnavalesque* (see Bromberger, 1998; Hassanzadeh and Asgari, 2002; Hassanzadeh, 2004; Bromberger, 2010; Hassanzadeh, 2013). To perceive this cultural change in the shape of rituals, it is important to first realize the differences between two kinds of rituals, liminal and carnival. The ethnographic data of this research sheds light on these forms and how they have transformed over time.

Firstly, soccer emerges as a kind of male liminality in which male teenagers and young boys found a space for the inversion of norms and breaking the laws and rules of formal culture (see Hassanzadeh and Asgari Khaneghah, 2002; Bromberger, 2010; Hassanzadeh, 2013). This was a reminder of what could be seen before the Islamic revolution as the form of soccer culture. But it seems youth and adolescent culture includes a larger scale and extent since 1989 compared to before the revolution. Some events such as bidding farewell to soccer, film and song stars such as Naser Hejazi (14 December 1949 – 23 May 2011), Mohammad Ali Fardin (February 4, 1931–April 6, 2000), Khosro Shakibai (March 27, 1944–July 18, 2008) and Morteza Pashai (11 August 1984 – 14 November 2014), confirmed this hypothesis (see Hassanzadeh, 2013, 203; 2016: 36-37). It is a reminder of women and young men's absence at the funeral of Takhti before the revolution (see Rahnema, 2000: 210-211; Azimi, 2009: 314; Hassanzadeh, 2013). After the war, as a male luminal culture, verbal and behavioral inversions of symbols broke all

rules of formal culture in the stadium space. Women did not take part in these spaces of club soccer. Then after the qualification game for the 1998 World Cup (match between Iran and Australia), women broadly took part in post-match events as a scene of carnival (see Bromberger, 1998; Hassanzadeh and Asgari, 2002; Hassanzadeh, 2013). It was the first image of a carnival meaning of soccer in Iran as a polyphonic ritual in which multi-vocality was given a perfect shape (see Ibid). Women were not separated from men, they sang songs, carried the national flag, blew horns and bugles, danced, and colored their hair with the three national colors from the Iranian flag, made car drivers stop their cars, and joined happy people and as they shaped a cycle of happiness in the streets (see Ibid). These symbolic behaviors correspond to all key features of carnival (for key features of carnival see Bakhtin, 1981; 1984a; 1984b; Gilmore, 1998). These symbolic and ritual manners were repeated over again in post-match rituals of other soccer events such as Iran- USA (World Cup 1998, France), Iran-Bahrain (Qualification Game for World Cup 2006 Germany), and recently, in 2018, in Iran-Morocco and Iran-Portugal (World Cup 2018, Russia). Coming back to the first street marches of happiness during the 1974 and 1978 Asian Games, only men participated in street celebrations (see Hassanzadeh, 2013: 256-289; 2018). Compared to before the revolution, when soccer had a male meaning, since 1996 the polyphonic meaning of soccer as a kind of ritual has emerged, so in the extent of informal rituals, it is possible to refer to this as “male liminal rituals” (male liminality) in the first period and carnival rituals in the second period (*carnivalesque*). As such, although the male liminality of soccer is rooted in the time before the revolution, it was given a perfect shape after the revolution with a large presence of male teenagers. In addition to the national meaning of soccer, TV and media have had a large role in the enlargement of women’s engagement in soccer (see *ibid*). TV calls the people and the nation, among them Iranian women, as the twelfth soccer player (*Yar-e Davazdahom* in Persian) of the national team while soccer seems an epic poetry. However, some successful programs such as the 90 program on TV’s Channel 3, attracts teenaged girls and young women to club games.

In spite of what Jafar Pahnahi shows us as a record of young female teenager’s entering Azadi Stadium in 2005 in the movie,

offside (see Crosson, 2013: 130), this trend of female teenagers disguising themselves as young men has come to its climax since about 2014. The third form of women's presence in soccer stadiums emerged in a new form of classic inversion: the female liminality of soccer (observed disguised teenage and young women in club matches between Persepolis and Sepidrud, Persepolis and Tractorsazi, Persepolis and Ra'ahan, Persepolis and Esteghlal Khuzestan). In this trend, young women dressed in male clothes and face make-up, secretly take part in club games next to male teenagers and young men. According to official rules, women are officially forbidden to enter soccer stadiums, but young women break these formal-official rules. For example, recently during the Asian Club Games 2018, in a match between Persepolis and Al-sad, women were not allowed to enter the Azadi stadium. Compared to the classic form of inversion, where women dressed in male clothes and banned men from the village (see Sarmadi, 1971: 40-42, for classical rituals of inversion in Iran see Beyzai, 1965; Anjavi Shirazi, 1974), in the modern context of soccer games, women take part in male space and come clash with and challenge the official rules. In this form of inversion, male teenagers and young boys helped young women break the rules and come inside stadiums as a rule and norm breaking action. Interestingly, since 2017, during the Iranian fire feast carnival, young men dressed in female clothes and took part in rituals and sub-rituals such as *Ghashogh Zani* (for *Ghashogh zani* sub-ritual see Hassanzadeh, 2013: 309-320). With the presence of female teenagers and young girls, it seems that the quality of multi-vocality increases in liminal forms of soccer in Iran. It is interesting that in this new female liminality of soccer, the main point is gender and age identity, not lofty and elevated meanings such as national identity, which is evident in the carnival of soccer. This shows how liminal and carnival forms of soccer (and rituals) coexist with each other in contemporary Iran.

NOTION OF POLLUTION

While women as an Iranian group demand their right to take part in the stadiums, how do other ritual subjects see this female interest in a male sport based on official and formal norms? Turner discusses (Turner, 1967: 154-155) how some world views in

traditional societies and communities find pollution in ritual space when men and women attend rituals at the same time. Turner gives examples of such rituals that revolves around a kind of initiation and puberty (ibid). Both liminal and carnival includes inversion of norms that sometimes signify gender meanings. In symbolic inversion, a kind of sexual and gender reversal happened. As such, in a male and official sense, this symbolic inversion is considered to threaten female purity and piety. This standpoint is not confined to some officials or traditional agents, people, even laypersons and commoners, sometimes share the same opinions. In interviews with people, even some women, they justify that women should not go to soccer stadiums. Some young men, who were interviewed, criticized women as having a weak body while soccer is a strong sport and women are considered fragile. Some other interviewees claimed that male soccer and its space is brimful of pollution because of its insulting, mostly sexual words and vulgar chants. In their opinion, under such circumstances, groups (of women) that comprise the key symbols of purity and cleanliness should not be exposed to such crassness in stadiums (see Hassanzadeh, 2013: 330).

The concept of the mystic quality of women in Iranian symbolism makes some groups think women should not be allowed to attend these kinds of spaces. As this article discusses, the normative-ideological and sensory-emotional poles produce two different social meanings including one of the most important points of this discursive clash. In this standpoint, women are known as the symbol of mystic quality and symbols of the normative pole while soccer space, with its symbolism and bodily features, is the symbol of the emotional pole (for these two poles see Turner, 1967: 29-32). As such, officials think that it improper for men and women to take part in an informal-external space with the inversion of symbolic culture at the same time. From this angle, a kind of pollution resulted from the participation of men in the ritual space of women or vice versa. Women, as fans, are beyond the control of formal culture. This is reminder of what happened both before and after the revolution, for example, when fans insulted the family of a soccer player about the match in his front of his face (see Donya-e Varzesh, 1971a; 1971b; Hassanzadeh, 2013). Another answer that indicates a more conservative response, take the participation of young women at stadium

as a combination of male and female liminality, intensifies the emotional pole and produces a greater anti-normative state in the sense of a group of people.

An interesting question arises here: Why are women permitted to take part in the network of media and send messages to some programs such as 90 Program but they are not allowed to go and watch games in the stadiums (see Bromberger, 2010; Hassanzadeh, 2018). It seems that the conceptual term of ritual pollution provides understanding of this paradoxical issue. When women take part in the public pull of TV, they are not at risk of being with men in a physical space at the same time. Thus, this virtual and media space does not put both genders at risk of pollution in a traditional sense. Here, pollution has a physical and bodily quality and implication. This is a reminder of what Marry Douglas (2003: 119-123) argues, where order is threatened, the notion of pollution arises. Due to the role of key components such as dirty money and corruption (see Hassanzadeh, 2013: 141), Iranian soccer has been influenced by the discourse of polluted soccer that could put women at the risk of contamination from a formal cultural point of view. On the other hand, from a psychological point of view, as the foot replaces the hand in soccer (see Richards, 1994), as a downside symbol, it also produces ritual pollution. The public pull of TV shows a normative space under government conduct, which differs from social networks that include informal culture and space with the risk of pollution from a traditional standpoint. The other interesting example that affirms this hypothesis is why women are rarely allowed to go to volleyball or basketball courts, but this permission does not include soccer. Among modern and even traditional sports, soccer is one of those sports connected to events in and outside the stadium (public space) and in cyber spaces (for soccer's connection to public and cyber space see Ballantine and Roberts, 2012:135-136). This shows the discursive power of soccer in shaping public spheres and spaces (see Hassanzadeh, 2017: 246-247). Media, and national contents of soccer, turn women as home spectators into fans who participate in the carnival of soccer in the streets and stadiums. This gives the will and demand of women a discursive shape and is a reminder of their symbolic motto and slogan for partaking in Azadi stadium when they expressed: Half of Azadi (means freedom and the name of stadium) belongs to women. As Pia

Lara argues (Pía Lara, 1998: 58-66), women find their discursive power in the public sphere. Volleyball and basketball lack liminal and carnival shapes as powerful and extensive as soccer and their national color is less than that of soccer among Iranian people. Why do women from other countries have the right to enter Azadi Stadium but Iranian women are not allowed? (see Bromberger, 2010; Hassanzadeh, 2018). It shows once again the meaning of pollution in a male-traditional standpoint and masculine meaning and image of nationality as well.

IRANIAN WOMEN AND THE REPRESENTATIVE IMAGE OF NATIONALITY

It seems an important clash is observed over the observance and enactment of rituals in Iran: the clash between normative and emotional poles (see Hassanzadeh, 2013: 604-612). However, how this can be used to perceive different opinions and discourses about women presence at stadiums? With a review on Iranian rituals, it is evident that women, teenagers and young people are symbols of the emotional-sensory pole in Iran. As already discussed, Iranian ancient sports show some elements such as warlike (spiritual and epic combat with evil), mystic and spiritual qualities that pertain to normative poles. Turner makes it clear that (for these two poles see Turner, 1967: 29-32) every ritual enjoys two poles. One is normative-ideological while the other is emotional-sensory. While some groups deny one of these two poles and produce discursive tension between them, people, through holding liminal and carnival rituals, try to create a balance between these two poles (body and spirit, etc.). Regardless of normative and formal rituals, which include all groups of people and led by reference, groups of society (see Turner, 1988: 44-45), star groups who embrace informal and subordinated cultures and subcultures (see *ibid*), such as groups of women, teenagers and young people, are symbols of emotional poles in Iran, so they are confronted more with formal norms and rules. They are more talented and gifted for pollution and contamination because of their closeness to body in the above-mentioned sense. It is reminder of the closeness of women to nature compared to men (see Ramirez, 2007: 207-208). However, this kind of standpoint is unable to show what women

have in mind as their reason and intentions when they watch games in the stadium. What do women think about going to the stadium?

As already elaborated, to a very large extent soccer is the only sport that can connect all groups of people to each other, and ascribe all spaces of society (domestic, ethnic, local, cyber, public) a national-collective meaning. On one hand, media, television and radio have made soccer an extraordinary and attractive narrative of nationality. They always call all groups of nation among them women to support the Iranian national soccer team. Women played this role in different spaces such as TV programs, cyber spaces and social networks. During the 2018 World Cup in Russia, the municipality of Tehran installed a billboard in an urban street setting that depicted only men. Social networks harshly criticized this image of Iran and protested the lack of women on this image. Under public pressure, the Tehran municipality was forced to change the image, adding covered women.

On the other hand, the fieldwork for this research, as above explained, and interviews with women can show why women want to go and watch games in the stadiums. When women were asked why they want to go to the stadium, believe that soccer national team belongs to all Iranians without exception. They think Azadi Stadium is a national place and that women as a group of nationality should have the permission for entering in stadium (interviews with female fans). Interestingly, women of various Iranian ethnic groups have expressed this desire as well, which shows combination between ethnic and female identity in Iran. In the previous system, since the first days of the emergence of soccer in Iran, we are faced with provincial teams such as Shahin and Malavan (see Mohammad Nabi, 2005), but these teams had male fans and exposed male fandom. Now, however, female fans of provincial clubs have begun to appear. The best example is Nasaji Mazandaran whose female fans tried to take part in the party celebrating the qualification of this team as it moved up to an excellent league in the country. When officials opposed women entering the stadium⁸, the soccer players proclaimed that they would hold the party somewhere else rather than the stadium

⁸ <https://tamasha.com/v/jLdnD/> تجمع گسترده زنان پشت درهای ورزشگاه در جشن صعود
تجمعی مشاهده شده در 6th November 2018

so that women could take part as fans and women took part in the street ceremony behind the stadium's closed gate, blowing horns, hoisting the club's red flag and balloons, putting on red symbols such as clown wigs and showing their happiness⁹. Interestingly, male fans of Tractorsazi that belong to Tabriz, chant in favor of women's right to enter the stadium¹⁰. This events including the support of male fans of club soccer (male liminality) for women 'presence at stadiums, shows the male liminality gendered *monoglossia* (monophony) moves toward the *heteroglossia* of carnival culture with its gendered polyphonic quality in Iran. While officials allow foreign women from places like Syria and Korea to enter Iranian stadiums, Iranian women are not permitted to do the same thing and are prevented from entering the stadium. It seems we are faced with two forms of Iranian nationality combined with each other, one is one of female representation, the other is the emotional image.

When the image of women is taken into consideration as the representative image of Iranian nationality, mystic and normative images dominate. Even in the constitutional revolution era, oppressed images of women of Quchan caused national rage, which was given shape against Russia, which shows how Iranian people equated the status of Iranian women with Iranian nationality and taking Iranian women captive was viewed as the captivity of the country (see Najmabadi, 1998). Many literary works such as Iraj Mirza's poem of Maryam were composed and inspired by this event and showed the fall of women as the fall of the homeland (see Meskoub, 2012). As such, coming back to the early centuries of Iran with its long history, it becomes clear that nationality was symbolized in the face of male kings and heroes (see Barafroukhteh, 1941; Hassanzadeh, 2013: 53-58). Women in Iran, like some other countries such as Mexico (see Paz, 1985: 35), are seen as mystic and normative figures and showed the piety of this land without bodily representation. It can be said that liminal female figures cannot produce this kind of image

⁹ <https://www.aparat.com/v/IW0Nt/> جشن صعود نساجی observed in 6th November 2018.

¹⁰ <http://www.bartarinha.ir/fa/news/789544/> شعار تراکتورچی ها در حمایت از حضور زنان در استادیوم observed in 6th November 2018

based on the normative pole. In other words, as Douglas argues (2004: 72-80) different kinds of bodies' roles, it can be said that the social body of women is defined here as a mystic body that is equated with a mystic and pious image (normative image) of a country. As such, when we ask about the female image of nationality, it seems the emotional image as can be seen in female fans of the Iranian national team is absent. This bodily image can be seen in symbolic expressions that are intended to show the body of the king as the image of nationality with emphasis on some sports such as horsemanship (see Hassanzadeh, 2013: 53-58). It seems, due to the cultural changes of Iranian rituals, we are faced with attempts of star groups of young women to portray and produce a female national image of homeland and nationality through emotional poles and liminal-carnival body (for star group see Turner, 1988: 44-45). Compared to this normative image, this image of nationality is new and is associated with youth and women cultures. According to this emergence, social-national body and its representative image is not restricted to normative forms and now liminal forms produce a kind of social body, the function of which is the expression of emotional symbols to show national identity. Interestingly, international-non-governmental soccer laws are rooted in *Lex Mercatoria* and *Lex-sportive* (see Hertogh, 2008: 13), which amplifies youth and women culture in Iran. The presence of selected women at stadiums can this be seen in a friendly match between Iran and Bolivia (friendly match) and Persepolis and Kashima Antlers (AFC Champions League 2018 Final match), is an effort to keep the normative pole of women's participation strong. The Soccer Federations' policy faced a critical response in social media, however.¹¹ The chronology of Iranian soccer's liminality and carnival forms show an inter-ritual trend on the informal level in Iran as follows (for inter-ritual notion see Hassanzadeh, 2013: 588-592):

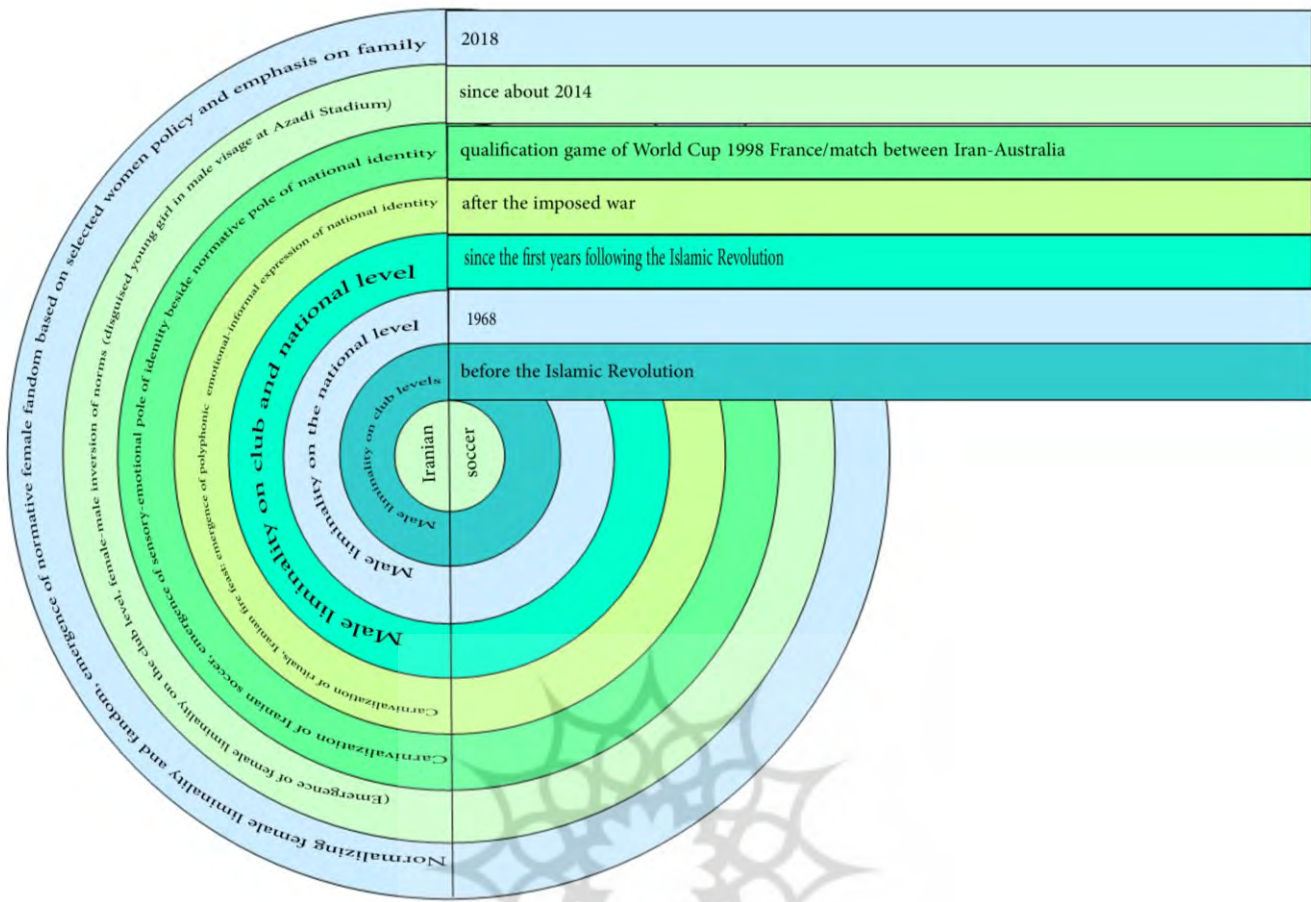


Figure 1: chronology of the emergence of Iranian and carnival forms

CONCLUSION

In the sense of some formal cultures, the combination of normative pole, as women should be included, and emotional poles, produced ritual pollution. The contradiction between these two poles comes into view in Iran. However, women have shown a new kind of nationality and nation building in Iran, female-emotional forms and the female image of nationality. Women as fans are close to the emotional pole like young men, so soccer in a polyphonic context indicates a bodily

image from Iranian nationality next to the normative image that demonstrates another image of nationality. Women played a discursive role through soccer in the public sphere and space, and this elevates their role as the creators of national symbols. New discourses of fandom policy includes normalizing female fandom by selective allowing women to enter soccer stadiums (female participation such as MPs), emphasis on the presence of family members and the separation of female spaces from male spaces at Azadi stadium. This indicates a kind of soccer policy of fandom that rests on the normative pole for the creation of normative female fans versus the emotional-sensory female fans. This policy emerges in the face of the appearance of female club liminality in recent years. While the normative policy shows a formal culture, female club liminality uncovers a kind of spontaneous and informal culture. Dynamic evolution of soccer culture in Iran, continues in the shapes of male liminality of soccer, carnival-polyphonic soccer forms, and, recently, female liminality and normative female fandom. We are currently faced with combination of ethnic and female identity on the local level in Iran.

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