

Iran and the Olympic Games after the 1979 Iranian Revolution

"Investigating the Role of Morality and Chastity in the Participation of Iranian Female Athletes during the Olympic Games"



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Abstract

Most studies covering Iranian women's sports after the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) have focused on issues related to gender discrimination and gender inequality and few have discussed changes that have occurred over time. A debate has been sparked over the status of women's rights and sports in Iran since Iranian women athletes like Elnaz Rekabi removed their hijab at international sporting events in 2022, defying the Islamic regime's dress code. Since this issue has been raised, it is of interest to determine whether female athletes have experienced significant changes in their sports situations since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, and in comparison to the first decade of the regime, or whether the appearance of female athletes, the availability of sports facilities, and the participation of female athletes in international sports have evolved over time. In this Master's thesis, the focus is on the gradual change in the situation of Iranian women's athletes after the Iranian Revolution. A special emphasis is placed on the way in which women athletes have represented Islamic values such as chastity and morality at international sporting events, including the Olympic Games, over the past four decades.

As part of this study, three sites of particular interest will be examined: Two Persian-language magazine sites that cover Iranian sports news, some religious websites that answer religious questions regarding the regime's meaning of chastity and morality and their policies in light of feminist theories, which were instrumental in the development of this research. As part of my research, I gathered extensive information about Iranian female athletes from newspapers and magazines in Persian and English and studied the Instagrams of Iranian sportswomen to gain a sense of their personal style and tastes, as well as to perceive the influence that their interests have on their work.

It is my contention in this study that though women athletes in Iran are expected to represent Islamic values, such as chastity, in international sporting events; there are, however, differences in how they present these values over time. It has been over forty years since attitudes toward women's sports have gradually changed and the rigid rules that restricted women's participation in the first decade following the Iranian revolution have gradually eased and have been replaced by encouraging and supporting women to exercise. Even so, the general modesty code that continues to apply to women's sports must demonstrate chastity and morality in a way that corresponds to the modern day and the changing world.

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Notes on Transliteration and Translation

In order to translate Persian terms and names, I follow the guidelines provided by *Encyclopedia Iranica*. I have used the formal versions of words and terms that are commonly used. It should be noted that my translation of the names of Khomeini's books and of some religious scholars, such as Morteza Motahhari, is identical to the transliteration that appears on their own websites. But as far as other words and phrases are concerned, I have followed the guidelines of the *Iranica* Alphabet.

All translations from Persian to English are my own.

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Introduction

In October 2022, Iranian climber, Elnaz Rekabi made international newspaper headlines at the Asian Continental championships, held in South Korea. Not being in dialogue with the Islamic regime, she competed without her hijab, which she was always expected to wear. Upon her return to Tehran, she was met by a massive crowd of people, but her driver did not stop to greet them; he drove directly to the office of the Islamic Republic of Iran's (IRI) Minister for Sports. Shortly thereafter, in Turkey on November 6, Niloufar Mardani, a member of the Iran's national speed-skating team, was the first to stand on a podium without wearing a headscarf to receive the championship title. She was later arrested by the Islamic Republic's agents after returning to Iran; a published statement later attributed to her said that she had appeared unveiled in public by mistake.¹

The history of sports in Iran is replete with the presence of Iranian women. There are generally two periods of their historical engagement, preceding and following the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Before the implementation of the Islamic Republic in Iran (IRI), female athletes participated in domestic and overseas sports events without regard to religious dress codes.² Since the 1979 Revolution, women's lives including their participation in sports, have changed significantly due to the implementation of Sharia and Islamic principles.³

After the Iranian Revolution of 1979, there has been almost no representation of female athletes in domestic sports competitions and arenas. Religious leadership, chiefly under Ayatollah Khomeini, who was the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution (*Rahbar-i mo'azzam-i enqelāb-i eslāmi* or "*velayat-i faqih*") and other religious leaders who take control of the nation's politics, have contributed to a profound shift in the political view toward gender equality.⁴ For instance, a separate authority for women's sports was created based on the distinction between men and women. Women's rights were being attacked wholesale when males and females were expected to practice at different times and places;

¹ Iran International Newsroom, "Iranian Actresses, Athletes Unveiling In Public To Support Protests," Iran International, November 11, 2022, <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202211118006>

² Vajiheh Javani, "Sport and Gender Equity, The Case of Iran," in *International Perspectives on Sport for Sustainable Development*, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2022): 183. [file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/BariiiBuar2022Springer%20\(4\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/BariiiBuar2022Springer%20(4).pdf).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Azadeh Kian, "Women and politics in post-Islamist Iran: the gender-conscious drive to change," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 24, (2007): 76. <file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/azadehkianwomenandpolitics.pdf>.

only coaches or trainers of the same gender were allowed to oversee and coach athletes.⁵ In public events, women were still allowed to participate in sports without being accompanied by men as long as they wear appropriate clothing, wore a hijab, or if they wish to do so anonymously.⁶ On the other hand, the Iranian government pointed to preventing Iranian women from attending stadiums. Considering the international acclaim of the Iranian volleyball team, women were also prohibited from attending volleyball stadiums.⁷

The current regime feels it necessary to supervise female athletes' bodies and authorizes their appearance at international sports games. According to regime ideology, to maintain the social health of Muslim society and prevent the sexual desire of men, proper veiling must be enforced, and thus women must be '*muhajjabih*' (veiled).⁸ By demonstrating and propagating gender ideology and values, the Olympic Games have created a conducive environment for the Islamic regime. Women athletes from Iran have used such prominent occasions to spread the Islamic hijab through their accomplishments at international events.⁹

More significantly, Iranian female athletes are required at international sports events to maintain a "culture of *ifāf*" "chastity" and *akhlāq* "morality" values to uphold the government's ideological and moral principles.¹⁰ *Ifāf* means refraining from immoral acts, and dealing with desire appropriately which is propagated by the Islamic regime in Iran. Female athletes who aim to achieve international achievement should take note of this virtue and present as introducers of *ifāf* and *akhlāq* of the Islamic regime in international sports events.¹¹

In the literal sense, chastity is restraining the soul and keeping the sensual powers from the prohibitions and vows of others to keep the soul from forbidden or unworthy activities.¹² In its most basic sense, chastity is the taming of the sensual power under the rule of reason

⁵ Zeinab Mahmudabadi and Ladan Rahbari, "Women's (non)participation in sports: Gendered attitudes, biopolitics, and perceptions of body and sports in Iran," *DiGeSt-Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* 9, no 1 (2022): 93. [file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/digest-81846-rahbari%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/digest-81846-rahbari%20(1).pdf).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Shahrzad Mohammadi, "A Critical Study of State Control, Elite Female Athletes and Fans' Resistance in Post-Revolutionary Iran," *IZGOnZeit. Onlinezeitschrift des Interdisziplinären Zentrums für Geschlechterforschung (IZG)*, (2021): 58. <file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/izgonzeit2,+6+Mohammadi.pdf>.

⁸ Shahrzad Enderle, "Olympic Analysis, Forced hijab and female athletes in postrevolutionary Iran," Olympic Analysis, accessed May 21, 2023, <https://olympicanalysis.org/section-5/forced-hijab-and-female-athletes-in-postrevolutionary-iran/>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Mohammad Said Karami, "Irāi-yi ulgū-yi mafhūmī-yi ifāf-i jinsī muḩtanī bar āyāt-i Quran-i karīm [Presenting a conceptual model of sexual chastity based on verses of Holy Quran,]" *Family and Sexual Health Journal* 33, no. 1 (2020): 35. [file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Article%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Article%20(1).pdf).

¹² Fakhr-al dīn Ṭaḩrīrī, *Majma' - al baḩriyn* (Tehran: Murtazavi, 1362/1983), 102.

and faith.¹³ In Islam, chastity serves as one of the most valuable blessings God has given to mankind, as it provides an effective fence against foreign influence and prevents it from spreading. Furthermore, adhering to this divine deposit will protect humans from satanic temptation, lead to evolution, and allow them to get closer to God.¹⁴ The human characteristic of chastity manifests itself in individuals' behavior, speech, and thoughts. It is the most obvious and beautiful manifestation, and the most beautiful example is wearing the appropriate covering or to observe the hijab according to religious literature.¹⁵

As a way to better understand how the government discourses of chastity and morality emerged after the 1979 revolution, I focus on the case study of how Iranian female athletes were expected to follow the culture of “chastity” and “morality” at the Olympic Games in the Post-Revolutionary period. Specifically, in order to accomplish this, I study the state’s production and dissemination of a “culture of chastity” and how it was implemented as a policy to impact Iranian women athletes in international sports events like the Olympic Games after Iran’s 1979 Revolution.

To sum up, by negotiating the mentioned concepts, this thesis project uncovers certain factors that have affected the performance of Iranian women athletes in the Olympic Games after Iran’s Islamic Revolution and investigate in what ways the IRI government’s conceptualization and policies on morality and chastity culture impact and/or influence the circumstance of Iranian female athletes fighting for equal representation in sports. The thesis addresses the following questions: How has the culture of chastity made an impact on the achievements of Iranian women athletes in international sports events like the Olympic Games after the establishment of the Islamic Republic? And how does the Islamic regime manipulate Iranian women athletes to portray chastity and morality during international sporting events such as the Olympics?

To explore how the Iranian postrevolutionary government has governed female bodies through the coupling of power and bodies, this thesis mainly draws upon Foucault's theoretical intervention in governmentality. This is how Foucault enables power to be

¹³ Morteza Motahhari, *Ta'lim va tarbiyat dar Islām [Education in Islam]* (Tehran: Šadrā, 1375/1996), 150.

¹⁴ Ma’sumi Amirlu and Nayyiri Ghavi, “važ’īyyat’ shināsī-yi ifāf va hijab dar jumhūrī-yi Islāmī-yi Iran [Status analysis of chastity and hijab in the Islamic Republic of Iran],” *Islamic Revolution Researches, Scientific Association of Islamic Revolution in Iran* 9 (2020): 14.

[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/ROIR_Volume%209_Issue%201_Pages%209-36%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/ROIR_Volume%209_Issue%201_Pages%209-36%20(1).pdf).

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 12

effective by creating areas, notions, outlines, and categories¹⁶ There are both inhibiting and constructive aspects to power. State power can be divided into sovereign and governmental forms. Governmentality is a form of power that involves controlling the inhabitants of a territory, while sovereignty is the control of a territory. Unlike sovereign power, governmentality invests in the failures of its subjects as well as in the production and disciplining of citizens.¹⁷

A Muslim female athlete is expected to follow the moral conduct norms and codes of Shi'a Islam as part of her role as a moral protector of the larger Muslim community. Furthermore, this thesis incorporates two feminism theories based on *Control and Sexuality* by Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Vanja Hamzić, and "Temporary Marriage and the State in Iran: An Islamic Discourse on Female Sexuality" by Shahla Haeri. With these two theories, I can comprehend how gender roles and religious traditions have long been intertwined, dictating many aspects of women's daily lives since the Islamic regime came to power. Thus, the Islamic Republic emphasizes the importance of the family, modesty, and respect for religious beliefs.

The thesis is organized into three chapters. A history and contextualization of Iranian women athletes in the years following the Islamic regime's rise to power in 1979 is presented in the first chapter. It goes on to discuss the Islamic concept of chastity and morality as well. In the second chapter, I discuss issues that contribute to establishing a culture of chastity and morality in sports following the IRI. This chapter also continues by linking up to three theoretical frameworks to discuss in detail how the IRI links the power of the body to control women in sports. In this manner, I provide an in-depth discussion on how Iranian female athletes adhere to chastity to be able to participate in international sports competitions. The ambition of this part is to discuss how Iranian female athletes were compelled to comply with "social norms", and the "chastity" and "morality" cultures, which were essential to the regime's operation. I will discuss in Chapter Three how hijab and chastity affect the performance of Iranian women athletes. In light of the Iranian government's decision to make hijab and chastity mandatory for all female athletes in the country, this topic is particularly

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Translated from French to English by Alan Sheridan (New York, Vintage: 1995), 194.
[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Foucault Michel Discipline and Punish The Birth of the Prison 1977 1995.pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Foucault%20Discipline%20and%20Punish%20The%20Birth%20of%20the%20Prison%201977%201995.pdf).

¹⁷ Nazanin Shahrokni, "State and the Paradox of Gender Segregation in Iran," (PhD. diss., University of California, 2013), 22-23.
[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/qt16x707q2%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/qt16x707q2%20(2).pdf).

pertinent. This decision has had profound implications for the athletes' professional and personal lives.

Methodology

A variety of methods are applied here to gain a deeper understanding of gender inequality and injustice within sports and the culture that demands chastity and morality within sports. Participant observation provided insight into the particularities of gender arrangements at the time I conducted the research, allowing me to better understand the experiences of female athletes in international sports events. I attempted to locate many primary and secondary sources that have recognized their holdings as valuable for writing about Iranian women's challenges during their participation in sports and those are the sources, I cite in the literature review. This thesis's main sources of information were books and articles, respectively. Instagram and YouTube were ranked third among the least visited pages.

In the present study, a primary set of data have been collected from a group of Iranian athletic women who were subject to gender inequality in Iran (such as Shohreh Bayat and Kimia Alizadeh), as well as from a group of other girls with an interest in sports. They were interviewed qualitatively.¹⁸ As part of this project, I used a variety of Persian and English websites that covered both political and sports news from Iran in which I can refer to “Iran International,” *Mashregh News*, and *The Iran Primer*. My understanding of the current situation in the country was obtained primarily through these websites, rather than any book or article.

Fieldwork

This thesis has yielded this significant finding that female athletes who participated in the Olympic Games following the Iranian revolution were expected to observe a culture of chastity and morals. From November to December 2022, I conducted online fieldwork, and

¹⁸ As of August 15, 2021, I have registered my Master's Thesis on the NSD (Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata) website (<https://minforskning.sikt.no/>). Data from Norwegian and international research projects are archived, organized, and disseminated by this institution.

between 12 to 20 of February, I returned to Iran in order to complete my fieldwork in person. My research process was disrupted by the Covid-19 global pandemic, so part of it was done remotely. During my short visit to Tehran, I did not have enough time to interview a wide range of people regarding my thesis topic. Thus, I tried taking more photos and interviewing several sports fans during this short trip.

It was unsuccessful for me to interview Faezeh Hashemi, the daughter of former Iranian president Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who has made efforts to provide more sporting facilities for Iranian women, because she had been sentenced to five years in Tehran's Evin prison for her continuous criticism of the government and protest against its policies.

In addition, I was prohibited from visiting her or calling her from the prison. As part of the fieldwork, I interviewed 6 girls residing in "Mothers' Paradise Park," a sex-segregated park in Tehran. The girls come to the park to participate in athletic activities and exercise freely without being required to cover their heads.

Literature Review

There has been little research on this topic, however, a few studies have been conducted that provide insight into the subject. The lack of many studies on this topic is concerning, as it indicates that it may not be receiving the attention it deserves. It is important to point out one important observation: most of the research conducted on sports in Iran after the Islamic Republic came to power in 1979 evaluated sports according to the issues of the revolutionary period without taking different periods of time into consideration. In light of this, it may not be easy to locate a variety of resources which discuss chastity and morality in women's sports in different years following the IRI.

As part of my quest to understand the concept of “chastity” and “morality,” I immersed myself in a wide range of Arabic, Persian, and English sources. In some of these resources, the meaning of these two concepts is expressed in their pure and old Islamic form in which I can refer to *Quran Karim* and *Vasā'yl al-shi'i* by Hur Āmulī. However, I was able to identify some reliable resources that could assist me in implementing these two concepts in sports including, “*važ'īyyat' shināsī-yi ifāf va hijab dar jumhūrī-yi- Islami-yi-Iran* [Status analysis of chastity and hijab in the Islamic Republic of Iran],” by Ma'sume Amirlu and Nayyereh Ghavi.

Regarding modesty, throughout this master's thesis, extensive references are made to the work of Dr Kristin Soraya Batmanghelich, which examines the effect modesty has on marriage and family in Islamic societies. Batmanghelichi asserts in her dissertation “Revolutions and Rough Cuts: Bodily Technologies for Regulating Sexuality in Contemporary Iran” that sexuality is controlled by procedures such as “sexualization” and “desexualization,” revision and suppression, and refusal and approval.¹⁹ Aside from regulating the bodies of women, sexuality in Iranian society is also managed by incorporating values pertaining to “family, marriage, and modesty.”²⁰ So, the values of family, marriage, and modesty are embedded in Iranian society and are reinforced through laws, social norms, and religious teachings. As such, they serve as a powerful tool for regulating and managing sexuality in Iran.

¹⁹ Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi, “Revolutions and Rough Cuts: Bodily Technologies for Regulating Sexuality,” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2013), (Page 2 in “abstract” part)[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Batmanghelichi_columbia_0054D_11207%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Batmanghelichi_columbia_0054D_11207%20(2).pdf).

²⁰ Ibid, (Page 2 in “abstract” part).

Sport and Women: Social issues on international perspective by Gertrud Pfister provides a good overview of how chastity affects sport in many Islamic countries, including Iran. A notable contribution by Homa Hoodfar is *Women's Sport as Politics in Muslim Contexts*. It is the purpose of this study to describe how sports and gender are viewed in different Muslim countries, including Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Bangladesh, Europe, North America, and Senegal. In the context of their cultural background, social norms related to gender have been discussed. Many of the parts of the book are concerned with women's attempts to participate in sports and manipulate them. Using women-only enclaves as the originating focus of "State and Paradox of Gender Segregation in Iran" by Nazanin Shahrokni, Apart from focusing quickly on the Olympic Games, she offers three points of view regarding changes in Iranian society at large and changes in the Iranian social scene.

In "Hazards of Modernity and Morality: women, state, and Ideology in Contemporary Iran" by Afsaneh Najmabadi, she discusses how the emergence of the Islamic Republic in the late 1960s marked a significant shift in the place and role of women in the Middle East. As the Islamic Republic sought to redefine the role of women in society, it created a new 'woman question' that still resonates today. This question revolves around the rights of women in a modern society, and how Islamic principles should be adapted in order to provide equal rights for women.

Additionally, in the development of this project, several sources subject to governmentality, Iranian women athletes and the Islamic regime were consulted. In addition, this research has relied upon a number of scholarly and peer-reviewed journals which have provided a variety of sources of information that are confidential, including *The Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, and *Iranian Studies*.

Iranian Women Athletes as the Ambassadors of “Chastity” and “Morality” in the Olympic Games after the Iranian Revolution

Introduction

Almost immediately upon returning to Iran in 1979, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini issued a statement that prohibited women from participating in sports of all types.²¹ A fundamental difference between the natures of men and women, according to Khomeini, leads to the assumption that females are subordinate bodily, logically, and spiritually. In this way, the motherhood role was viewed as the most essential function of a woman, perhaps even the only function.²² In addition, the destructive Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), budget shortages, and lack of enthusiasm contributed to women's sporting events dying out. Finally, after approximately eight years, women were permitted to compete in international sports competitions if they adhered to dress codes and wore hijabs.

But the problem was that hijabs worn by female athletes have been deemed an obstacle to their active participation in sports by many international sports federations since the rise of the Islamic regime.²³ Due to this, water sports have been domesticated for women, which means that female athletes competing in these sports are not permitted to participate in international competitions.²⁴ Thus, over the course of the regime's tenure, the body has become a red zone. Acting starts with the empowerment of the body, the compulsory veil has become an integral part of the regime's general and specific ideological consumptions. It reflects not just the exploitation of bodies, but additionally the exploitation of all Iranians. The example illustrates the suppression of the right to speak freely as well as the suppression of freedom in general.²⁵

²¹ Homa Hoodfar, *The Women's Movement in Iran: Women at the Crossroads of Secularization and Islamization*, Volume 1 (Grabels Cedex, France: Women Living Under Muslim Laws, 1999), 23.

[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/women-movement-iran-eng%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/women-movement-iran-eng%20(2).pdf).

²² Gertrud Pfister, "Women and sport in Iran. Keeping goal in the hijab?" in *Sport and Women: Social issues on international perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 209.

<file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/SportandWomen-Socialissuesininternationalperspective.pdf>.

²³ Farideh Reihani, "Az hijab tā nabūdan-i sponsor. Vaz'īyyat-i varzish-yi zanān dar Iran [From the Hijab to the Lack of Sponsorship, the State of Women's Sports in Iran]," BBC Persian, accessed May 5, 2019,

<https://www.bbc.com/persian/blogs-48168105>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Mehr-Afarin Kohan, "Politics of the body in the 'woman, life, freedom' movement in Iran," *Psychotherapy & Politics International* 20, no 4 (2022): 6.

[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/69-Article%20Text-189-1-10-20221219%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/69-Article%20Text-189-1-10-20221219%20(2).pdf).

The purpose of this chapter is to examine how women's bodies were manipulated in the Olympic Games after the Islamic revolution in accordance with "chastity" and "morality" concepts. To create a new public image of Iranian womanhood, one that adhered to Islamic values, these concepts were applied. The new image contrasted sharply with the ideals of the pre-revolution era, which celebrated female power and strength. As a way of demonstrating the values of the Islamic Republic, the image of the "chaste and moral" woman was presented at the Olympics.

An Analysis of the Conceptualization of “Chastity” and “Morality” after the Iranian Revolution

Ifāf (in general, meaning “chastity”) is an Arabic word and concept that means a combination of *pārsāyi* “piety,” *pākdāmanī* “purity,” *pākī* “innocence,” *taqvā* “virtue,” *iffat* “modesty,” and *nijābat* “decency.”²⁶ Keeping chastity means resisting the dominance of lust on the inside and on the outside.²⁷ This is said by Rāqib Isfahānī.²⁸ There is a general and a specific meaning associated with *ifāf*. As a general term, it means "emotional state" that controls and moderates' lust, and its special meaning is the control of sexual lust.²⁹ Regarding this definition, it is said in Quran that: “Tell the believing men to lower their gaze... And tell the believing women to lower their gaze” (Nur 30-31).³⁰

Because among the natural tendencies that exist in humans is the tendency toward the opposite sex, so in Islam, *ifāf* plays a significant role in controlling these tendencies.³¹ To maintain modesty in clothes, one should avoid wearing tight, clingy clothes or thin, revealing clothes that draw attention and show off; instead, one should choose dignity and heaviness in

²⁶ Ali Akbar Dihkhodā, “Ifāf,” *Luġatnāmi-yi dihhudā [Online Encyclopedia Dihkhodā]*, accessed May 13, 2023. <https://dehkhoda.ut.ac.ir/fa/dictionary/%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%81>.

²⁷ العفت حصول حاله للنفس تمنع بها عن غلبه الشهوه

²⁸ He was an eleventh-century Muslim scholar of Qur'anic exegesis and the Arabic language. See: Wikipedia, “Al-Raghib al-Isfahani,” accessed May 20, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Raghib_al-Isfahani.

²⁹ “Ifāf dar Quran bā nigāhī bi rivāyāt [Chastity in the Qur'an with a look at the hadiths],” Alshi'i, accessed May 13, 2023

<https://fa.al-shia.org/%D8%B9%D9%81%D8%A7%D9%81-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D9%82%D8%B1%D8%A2%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D9%86%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%89-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%AA/>.

³⁰ قل للمومنين يقضو من ابصارهم ... و قل للمومنات يغضن من ابصارهن

³¹ Alshi'i, “Ifāf dar Quran bā nigāhī bi rivāyāt [Chastity in the Qur'an with a look at the hadiths].”

the quality of clothing. Imam Ali³² declares: "I advise you to wear thick clothes, since whoever wears thin clothes, his/her religion is thin."³³

Ifāf holds a very high position in Islamic teachings and is always referred to as the most effective means of adjusting human instincts and desires. What has been suggested from the concept of the word *ifāf* and based on which religious moral teachings are derived, is the use of this word in the specific meaning of "hijab," which is part of this way of using this word.³⁴ *Ifāf* has a broader meaning and concept than its narrow definition of covering and hijab. There is no specific gender to *ifāf*, and it has many manifestations, while hijab is an external manifestation of *ifāf*. It is possible to count *ifāf* in action, speech, and thought among its different dimensions of it.³⁵ The different dimensions of *ifāf* in action include ignoring the haram (illegal) gaze, appropriate clothing, moderation in adornment and makeup, moderation in diet, and *ifāf* in poverty and wealth. Avoiding forbidden words and haram thoughts constitutes *ifāf* in speech and thought. It is important to recognize that observing *ifāf* can play the most decisive role in maintaining the path of human moderation and achieving true perfection and happiness.³⁶

Culturally, Iranian womanhood relies on "chastity" and "virtue."³⁷ On the other hand, chastity can be viewed as a virtue and value in desire, which refers to an overarching notion of moderation in lust from an ethical viewpoint.³⁸ Chastity can also be considered as moral purity or the virtue of one's thinking. Chastity and hijab are believed to be crucial Islamic and ethical principles that impact the individual's well-being, safety, growth, and performance.³⁹ State fundamental regulations (such as wearing hijab) were quite strict when it came to

³² The first Imam in shi'i faith

³³ Hur Āmulī, *Vasā'yl-al-shi'i* (Qum: Muassissī Āl-albayt, 1988), 389. And also see: Alshi'i, "Ifāf dar Quran bā nigāhī bi rivāyāt [Chastity in the Qur'an with a look at the hadiths]."

³⁴ Alshi'i, "Ifāf dar Quran bā nigāhī bi rivāyāt [Chastity in the Qur'an with a look at the hadiths]."

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Fae Chubin, "When my virtue defends your borders: Political justification of nation and order through the rhetorical production of womanhood in the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran," *Women's Studies International Forum* 42 (2014): 49.

[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/WSIF2014%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/WSIF2014%20(1).pdf).

³⁸ Mohammad Sa'id Karami, "Irā'i-yi ulgū-yi mafhūmī-yi ifāf-i- jinsī mubtanī bar āyāt-i Quran-i karīm [Presenting a conceptual model of sexual chastity based on verses of Holy Quran]," *Family and Sexual Health Research Journal* 1, no. 1 (winter 2020): 35.

<file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Article.pdf>.

³⁹ Amirlu and Ghavi, "važ'iyyat' shināsī-yi ifāf va hijab dar jumhūrī-yi- Islami-yi Iran [Status analysis of chastity and hijab in the Islamic Republic of Iran]," 9.

Also See: Geoff Harkness, "Out of Bounds: Cultural Barriers to Female Sports Participation in Qatar," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 29, no. 15 (October 2012): 2169.

[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Out_of_Bounds_Cultural_Barriers_to_Femal%20\(3\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Out_of_Bounds_Cultural_Barriers_to_Femal%20(3).pdf).

holding societal affairs accountable. Compulsorily wearing was the hijab. The penalty for being caught without wearing the veil in public varies from hefty sums to 70 lashes. The state also attempted to implement *ifāf* by keeping men and women apart in public spaces, but it failed.⁴⁰

In addition to being a defining concept, the concept of “morality” can also be used to describe ethical principles that all ethical people would follow under certain circumstances, or as a descriptive concept that describes specific standards of behavior prescribed by the religious power of a country.⁴¹ As the Islamic regime in Iran sought to project an image of piety, veiled women became a representation of that ideal. The regime viewed “body image” as antagonistic to women's individuality.⁴² The philosophy of Khomeini posits a hierarchy between men and women⁴³ and a model was created based on the "Islamic-thus-modest" principle and inspired by Fatima, Prophet Muhammad's daughter. She was considered an example of a woman's ideal, especially regarding her commitment to her family, as a married woman and mother.⁴⁴

There is often a political component to the way women dress. Those who adhere to the regime wear the black chador [it is an attire that covers the whole body] (look at figure 1 below) as their official attire. Tweed outerwear paired with petite skirt or trousers with a covering over the head and neck makes an excellent combination. It is considered the most anti-revolutionary to wear fashionable clothing accompanied by adornments such as scarves that reveal the scalp.⁴⁵ “In public, sunglasses, see-through hose, jeans jackets, bright colors, makeup, and nail polish are clearly considered subversive, though they are sometimes tolerated.”⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Haleh Esfandiari, “The Women's Movement,” *The Iran Primer*, October 6, 2010, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/womens-movement>

⁴¹ Bernard Gert and Joshua Gert, “The Definition of Morality,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, first published April 17, 2002, last modified September 8, 2020, accessed May 21, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/ENTRIES/morality-definition/>

⁴² Ashraf Zahedi, “Contested Meaning of the Veil and Political Ideologies of Iranian Regimes,” *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 3 (Fall 2007): 91. [file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/WSIF2014%20\(4\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/WSIF2014%20(4).pdf).

⁴³ Pfister, “Women and sport in Iran. Keeping goal in the hijab?,” 209.

⁴⁴ Nina Hoel and Sa'diyya Shaikh, “Veiling, Secularism and Islamism: Gender Constructions in France and Iran,” *Journal for the Study of Religion* 20, no. 1 (2007): 119. [file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Politics_of_Higher_Ordination_For_Women%20\(4\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Politics_of_Higher_Ordination_For_Women%20(4).pdf).

⁴⁵ Elaine Sciolino, “The Chanel under the Chador,” *The New York Times Magazine*, May 4, 1997, <https://www.nytimes.com/1997/05/04/magazine/the-chanel-under-the-chador.html>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.



Figure 1. A hijab store (*maghāzi-yi hijab*) in Tehran offering a variety type of Chador (Tehran, March 2023).

A Hard Decade for Women’s Sports

On the 9th of September 2019, a heartbreaking tragedy occurred when Sahar Khodayari, known as the “Blue Girl” for wearing the blue of her beloved Iranian football club, Esteghlal, set herself afire in front of a Tehran court, protesting an Iranian law that prohibits women from attending football matches. She passed away due to the severity of her injuries.⁴⁷ Many have called for the repeal of this oppressive law-the prohibition of women from entering stadiums- in response to her death, which has sparked outrage and protests across the nation.⁴⁸

Iranian women are prohibited from entering stadiums where men have played sports since 1979.⁴⁹ To challenge the ban on Iranian women watching sports in stadiums, they have staged protests and created online campaigns. During the 2018 season, the ban was temporarily lifted, allowing a small number of women to attend a men's volleyball match.⁵⁰ This is because if the fact that they cannot legally view those parts of a man's body which are usually covered, such as above the knee and below the thigh. This is the look of women, so it

⁴⁷ Claude Sobry, “From a Theocracy to Transmodernism, So far from each other: The Example of Sport in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” in *International Perspectives on Sport for Sustainable Development, 195-201*, eds. Claude Sobry and Kazem Hozhabry (Cham: Springer, 2022), 196.
<file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/SportVectorDevelopTransparency.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ “Nukhustīn hūzūr [The first presentation],” Tabnak, last modified 8 May, 2023, <https://www.tabnak.ir/fa/tags/40499/1/%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%B2%D8%B4%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

is *haram* (illegal), and we should not allow a woman into the stadium, since entering is the prelude to the opinion, and preventing it from being fulfilled.⁵¹ Even though there is no law prohibiting women from entering stadiums, either in the constitution or in any other law of the country, women are prevented from entering.⁵² It has been suggested that the stadium environment is not conducive to women and that men do not respect the etiquette in the stadiums and may insult the opposing team from time to time.⁵³

Prior to the qualifying matches for the Asian Youth Cup slated for July 1994, the news broke that women would be able to participate. Several right-wing newspapers such as *Risālat* and *Jumūrī-yi Islami* have raised concerns about the offensive comments made by male football spectators who made sporting arenas an unwelcoming place for women as well as concerning the disrespectful clothes worn by male footballers.⁵⁴ However, on July 18, 1994, the “Physical Education Organization” provided a dedicated area of the venue for five hundred female attendees in response to a plan approved by the President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.⁵⁵ But a fatwa (religious ruling) authored by Supreme Leader Khamenei was released one year later, saying: “An unrelated woman should not view the naked body of an unrelated man, even if she does not intend to derive lust from it.”⁵⁶

Aside from this restriction, as previously mentioned, Iranian Muslim women were barred from participating in sports contests and the Olympics after the Islamic Republic came to power in 1979.⁵⁷ But finally, it has been permitted for Iranian women to participate in sports abroad since the early 1990s, almost ten years following the establishment of the IRI, although only at competitions where dress codes were adhered to.⁵⁸ Shortly after, women's

⁵¹ “Zanān va man‘-i shar‘ī-yi vurūd bi stadium [Women and the Islamic ban on entering the stadium],” Vokala press, accessed May 23, 2023,

<https://vokalapress.ir/%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%88-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%B9-%D8%B4%D8%B1%D8%B9%DB%8C-%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%AF%DB%8C%D9%88%D9%85/>

⁵² “Vurūd-i- bānuvān bi varzishgāh mannū‘, chirā? [Women are not allowed to enter the stadium! Why?],” Didar independent analytical-news media, last modified 09 May 2018,

<https://www.didarnews.ir/fa/news/1159/%D9%88%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%AF-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%B2%D8%B4%DA%AF%D8%A7%D9%87-%D9%85%D9%85%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B9-%DA%86%D8%B1%D8%A7>

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Shahrokni, “State and Paradox of Gender Segregation in Iran (PhD diss.),” 58. Also see: Houchang Chehabi, “A Political History of Football in Iran,” *Iranian Studies* 35, no. 4 (2002): 246.

[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/A Political History of Football in Iran%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/A Political History of Football in Iran%20(2).pdf).

⁵⁵ Ibid, 58. Also see Chehabi, “A Political History of Football in Iran,” 246.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 58. Also see Chehabi, “A Political History of Football in Iran,” 246.

⁵⁷ Pfister, “Women and sport in Iran. Keeping goal in the hijab?,” 216.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

football in Iran was forgotten at some points because of the chaotic political situation following the end of the Pahlavi regime and the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979.⁵⁹ Thirteen years later, in 1992, women's football was revived for the first time in Al-Zahra University (former Farah) with indoor futsal matches held for the first time, but this year women were only allowed to participate in indoor futsal matches. In the following years, the women's national football team was reformed and prepared for competition.⁶⁰

Furthermore, since the 1979 revolution, women have been prohibited from participating in boxing in Iran. The Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs of the 10th government⁶¹ banned women's sports, of which only kickboxing and Muay Thai were active in Iran. These two fields of sports are considered to be harmful to the health of women, and the prevailing culture of these fields and their competitions are incompatible with Islamic and Iranian values and customs.⁶² Women have been also prohibited from participating in bodybuilding in Iran. In accordance with the Iranian Bodybuilding Federation, women are permitted to train in gyms only for exercise purposes, but they do not have the right to compete. These restrictions led to the departure of several female bodybuilders from Iran in the past few years, including Hoda Jarrah and Mona Poursaleh.⁶³

Women's Sports in the Era of a Lenient Ayatollah

In 1989, after the passing of Khomeini, the balance between the clergy and the government shifted. The successor of Khomeini, Ali Khamenei, aimed to strengthen his position by amplifying the power of unelected officials, representing the ideological viewpoint of the

⁵⁹ "Tārikhchih-yi football-i zanān dar Iran [The History of Women's Football in Iran]," *Footballdokht*, last modified March 24, 2020,

<https://footballdokht.ir/577-%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AE%DA%86%D9%87-%D9%81%D9%88%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%84-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%DA%A9%D8%B3.html>

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ After Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won the election on June 12, 2009, the 10th government was formed.

⁶² Mehdi Afsharzadeh, "Varzishhā- yi mamnū'h barāyi zanān-i-Iran [The Prohibited Sports for Iranian Women]," *Virgool*, accessed May 21, 2023,

<https://virgool.io/@mehdiafsharzadeh/%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%B2%D8%B4-%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D9%85%D9%86%D9%88%D8%B9%D9%87-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%86-lfrih9i2a6uk>

⁶³ Ibid.

government over legislative bodies, and expressing the government's political agenda despite lacking the charismatic personality and moral character of Khomeini.⁶⁴

In his youth, Khamenei played volleyball, mountain climbing, and other sports, and he continues to do so in recent years.⁶⁵ He believes that Islam generally supports and encourages sports and has a positive opinion towards it.⁶⁶

Regarding sports Khamenei stated:

“When our athletes achieve a victory in such arenas and when they are ranked first, they chant the slogan of "Ya Hossein,"⁶⁷ prostrate themselves and hold up their hands and thank God. Do you know how excited the Islamic Ummah and Muslim nations become when you do this? In sports arenas, our outstanding youth - not ordinary youth - give such prominence to spirituality in a world in which there is an effort to make young individuals decadent and turn their backs on spirituality...”⁶⁸

By making this statement, Khamenei is attempting to establish a link between religion and sports. According to him, participation in sports is an expression of one's commitment to Shia chastity.

As a result of his positive attitude toward sports, early in the 1990s, the regime adjusted its strategy regarding sports. The government has acknowledged and endorsed the athletic and recreational aspects of sports.⁶⁹ In comparison with the period prior to the Iranian Revolution, women have made significant strides forward in terms of their interest and involvement in sports upon the leadership of Ali Khamenei (1989).⁷⁰ In sports, women have

⁶⁴ Ziba Mir-Hosseini and Vanja Hamzić, *Control and Sexuality. The Revival of Zina Laws in Muslim Contexts* (London: Women Living Under Muslim Laws, 2010), 90-91.

[WLUML-Control-and-Sexuality-revival-of-zina-laws-in-Muslim-contexts-Mir-Hosseini-Hamzic \(3\).pdf](#).

⁶⁵ “Huzūr-i zanān dar barkhī varzish’hā hīch munāfatī bā mavāzīn-i islamī nadārad [The presence of women in some sports does not contradict Islamic standards],” Mashregh News, last modified July 12, 2017,

<https://www.mashreghnews.ir/news/736451/%D8%AD%D8%B6%D9%88%D8%B1-%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%AE%DB%8C-%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%B2%D8%B4-%D9%87%D8%A7-%D9%87%DB%8C%DA%86-%D9%85%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%81%D8%A7%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D8%A7-%D9%85%D9%88%D>

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ In Shi'i faith, Hossein is the third Imam, and Shi'i people say "Ya Hossein" when they ask for mental assistance from him.

⁶⁸ “Khamenei Comments II: Islam’s Rules on Sports,” *The Iran Primer*, April 2, 2013, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2013/apr/02/khamenei-comments-ii-islam%E2%80%99s-rules-sports>

⁶⁹ Shahrokni, “State and Paradox of Gender Segregation in Iran (PhD dissertation),” 57.

⁷⁰ Sciolino, “The Chanel under the Chador.”

experienced a profound shift from being excluded from playing sports to engaging in a range of cooperative and competitive sports.⁷¹

However, to legitimize sports, the Islamic regime requires them to be conducted in an environment in which only women are present. Increasingly, women are competing in sports where they are visible to men, such as skiing, water-skiing, and bicycling, even when wearing bulky clothing that restricts their movements.⁷² Contrary to the early 1980s, officials in the 1990s began promoting Iranian women's active involvement in sports⁷³ and benefited from the privilege of being able to participate in international sports contests, but only for events that were compliant with Islamic dress codes.⁷⁴ The competitions include “chess, sport shooting, horse-riding, kayaking, and karate for girls.”⁷⁵

Women’s Sports during the Hashemi Rafsanjani Presidency (1989-1997)

An unprecedented chapter in Iranian political history began following the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 and Khomeini's death in June 1989. Women were pivotal to the election of Rafsanjani as president in 1989 and his subsequent re-election in 1993. He was enthusiastically endorsed by women after a series of modifications were made within the confines of Islamic law.⁷⁶

During his speech to 80.000 people at Tehran's Azadi Stadium in November 1994, Hashemi Rafsanjani stated that Islam and the Revolution have envisioned greater opportunities for women.⁷⁷ During the 1990s, secular journals for women increased dramatically as a result of a greater diversity of publications. The reforms began under the administration of Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and were intensified under the administration of Mohammed Khatami from 1997 to 2005.⁷⁸

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ali Ziaee, Jacco van Sterkenburg and Ivo van Hilvoorde, "Female elite sports achievements in Iran: The Case of the First Olympic Medalist," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 58, no. 1(2022): 4. [file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/10126902221088124%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/10126902221088124%20(2).pdf).

⁷⁴ Pfister, "Women and sport in Iran. Keeping goal in the hijab," 216.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Hanna Andrew, "Part 1: Phases of the Women’s Movement," *The Iran Primer*, August 11, 2020, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2020/aug/11/iranian-womens-movement-four-phases>

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Nikkie R. Keddie, "Iranian Women’s Status and Struggles since 1979," *Journal of International Affairs* (2007): 26-27.

During his presidency, aside from supporting women's sports leagues, Hashemi spearheaded the implementation of athletic facilities and physical exercises in Iran.⁷⁹ The “Women’s Sports Affairs Directorate” was a sports commission for women that first established a committee for implementing women's sports in 1981 to handle all affairs pertaining to women's sports. The department was reconfigured in 1985 and in 1989 its name became "Physical Education and Sports Affairs" for women. Back then, the Senior Sports Commissioner supervised all women's sports.⁸⁰ Only women were allowed to participate in female sports in their normative forms. Women's covering evidently acts as the primary basis for the making of female sports. Nevertheless, there is still controversy over how women behave as fans. Ultimately, this led to a confrontation and a dramatic breakthrough when women sought to take part in male sports overall and in soccer stadiums specifically.⁸¹ Also, Ali Akbar Hashemi’s support for cycling was one of the many ways that Hashemi encouraged women to get involved in sports and exercise.⁸²

The National Iranian Olympic Committee was founded in 1989 by Faezeh Hashemi, a daughter of former Iranian president, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. As a result of her efforts, women's sports in Iran greatly flourished. Women's sports had more funds than ever before during that period because the war with Iraq was over. There were no male spectators allowed at the Muslim Women's Games, which were hosted in Tehran in 1993, 1997, and 2001.⁸³

Faezeh Hashemi, in an interview with *Shargh* newspaper, stated about the first appearance of Iranian female athletes in an international event:

“At that time, our girls were not allowed to go abroad. They competed only in domestic events, and this resulted in a lack of motivation on their part. Since our girls are

⁷⁹ Yasmeeen Iqbal Qureshi and Soniha Aslam Ghour, "Muslim Female Athletes in Sport and Dress Code: Major Obstacle in International Competition," *Journal of Experimental Sciences* 2, no. 11 (2011): 10. <file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/10.Muslimfemaleathletesinsportsanddresscodemajorobstacleininternationalcompetitions.pdf>.

⁸⁰ Maryam Koushkie Jahromi, Tansin Benn, Gertrud Pfister and, Haifaa Jawad, “Physical activities and sport for women in Iran” in *Muslim Women and Sport* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 116. https://books.google.no/books?id=ap5AgAAQBAJ&lpg=PA109&ots=ieLXzS2_fm&dq=Physical%20activities%20and%20sport%20for%20women%20in%20Iran&lr&pg=PA109#v=onepage&q=Physical%20activities%20and%20sport%20for%20women%20in%20Iran&f=false.

⁸¹ Alireza Hassanzadeh, "Iranian Women, Inside or Outside of the Stadium? An Anthropological Study on Female Representation of National Identity in Iran," *Journal of Sociology of Social Institution* 5, no. 12 (2019): 82. file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/SSI_Volume%205_Issue%2012_Pages%2073-100.pdf.

⁸² Koushkie Jahromi, “Physical activities and sport for women in Iran,” 116.

⁸³ Pfister, "Women and sport in Iran. Keeping goal in the hijab?," 217.

having difficulty leaving the country and participating in various competitions as a result of the hijab issue, we suggested organizing competitions for Islamic countries so that our girls can prove their ability as well as gain motivation again.”⁸⁴

As with the First Muslim Women's Games, the Second Muslim Women's Games were hosted in December 1997. The event was attended by sixteen countries, and no athletes from eight Islamic countries participated. Tehran hosted the Muslim Women's Games again in 2001. In the wake of the events on September 11, 2001, and the war in Afghanistan, there were twenty delegations from forty countries scheduled to participate, but the number of competing countries dropped to twenty-seven.⁸⁵

Likewise, during his presidency, women were finally allowed to compete in Asian sports competitions, but their clothing was required to conform to Islamic standards and laws (at shooting events in particular).⁸⁶ The first appearance of women wearing Islamic hijab at the Asian Games in Beijing was with the participation of six female shooters, wearing a veil. After that, the conditions for women's participation in international sports improved and women were even able to participate in these games by winning the Olympic quota.⁸⁷ Following the IRI, Lida Fariman was the first female player to compete at an Olympic event. Fariman participated in the 10-meter air rifle shooting and was able to get 47th place.⁸⁸ In the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, she was the flag bearer of Iran's sports caravan and with her veiled presence in this big event, she unveiled the female symbol of the Islamic Republic of Iran, that is, what the regime wanted to show about Iranian women.⁸⁹

The History of Women's Sports after the Election of Mohammad Khatami in 1997

A new phase of the effort for gender equality after the IRI began in 1997 by means of the Reformist movement. As part of the battle between “conservatives” and “reformers,” it

⁸⁴ Saeid Pirmahmoui, “Tab’iz-i-jinsiyatī [Gender Discrimination],” Iran International, last modified July 7, 2020, <https://old.iranintl.com/%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%B2%D8%B4/%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B9%DB%8C%D8%B6-%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%AA%DB%8C>.

⁸⁵ Pfister, “Women and sport in Iran. Keeping goal in the hijab?,” 217.

⁸⁶ Javani, “Sport and Gender Equity, The Case of Iran,” 190.

⁸⁷ S. Montazeri, “Varzish-i zanān talāsh-i rahāyī [Women’s Sports, Liberation Efforts],” Navid-i nu, last modified March 6, 2020, <http://www.rahman-hatefi.net/navidenou-1037-98-472-981217.htm>.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

became a focal point for the battle between the two parties.⁹⁰ As they did when the Islamic Republic was founded in 1979, the clerical establishment⁹¹ is now going through a new stage of reform that is also proving divisive. The theocratic state is standing on fragile foundations following the eruption of this confrontation for control. Although the Special Court for the Religious Council acts as an investigation court, it can silence voices supporting moderate and inclusive Islam.⁹² According to Mir-Hosseini, “it also gave birth to a reformist movement and a vocal press that are paving the way, against intense and sometimes violent opposition from part of the clerical establishment, for ‘democracy Iranian style’.”⁹³

Upon the election of Khatami as president and the opening of the political space in the country, women's football was revived. This was the time when the national women's football team was reformed and prepared for competition. In every federation, it was established under the title of vice president of women, and women's sports became more prominent.⁹⁴ After obtaining the permission of the Overseas Sports Council, the women's football team was able to participate in Asian Games and became the runner-up in its first appearance at the West Asian Games.⁹⁵ It was then that women's football began to gain momentum, and in 2007, Iranian women made it to the second round of the Asian Nations Cup after defeating India in the preliminary stages. This was the first time Iranian women participated seriously in a football competition. Women footballers in 1984 without no noise news participated in the West Asian Games in Jordan. In both fields, they performed better than expected and placed second.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "The Conservative: Reformist Conflict over Women's Right in Iran," *International Politics, Cultures, and Society* 16, no. 1 (Fall 2002): 50.

file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/The_Conservative_Reformist_Conflict_Over.pdf.

⁹¹ Ruhollah Khomeini and his conservative adherents established a philosophy that validated the authority of the clergy. Their credibility and respectability have been established through Khomeini's commitment to upholding religious authority, his dedication to governing in accordance with the will of God, and their dominating explanation of Islamic law. For this see: Marvin Zonis, “The Rule of the Clerics in the Islamic Republic of Iran,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 482, no. 1 (1985), 85.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1046384>.

⁹² Mir-Hosseini, "The Conservative: Reformist Conflict over Women's Right in Iran," 51.

⁹³ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, “Debating Women: Gender and the Public Sphere in Post-Revolutionary Iran,” in *Civil Society in the Muslim World: Contemporary Perspectives* (London: I.B Tauris & Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2002): 97.

[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/A_Political_History_of_Football_in_Iran%20\(3\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/A_Political_History_of_Football_in_Iran%20(3).pdf).

⁹⁴ Sara Mohaqiq, “Murūri bar varzish-i bānuvān ghabl va ba’d az inghilāb dar Iran [An overview of women's sports before and after the revolution in Iran],” Danishgāh, last modified May 17, 2008,

<http://3886.blogfa.com/post/204>.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

It was due to Khatami's reformist attitude toward women that Iranian women's sports enjoyed a successful year in 2002. At the 2002 Busan Olympics in Korea, Iran's women's 10m pistol team broke a streak of no medals for women by winning a silver medal among several competing teams. In Busan, South Korea, Nasim Hasanpour won the silver medal in the 10-meter shooting competition and became known as Iran's first medal winner in international competitions.⁹⁷

The 2006, 2008, and 2010 Olympic Games during the Presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013)

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's coming to power has been accompanied by the establishment of police forces and police patrols, which suppress peaceful gatherings of women under the guise of fighting hijab.⁹⁸ As a result of Ahmadinejad's presidency, the police have adopted a repressive and violent approach. Police officers repeatedly beat and arrested these women during the 22 June Solidarity Day of Iranian Women and the March 8 International Women's Day ceremonies, as well as in front of sports stadiums.⁹⁹ Although women were under a great deal of pressure and restrictions during this period, he attempted to portray himself as a defender of women's rights.

Thus, during his presidency, Ahmadinejad ordered women to enter stadiums, which became the subject of headlines. Nevertheless, the order soon generated controversy and some clerics reacted sharply to it. The religious authorities oppose this order and declare it to be "forbidden and corrupting."¹⁰⁰ In this way, in a letter to the president, Makarem Shirazi advises him to consult with the clerics before issuing such decrees. Because the country's issues cannot be solved overnight and with one decision.¹⁰¹ Also, Mohammad Yazdi [One conservative and non-conformist religious leader] and Ahmad Jannati [One official of the

⁹⁷ Parvaneh Hosseini, "Varzish-i zanān ba'd az inghilāb: ḥuẓūr-i-zanān-i-varzishkār-i Irāni dar miyānhā-yi varzishī-yi jahānī [Women's Sport after the Revolution: the Presence of Iranian Women Athletes in the World Sports Fields]," BBC News, last modified April 9, 2014.

https://www.bbc.com/persian/sport/2014/05/140409_156_women_sport_iran_parvaneh_hossini.

⁹⁸ "Kārnāmih-yi du sālih-yi Ahmadinejad; zanān va du sāl-i nā'ārām [Ahmadinejad's two-year record; Women and two restless years]," Radio Farda, June 24, 2007,

https://www.radiofarda.com/a/01_wemen_after_ahmadinejad/399214.html.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ "30 janjāl-i yik ra'īs jumhūr (3); dastūr-i vurūd-i zanān bi varzishgāh [30 controversies of a president; The order for women to enter stadiums]," Radio Farda, May 20, 2013,

<https://www.radiofarda.com/a/f7-ahmadinejad-controversies-part3-on-women-attendance-in-stadiums/24990911.html>.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Guardian Council (*Shourā-ye Nigahbān*) and a conservative cleric] expressed regret for the president's order, but also stressed the illegality of mixing men and women, and that the order for women to enter the stadium should be canceled.¹⁰²

During his presidency, female athletes were asked to adhere to a dress code and in this way, during the 2012 London Olympics qualification match in the Asia region, which was hosted by Jordan, the female soccer players of Iran were excluded due to the simultaneous use of hats and masks, as determined by the FIFA representative.¹⁰³

After two years, Iranian female athletes were once again able to win medals at the Asian Games. As part of the Iranian delegation to the 2006 Asian Games in Doha, Qatar, 26 female athletes were present, three of whom won medals. The Asian competitions in Qatar were the first to recognize the presence of women in a variety of disciplines. The participation of Iranian women in sports may be difficult, but it is not impossible, as Mehrooz Saeed and Afsana Sheikhi have won bronze medals in Taekwondo and Atusa Pourkashian has won a bronze medal in team chess.¹⁰⁴

During the 2008 Beijing Olympics Homa Hosseini participated in rowing, Najmeh Abtin in Tirokman, and Sara Khosh Jamal Fekri participated in Taekwondo.¹⁰⁵ In the 2010 Asian Games in Guangzhou, Khadijah Azadpour was able to win the first individual gold medal for Iranian women in the history of the Asian Games in Wushu. In this tournament, Iran reached fourth place in the 2010 Asian Games with the championship of Khadijah Azadpour, the runner-up of the girls' shooting team, the bronze medal of the rowing team, and the medals of the taekwondo girls.¹⁰⁶ This time, the presence of Iranian women in sports fields outside the country was criticized by domestic opponents. Hujjat-al Islam Seyyed Mohammad Gharavi, a member of the Central Council of Qom Seminary Teachers' Society, criticized the radio and television for covering and broadcasting images related to women's sports in the Gwangju competitions and said:

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Afsharzadeh, "Varzishhā-yi mamnū'ih barāyi zanān-i Iran [The Prohibited Sports for Iranian Women]."

¹⁰⁴ "Varzish-i bānuvān pas az pīrūzī-yi inghilāb [Women's Sports after the Victory of the Revolution]," Analytical News base of 361 Degrees of Iran, last modified May 14, 2023, <https://i361.ir/%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%B2%D8%B4-%D8%A8%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%BE%D8%B3-%D8%A7%D8%B2-%D9%BE%DB%8C%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%B2%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%82%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%86/>

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

“I ask the authorities to reconsider the presence of women in the world competitions.”¹⁰⁷

Due to this, after returning to Iran, the female athletes were disrespected and Khadijah Azadpour was denied the apartment bonus that was promised to the gold medal winners before the competition. [The sports ministry] stated that the Asian wushu champion that this reward will only be given to you if you get married. After Khadija Azadpour's protest became controversial in the media, the authorities prevented the continuation of the story by donating 20 houses to 20 heroes.¹⁰⁸

The First Women's Olympic Medalist after the IRI

To ease some of the restrictions placed on Iranians by his predecessors, Hassan Rouhani announced a plan to permit women to attend some athletic events.¹⁰⁹ During his presidency, morals police were scaled back in the country's largest cities. It was more acceptable for women to wear outrageous and vibrant apparel, intricate makeup, and trend-setting hairstyles. Women's trends and women designers have increased their activities in Tehran.¹¹⁰ Additionally, it has been asserted by the president that the police should be empowered to enforce the law rather than relying on Islamic principles.¹¹¹ Despite Rouhani's status as a clergyman, he has condemned the police for applying Iran's restrictive "Islamic dress code," which obliges women to cover their hair and bodies.¹¹² In this way, he stated:

“Our virtuous women should feel safe and relaxed in the presence of the police.”¹¹³

During Rouhani's authority, in 2016, women's volleyball and handball made their first international appearances since the Iranian revolution.¹¹⁴ Also, because of wearing a hijab, "Maral Mardani", a member of the Iranian women's judo team, was not able to compete

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ “Iranian women and sport: every obstacle an opportunity,” *The Guardian*, April 20, 2015,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2015/apr/19/iran-women-sports-stadium-competitive-obstacles>.

¹¹⁰ Haleh Esfandiari, “The Women's Movement.” Also see: Rebecca Gould, “Hijab as Commodity form: veiling, unveiling, and misveiling in Contemporary Iran,” *Feminist Theory* 221, no. 15 (2014): p 231.

[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/document%20\(5\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/document%20(5).pdf).

¹¹¹ Gould, “Hijab as Commodity form: Veiling, Unveiling, and Misveiling in Contemporary Iran,” p 231.

¹¹² Garrett Nada, “Rouhani Under Fire,” *The Iran Primer*, May 15, 2014,

<https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2014/may/15/rouhani-under-fire>.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Sara Mohaqiq, “Murūī bar varzish-i bānuvān ghabl va ba'd az inghilāb dar Iran [An overview of women's sports before and after the revolution in Iran].”

during the 2018 Youth Olympic Games in Argentina. Note that the World Judo Federation had previously announced to the Islamic Republic of Iran that athletes wearing a hijab will not be permitted to compete.¹¹⁵

During Rohani's authority, Kimia Alizadeh became a sporting sensation at the 2016 Rio Olympics in Brazil by taking home for Iran an Olympic bronze medal in taekwondo.¹¹⁶ Despite the accolades she garnered in the press and in the community for her accomplishments, there were also negative debates denigrating her achievement, in which Ayatollah Abdullah Javadi Amoli stated that "it is not virtuous for a woman to stretch her legs!"¹¹⁷ She has fought hard to become a sporting champion in a country that has been struggling with the clash between tradition and modernity for more than a century. Her success was a great moment in Iranian history for women in general, athletics or otherwise, Kimia's victory inspired achievement and rekindled the flames of hope for triumph in the face of limitations and hardship.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ S. Montazeri, "Varzish-i zanān talāsh-i rahāyi [Women's Sports, Liberation Efforts]."

¹¹⁶ Javani, "Sport and Gender Equity, The Case of Iran," 184.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. Also see: "Iranian women and sport: every obstacle an opportunity," *The Guardian*, April 20, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2015/apr/19/iran-women-sports-stadium-competitive-obstacles>.

¹¹⁸ Javani, "Sport and Gender Equity, The Case of Iran," 184.

The Manipulation of Minds and Bodies of Iranian Women Athletes according to IRI's "Chastity" and "Morality"

Introduction

Immediately after the new regime was established in Iran, it began to focus on consolidating its power and authority throughout the country. For this purpose, it attempted to implement an Islamic government that would bring order and stability to the nation. Accordingly, the new regime would have to enact laws, regulations, and policies that were in accordance with Islamic teachings.¹¹⁹

Using a framework of three theoretical streams, I analyze my case studies to examine the impact of chastity on sport in post-revolutionary Iran. My theoretical interventions address a specific aspect of the burgeoning connection between chastity, women, sport, and state power in post-revolutionary Iran.

A Glance at Foucault's "Governmentality"

A sovereign and a governmental authority have two distinct functions of constraining and generating power. In general, sovereign power can be defined as authority over a region, whereas governmentality can be defined as the management of its residents. Thus, governmentality is concerned with how its constituents are treated.¹²⁰ The purpose of a government is to influence public behavior through deliberate tactics. As a concise definition, it could be described as the "conduct of conduct."¹²¹ Governments cultivate desires as well as shape behaviors, ambitions, and attitudes to accomplish these objectives.¹²² As Foucault asserts, the notion of "governmentality" is the basis for his analysis of contemporary governments, which span a wide period of history from Greco-Roman times to the present.¹²³ "Governmentality" refers to Foucault's theory of the mutual formation of methods of power and the emergence of forms of authority and intervening forms. Acting on power is explained

¹¹⁹ Shahrokni, "State and Paradox of Gender Segregation in Iran (PhD diss)," 33-34.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 22.

¹²¹ Tania Murray Li, "Governmentality," *Anthropologica* 49, no. 2 (2007): 275.

[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/The Conservative Reformist Conflict Over%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/The%20Conservative%20Reformist%20Conflict%20Over%20(1).pdf).

¹²² Ibid, 275.

¹²³ Thomas Lemke, "An indigestible meal? Foucault, governmentality, and state theory," *Distinktion, Scandinavian journal for social theory* (2007): 44.

[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/document%20\(4\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/document%20(4).pdf).

within the discourse-based context of political authority.¹²⁴ To accomplish this, there are a variety of methods available, including the establishment of ideas, the definition of concepts, limitations, and the formulation of justifications and arguments. In this regard, the government facilitates the identification of problems and provides specific solutions for dealing with them.¹²⁵

It would be impossible to understand how powers are exercised other than by analyzing the "political rationality" that underpins them, given the conceptual connection between governing and thinking. In spite of this, there is another element of comparable importance.¹²⁶ The concept of "government" is used extensively by Foucault in his books and articles, emphasizing the interconnection between power and individuality. Throughout the 18th century, Foucault demonstrates that the term "government" had a broader meaning than it does today, implying only a political meaning. Now, the concept of government encompasses not only the management of the country, but also self-control, parental guidance, household management, and spiritual guidance.¹²⁷ In Foucault's view, power consists of the privilege of being able to construct spaces, ideas, concepts, and meanings.¹²⁸ In this way, according to Foucault, governmentality was "understood in the broad sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behavior, government of children, government of souls, government of a household, of a state or of oneself."¹²⁹

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault mentions:

“What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it... Thus, discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, “docile” bodies.”¹³⁰

In the context of this debate, Foucault's notion of power and governmentality gives a lens to better explore how the Iranian current regime governs women's bodies and shapes female athletes' appearance. The assumption of established norms is an example of Foucault's (1977) definition of normalization. In order to normalize or characterize something, it is

¹²⁴ Ibid, 44.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 45-46.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 194.

¹²⁹ Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth. Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984*, Volume 1, Translated to English by Robert Hurley, ed. by Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997): 81.

file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Foucault_Michel_Ethics_Subjectivity_and_Truth.pdf.

¹³⁰ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 138.

necessary to establish an ideal moral standard and to implement a systematic method of encouraging or condemning those who follow or violate it.¹³¹

A Glance at Feminist Theories by Mir-Hosseini and Haeri

Control and Sexuality by Ziba Mir-hosseini and Vanja Hamzić is a feminist and socially conscious assessment of the “zina laws” in Muslim contexts, which deem any sexual activity without a marriage contract unlawful. In this book, Mir-hosseini means by pointing to Islamic legislation, procedures, and traditions, Muslim authorities attempted to undermine the freedoms of women in Muslim countries by using a justification of "religion and culture."¹³² In this way, moral laws are simply a set of moral principles that God has established for us, which governments and communities are expected to observe. This has resulted in the use of these laws by Islamic governments as a means of exerting control and authority over the entire society's sexual orientation.¹³³ So, for example, “zina” laws were reinstated primarily for political reasons; in particular, to acquire or retain authority and control and “zina-related” policies are often disguised as "moralist religious veneers" and tend to control both social and interpersonal practices of the Muslim community.¹³⁴

This approach is employed in this paper to provide a comprehensive and unified framework for the concepts of "Chastity" and "Morality" in sports when it comes to the participation of women in international sports competitions. The laws and values of the dominant group serve to strengthen the political system that has been established.¹³⁵ In this paper, by examining this book, I consider the Islamic regime as an authority that exercises a great deal of control over female athletes participating in the Olympic games, closely monitoring their behavior and appearance, and punishing any breach of the Islamic codes of modesty. Even so, many female athletes have managed to compete in the Olympic games with remarkable courage and strength, showing that they are just as capable and talented as their male counterparts. In fact, to be accepted in society, Muslim women are expected to

¹³¹ Nisara Jiwani, “Islam, Hijab and Young Shia Muslim Canadian Women’s Discursive Constructions of Physical Activity,” *Sociology of Sport Journal* 27, no. 3 (2010): 254.

[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/jiwani_rail_2010%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/jiwani_rail_2010%20(1).pdf).

¹³² Mir-Hosseini and Hamzić, *Control and Sexuality*, p 4.

¹³³ Ibid, p 7.

¹³⁴ Ibid, p 15.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p 1.

adhere to a certain standard of chastity and morality, and this standard has been imposed on female athletes who participate in the Olympic games.

The article “Temporary Marriage and the State in Iran: An Islamic Discourse on Female Sexuality” by Shahla Haeri demonstrates that in Iran, Shi'i clergy have identified the ineffectiveness of opposing sexual desire by providing a morally suitable framework, in this instance a "sighe," or temporary marriage, that contains and regulates it.¹³⁶ It is explained that in the sacred literature of Shi'is, the subjects of “marriage, divorce, and child custody” is given great consideration, whereas the subject of female sexuality is given much less attention.¹³⁷ But as a result of the modernization process and the influence of western culture, as well as growing public awareness of feminist issues, Shi'i scholars have also had to reevaluate Islamic law as it pertains to individuals.¹³⁸ This has led to the introduction of ‘temporary marriage’ as a modern solution, Islamic framework, and a moral approach to resolving the sex issue in society.

Using this analysis as a model, it can be suggested that a possible solution is to ensure that female athletes from Muslim countries are provided with a dress code that complies with their religious beliefs. Providing female athletes with clothing and garments that are both modest and practical for sporting activities may be one way to achieve this end and all these measures are essential to ensuring that Muslim female athletes can compete in the Olympic Games while adhering to the values of chastity and morality and presenting the Islamic values of the established regime in their country to all people around the world.

Hijab as a Political Product to Islamize Sports

On Isfand 6, 1357 (February 25, 1979), Khomeini addressed the congregation making strong assertions about the Islamic government. He said that there should be no sin in the Islamic Ministry and that it should be a place of purity. Women should not be naked from now and should be allowed to work as long as they wear the appropriate hijab.¹³⁹ The main concern during the first decade following the revolution was the cleansing and purging of the

¹³⁶ Shahla Haeri, “Temporary marriage and the state in Iran: An Islamic discourse on female sexuality,” *Social Research* (1992): p 209. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40970689>.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 210.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifa Noor*, Volume 5 (Tehran: Institute for Organizing and Publishing Imam’s Works, 1362/1983), 150.

community and the female population. This purification appears to be an attempt by the newly elected government to restrict women to household duties, as it appears as if it is an aggressive strike against all the gains women in urban settings have made over the past five decades.¹⁴⁰

Thus, upon the regime came to power, the new concept of a woman was considered as protector of Islamic values and ensure that they were upheld in society. As an example of modesty, piety, and loyalty, she was expected to promote a culture of respect for the Islamic faith. As a result, it was a far cry from the notion of womanhood that had been prevalent in the West.¹⁴¹ However, dress code regulations have been enacted by the government since 1982 and none of these requirements or rules specify how this rule must be followed and adhered to in different situations. Before 1998, when Khatami achieved stunning success, there was no code of conduct governing the hijab to promote an Islamic way of life and to preserve Islamic principles.¹⁴²

But following the revolution, Khomeini and *faqih*s (shi'i scholars in the body of the Islamic regime who have the responsibility to decide on religious issues in society), believed that the visual style of Iranians had to be "revolutionized."¹⁴³ A new set of policies has been introduced by the new regime to govern the exterior aspects of the municipality. Rather than wearing outfits reminiscent of European wearing clothes, the men wore tucked in pants and untucked navy dresses, and hairless features gave way to hairy ones. Considering the sacred significance of the veil, it became a compulsory requirement for women and reflected the breakdown of Pahlavi's period when hijab was not obligatory.¹⁴⁴

During Khamenei's leadership, to provide an ideal woman in society, covered women have been used to point out their disconnection and isolation from European norms.¹⁴⁵ In the same vein, by asking women athletes to adhere hijab, the regime attempted to Islamize sports

¹⁴⁰ Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Hazards of modernity and morality: Women, state and ideology in contemporary Iran," in *Women, Islam and the State* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 69.

[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Hazards_of_modernity_and_morality_Women%20\(4\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Hazards_of_modernity_and_morality_Women%20(4).pdf).

¹⁴¹ Arezoo Osanloo, "Islamico-Civil 'Rights Talk:' Women, Subjectivity, and Law in Iranian," *American Ethnologist* (2006): 196.

file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Islamico_civil_rights_talk_Women_subject.pdf.

¹⁴² Kristin Soraya Batmanghelichi, "Revolutions and Rough Cuts: Bodily Technologies for Regulating Sexuality, PhD diss.," 225.

¹⁴³ Shahrokni, "State and Paradox of Gender Segregation in Iran (PhD diss.)," 41.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Islam, Gender, and Social Change in Feminism in an Islamic Republic*, (eds, 1998), 56. [file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Feminism_in_an_Islamic_republic_Years_of%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Feminism_in_an_Islamic_republic_Years_of%20(1).pdf).

which occurred along with the Islamization of universities, schools, and many other social arenas, such as public gyms since 1979. It is stipulated in these provisions that universities must observe and adhere to Islamic laws regarding the non-mixing of males and females.¹⁴⁶ But as I discussed in the previous chapter, in compere to Khomeini, Khamenei was more open to women's sport and supported it if women adhered to the regime's rules such as Islamic dress code and following morality while participating in international sports events. During Khamenei's leadership, he believes that Iranian Muslim women can have a powerful and dignified presence in sports arenas by maintaining the hijab and religious boundaries.¹⁴⁷

In this way, women's participation in international sports events is primarily intended to represent their country and demonstrate the Islamic values of their government. In his remarks, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei stated that athletes are crucial to representing Iran's moral principles globally and boosting the nation's morale domestically.¹⁴⁸ The athletes engage in international sports events as "ambassadors," emphasizing the nation's "determination, religiousness, talent and adherence to Sharia (Islamic law)."¹⁴⁹

As a sample in sports, we can see that Khamenei praised Mahlagha Jambozorg for wearing a "superior hijab" at the 2010 Asian Games held in China. In response, she dedicated her silver medal to Khamenei.¹⁵⁰ In addition, at the Rio 2016 Olympics, Kimia Alizadeh won a bronze medal in Taekwondo, which is one of the most notable examples of state propaganda regarding hijab in the sporting sphere. Because most news sources that covered her accomplishment, highlighted her Islamic hijab as "proof that hijab is not a limitation for Iranian women."¹⁵¹ Additionally, it can be mentioned Lida Fariman who became the first Iranian female athlete following the Revolution to participate in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics

¹⁴⁶ Saeid Golkar, "Cultural Engineering Under Authoritarian Regimes: Islamization of Universities in Postrevolutionary Iran," *Domes: digest of Middle East Studies* 21 no.1 (March 2012): 3. <file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/CulturalEngineeringUnderAuthoritarianRegimesIslamizationofUniversitiesinPostrevolutionaryIran.pdf>.

¹⁴⁷ "Varzish-i-bānuvān [Women's Sports]," Khamenei.ir, last modified November 11, 2013, <https://farsi.khamenei.ir/newspart-index?tid=25984&npt=12#102906>.

¹⁴⁸ "Khamenei Comments II: Islam's Rules on Sports."

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Hosseini, Varzish-i zanān ba'd az inghilāb: ḥuḏūr-i zanān-i varzishkār-i Irāni dar meydānhā-yi varzishī-yi jahānī [Women's Sport after the Revolution: the Presence of Iranian Women Athletes in the World Sports Fields]."

¹⁵¹ Enderle, "Forced hijab and female athletes in postrevolutionary Iran."

(shooting)¹⁵² where she marched with the flag of the Islamic regime and wore the hijab (chador).¹⁵³

Below is an image of a model of headcovering the Islamic regime expects Iranian female athletes to wear when participating in international sports competitions. Designed to adhere to the Islamic dress code, this model of headcovering is a requirement of the Islamic regime in Iran. It is intended to serve as a representation of modesty and to protect the dignity of female athletes. A headcover is composed of two parts. An athlete's head and neck are covered by a white (or colorful) headscarf. The second part is a white hood which is designed to cover the hair (See Figure 2 below).



A hijab store in Tehran offering head coverings and Islamic clothing for female athletes. (Tehran, March 2023)

Furthermore, during the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the flag bearer of Iran's convoy was a female athlete, Homa Hosseini. In this round of competitions, Hosseini participated in rowing. The flag-bearer of Iranian Olympic women was chosen for political purposes and to show women wearing hijab and with Iranian power as a sign of Muslim women's participation and national authority. But it did not even stay away from criticism within the system itself. Opponents from inside the country objected to the flag bearer of a woman and even to the

¹⁵² Islam considers shooting to be one of the most favored activities, primarily due to Mohammed's encouragement, and because it can also be carried out while wearing a chador. See: Pfister, "Women and sport in Iran. Keeping goal in the hijab?," 216.

¹⁵³ Pfister, "Women and sport in Iran. Keeping goal in the hijab?," 216.

participation of an Iranian woman in competitions abroad, and their protest was widely reflected in the world media.¹⁵⁴

In these mentioned Olympic Games, these two Muslim women had the opportunity to present the Islamic values and regulations of the Islamic regime. In fact, displaying women athletes in international sports events in Islamic dress can also be considered an “Islamic framework” which Shahla Haeri refers to this as “Islamic modernity.”¹⁵⁵ This will allow the country to demonstrate its commitment to equality and progress by allowing Iranian women to take part in international sports. It will also demonstrate respect for the women in Iran who deserve to have their rights and abilities respected. By doing so, it will demonstrate to the world that the country is willing to embrace new ideas and perspectives and to move away from outdated and oppressive ideas.

Consequently, the physical appearance of a woman without a hijab conveys an endorsement that is contrary to morality. While women wear veils, the balance of power is largely preserved; men as well as women are assumed to be protected.¹⁵⁶ Women athletes participating in international Olympic events should respect and adhere to the hijab as a symbol of Islamic values and beliefs. Because according to Haeri, “The more women have become involved in social life, the more necessary it has become to enforce the moral codes to ensure that such increased contact between men and women does not unwittingly undermine the moral fabric of the Islamic community and open it up to alien penetration.”¹⁵⁷

It can be observed that a comprehensive legislative strategy was sought and implemented by the Islamic regime using women. In a figurative sense, the compulsory dress code for women reflected the reformation of the country's moral code.¹⁵⁸ The regime made sure that women gathering in public places wore appropriate clothing that adhered to the Islamic principles of the regime to maintain the virtue of society.¹⁵⁹ It remains committed to portraying its female invisibilities as symbols of modesty and religious principles throughout the world. It reduces the government's assertion of chastity by emphasizing the importance of

¹⁵⁴ Hosseini, *Varzish-i zanān ba‘d az inghilāb: ḥuḏūr-i zanān-i varzishkār-i Irāni dar meydānhā-yi varzishī-yi jahānī* [Women's Sport after the Revolution: the Presence of Iranian Women Athletes in the World Sports Fields].”

¹⁵⁵ See: Haeri, “Temporary Marriage and the State in Iran: An Islamic Discourse on Female Sexuality,” 223.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 216.

¹⁵⁷ Najmabadi, “Hazards of modernity and morality: Women, state and ideology in contemporary Iran,” 70.

¹⁵⁸ Hoel and Shaikh, “Veiling, Secularism, and Islamism: Gender Constructions in France and Iran,” 120.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

"women's sexual modesty."¹⁶⁰ For instance, governments may seek to control individuals through laws and regulations, as well as through the media, education systems, and other institutions. One way is controlling women's bodies and minds through Islamic concepts such as *ifaf* which we translate to *chastity*.

Virginity and Sports after the Iranian Revolution in 1979

In Iran, the Islamic regime places great emphasis on the virginity of female athletes and to ensure that female athletes remain virgins, they are required to undergo virginity tests before participating in the country's sports programs. Sudeh Lashkari, former cricket player on Iran's national team, in response to the question of "What was the biggest discrimination you faced during your time in the national team," during an interview by the Persian language news television channel "Iran International," said:

"Sometimes the lives of female athletes were under control. Sometimes I was asked to take a test to determine if I was a virgin or not. And this discrimination is very big."¹⁶¹

A notable example of these policies is gender testing in sports, which assesses the athlete's physical characteristics, hormone levels, and other biological markers. In one interview, Shiva Amini an Iranian women's futsal player who immigrated to Switzerland and Italy said:

"There is discrimination between male and female athletes in Iran. Gender tests were taken from us in Iran. They took us to a building where a security lady was there, and they asked us questions to determine if we were girls or boys. We were spanked, then touched and tested to find out if we were bisexual or not. The questions they asked us were because of humiliation and harassment of us girls. They harassed those who were bisexual. Many bisexual girls in sports teams, especially soccer, committed suicide or thought about suicide. Many emigrated or said goodbye to football. I have friends who are now taxi drivers in Iran and have completely abandoned football."¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 121.

¹⁶¹ Iran International, "Chand chand: Varzish-i zanān zīr-i sāyih-yi tab'īz [Women's Sport under the Shadow of Discrimination]," YouTube, accessed May 24, 2023, https://youtu.be/pnB15a_7HWw.

¹⁶² Ibid.

There is no evidence that professional sports with heavy jumps harm virginity, however, during sports or an accident, a solid object may enter the body and cause injury to the athlete.¹⁶³ But Iranian parents of daughters are often overprotective and fearful of any heavy physical activities that could jeopardize their daughters' chastity.¹⁶⁴

While a distinction between culture and religion is difficult to make, women from the nations of the Middle East are equally influenced by their culture.¹⁶⁵ In this way, while women in Iran are expected to maintain a certain level of modesty, behave in a certain manner, and observe certain traditions, the influence of their culture is as strong as that of their religion.¹⁶⁶ Up to the time of their first legal partnership, Iranian women are expected to retain their virginity, despite the fact that they were believed not to be able to do so. The sexual potential of a woman is reached at the age of seven (occasionally at the age of nine). Rural and southern Tehran continue to use hankies stained with blood as a means of demonstrating virginity.¹⁶⁷

As an example, Iranian society and the Islamic government consider the “virginity” of girls to be another sign of *ifaf*. Through this means, the regime maintains its power and holds over its citizens by ensuring that girls remain virginal and chaste.¹⁶⁸ Girls are prevented from performing physical activities because of Islam's precept of virginity.¹⁶⁹ The danger of an injured hymn endangering a girl's life must be noted. On the other hand, Iran's traditional society places a high value on the preservation of a girl's virginity. Those who lose their virginity would face serious repercussions, both in terms of their reputation and the punishment they may receive from their families and communities.¹⁷⁰ When a girl is no longer a virgin, she is viewed as impure and unfit for marriage, since virginity is seen as a symbol of

¹⁶³ “Rivāyiathā-yi Šarīḥ darbāriyi āzmāyish-i-bikārat [Clear narratives about virginity testing],” Pāigāh-i khabarī-yi Aftab, last modified December 29, 2021, <https://aftabnews.ir/fa/news/745714/%DB%B1%DB%B8-%D8%B1%D9%88%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%AA%E2%80%8C%D9%87%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C-%D8%B5%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%AD-%D8%AF%D8%B1%D8%A8%D8%A7%D8%B1%D9%87-%D8%A2%D8%B2%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%D8%B4-%D8%A8%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA>.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Margaret S. Crocco, Nadia Pervez and Meredith Katz, “At the Crossroads of the World: Women of the Middle East,” *The Social Studies* 100, no. 3 (2009): 111. [file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/AtCrossroadsWorld%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/AtCrossroadsWorld%20(2).pdf).

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Janet L. Bauer, “Sexuality and the Moral "Construction" of Women in an Islamic Society,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 58, no. 3 (July 1985): 122. <file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/3317918.pdf>.

¹⁶⁸ Pfister, “Women and sport in Iran. Keeping goal in the hijab?,” 212.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

purity. While modern times have brought about changes in marriage prospects, young women's prospects are still heavily influenced by how virginal they are, as well as how sincere they are in their sexual relationships.¹⁷¹

The Nightmare of the Article 18 of the Passport Law

Women in Iran can only leave the country to an extent restricted by their age and marital status. It is necessary for women younger than 18 to get approval from their male responsible adults (like their father, grandfather, and uncle) to get a passport and travel outside of Iran, but women who are older and single do not need such approval.¹⁷² In accordance with "Article 18 of the Passport Law" in Iran, married women must receive their husband's consent before obtaining a passport and leaving the country.¹⁷³ Due to this law, Iran's women's futsal captain, Niloufar Ardalan, was prohibited from attending the 2015 Asian Football Confederation (AFC) Futsal Championship.¹⁷⁴ Similarly, Samira Zargari, who coaches the Iranian women's national alpine skiing team, was banned from leaving the country due to the opposition of her husband.¹⁷⁵ This ban was applied in line with regime laws. Zargari, therefore, was unable to travel with the Iranian national team to the World Cup in Italy.¹⁷⁶

If Article 18 of the passport law in the Islamic regime applies to female athletes, it is possible that it contains provisions or restrictions that negatively affect the mobility and participation of female athletes at international competitions. As an illustration, such restrictions can be seen as a means of exerting control over female athletes by prescribing specific rules and regulations.

Regarding women right, following the Revolution, the government concentrated on family and criminal law, two domains in which Sharia courts ceased to exist during the 1930s.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Saeed Kamali, "Husband bars Iranian footballer from Asian championships," *The Guardian*, September 16, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/16/husband-bars-iranian-footballer-from-asian-championships>. Also see: Hoda Mahmoudi, "Freedom and the Iranian Women's Movements," *Contexts* 18, no. 3 (2019): p 16. [file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/1536504219864953%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/1536504219864953%20(2).pdf).

¹⁷³ Mohammadi, "A Critical Study of State Control, Elite Female Athletes and Fans' Resistance in Post-Revolutionary Iran," 57.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Iran's law requires women to obtain permission from their husbands prior to leaving the country. See: "Misogynous law bans ski head coach from leaving with her team," Women's Committee of Iran NCRI (Women Are Force for Change), March 3, 2021, <https://women.ncr-iran.org/2021/03/03/head-coach/>.

¹⁷⁶ "Misogynous law bans ski head coach from leaving with her team," Women's Committee of Iran NCRI (Women Are Force for Change), March 3, 2021, <https://women.ncr-iran.org/2021/03/03/head-coach/>.

In spite of this, the system of justice abandoned the conventional understanding of multiple and ambiguous laws and preserved both a unified and coherent criminal justice framework, in addition to several regulations and principles originating from the Shah's reign.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, the regime aimed to restore all judicial functions and legal oversight to the religious leaders and remove what was considered detrimental secularization in the past. Between 1979 and the present, legislation covering family issues and legislation regarding crimes has been the platform for shaping and implementing government policies for the public and issues affecting women and men.¹⁷⁸

After the Iranian revolution, a new set of offenses under the title “Crimes against Modesty, Public Morality, and Family Obligations” was offered. These included women showing themselves uncovered and immodestly “Article 102”, and men refusing to support their children financially “Article 105”, with penalties of 74 lashes each.¹⁷⁹ “Immoral acts” committed in public are punishable by up to 74 lashes or a jail term of 10 days under article 638 of the penal code. Furthermore, it is stated in this article that in a situation in which a woman is observed without a hijab, she may be imprisoned for up to two months or must make a payment of about fifty dollars.¹⁸⁰ Therefore, these types of laws are nothing more than the fundamental principles of morality that Islam outlines as being the basis for a society that is safe. The result has been an increase in the use of moral laws by Islamic governments as a tool for enforcing their authority over women.¹⁸¹

Although many Islamic laws have become obsolete and are rarely used in Islamic societies, governments and non-governmental organizations continue to use and apply them in conjunction with the goal of establishing and maintaining dominance over the majority of the population based on gender and social status.¹⁸² As a result, this type of legislation does not emerge in a vacuum, as there are numerous examples of unjust legislation (no matter how morally sound) that have been passed through the legislative process, all of which can be demonstrated in their intent to restrict women. In this regard, reform, which is frequently characterized as a "moral reform" that is of superior quality, appears to be an extension of an

¹⁷⁷ Mir-Hosseini and Hamzić, *Control and Sexuality*, 91-92.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 95.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 7.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

existing structure designed to grant its administrators unprecedented control over society in general, and particularly over their female counterparts.¹⁸³

Veil and Wall:¹⁸⁴ Gender Segregation in Sports as a Source of Power Diagnostics

Since the Islamic Republic established its ruling authority in the country and began combating a war abroad after coming to power, sporting activities and events have been regarded as meaningless and incompatible with Islam.¹⁸⁵ It was decided to implement a policy of “gender segregation,” and an exclusive athletic commission was formed for female athletes only. As a result, men and women began to participate in sports in separate facilities and under separate schedules. The participants were only permitted to be mentored and supervised by supervisors and trainers who shared their gender identity.¹⁸⁶

On the other hand, as a result of gender segregation, there is often inadequate sports equipment available for women, which contributes to the marginalization of women from many sporting events, particularly competitive sports.¹⁸⁷

The practice of segregating males and females in Iran, is normal in accordance with the underlying norms and values of the Shi'i regime. Hence, it is not only necessary to establish explicit rules and conventions to govern gender invisibility, but also to impose restrictions on conduct between the sexes “veils and walls” to segregate them and govern their behavior.¹⁸⁸ In addition, even it is prohibited to broadcast female athletes' international competitions on television, and they are not supported by the government. However, male sports news is covered by the media.¹⁸⁹ Despite the authorities' claims to support women's sports, in practice they place women athletes in a difficult position by passing antifeminist and

¹⁸³ Ibid, 14.

¹⁸⁴ This phrase is borrowed from: Haeri, “Temporary Marriage and the State in Iran: An Islamic Discourse on Female Sexuality,” 209.

¹⁸⁵ Nazanin Shahrokni, “State and Paradox of Gender Segregation in Iran (PhD diss.),” 23.

¹⁸⁶ Mahmudabadi and Rahbari, “Women’s (non)participation in sports: Gendered attitudes, biopolitics, and perceptions of body and sports in Iran,” 93.

¹⁸⁷ Gertrud Pfister, “Women and Sport in Islamic Countries,” *Forum for Idret* 26, no. 1 (2010): 44.

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¹⁸⁸ Haeri, “Temporary Marriage and the State in Iran: An Islamic Discourse on Female Sexuality,” 209.

¹⁸⁹ “Tafkīk-i jinsiyyatī bi du va meydānī risīd! [Gender segregation reached athletics],” Independent, accessed March 8, 2022, <https://www.independentpersian.com/node/220891/%D9%88%D8%B1%D8%B2%D8%B4/%D8%AA%D9%81%DA%A9%DB%8C%DA%A9-%D8%AC%D9%86%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%AA%DB%8C-%D8%A8%D9%87-%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%88%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D8%B3%DB%8C%D8%AF>.

patriarchal laws. From the authorities of Shiite imitation in 2009, Safi Golpaygani, Alavi Gorgani, and Hosseini Zanjani declared it "haram" to send female athletes to international competitions.¹⁹⁰

Among the most important policies instituted by the regime was the segregation of public places and services based on gender. Gender segregation evolved from an individual practice to a government policy, therefore.¹⁹¹ Specifically, both genders were prohibited from attending sporting events of the other gender. Access points and bureaucratic offices were segregated, and men and women were generally separated by waiting lines.¹⁹² As it was mentioned earlier, the rule prohibiting women from entering stadiums is a clear example of the regime's gender segregation.¹⁹³ As another example, it can be referred to the women-only parks in Abbās'ābād district in Tehran, which are dedicated to women's sports and men are not permitted to enter.¹⁹⁴

Using women-only parks as an example, the government has shifted from restricting women from exercising publicly in accordance with Islamic values to creating women-only parks for the purpose of improving women's health.¹⁹⁵ With the emergence of Mothers' Paradise¹⁹⁶ as an example of a way for gender segregation, the Islamic regime began to assume a more governmentally oriented role. In the aftermath of the revolution, the new regime was required to meet the demands of Streamlined government systems, both domestically and internationally and concentrated its efforts in the first decade of the revolution on consolidating sovereignty over Iranian borders and establishing a state of Islamic supremacy.¹⁹⁷ After gaining traction, the regime was forced to deal with unforeseen outcomes because of its prior policies of obligatory coverage.¹⁹⁸ Despite declarations claiming to provide women with honor and respect, the Islamic regime failed to fulfill these claims, as

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Shahrokni, "State and Paradox of Gender Segregation in Iran (PhD diss.)," 5.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Mohammadi, "A Critical Study of State Control, Elite Female Athletes and Fans' Resistance in Post-Revolutionary Iran," 58.

¹⁹⁴ Shahrokni, "State and Paradox of Gender Segregation in Iran (PhD diss.)," 25.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 13.

¹⁹⁶ One of the women-only parks in Tehran

¹⁹⁷ Shahrokni, "State and Paradox of Gender Segregation in Iran (PhD diss.)," 33-34.

¹⁹⁸ Apoliticism of depression is a strategy used by the regime not only to monitor and supervise bodies, but also to actively downplay Iranian people. In this manner, the regime instilled a sense of despair and despondency that weakened and incapacitated people from questioning the established norm of power. See: Saeid Golkar, "Manipulate Society: Paralyzing the Masses in Post-revolutionary Iran," *International Journal of Politics Culture and Society* 29, no. 2 (2016): 135.

[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/ManipulatedSociety%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/ManipulatedSociety%20(1).pdf).

women reported suffering physical and mental maladies as a result of the hijab and the restrictive lifestyle imposed by the government.¹⁹⁹

During the regime's attempt to reinstate Islam in public life through incorporating its views on gender, the majority of the essential privilege's women had under the previous regime [like freedom in veiling and freedom in sports] were eliminated, as they were deemed incompatible with Islam.²⁰⁰ A significant number of societal restructuring projects [such as gender segregation and dress code] have been implemented in order to achieve the government's Islamicization strategy. The reaction of women to these attempts has not strictly conformed to the trends forecast by their ideological defenders, adding a layer of complexity and theoretical and religious contradiction to the government's ethos.²⁰¹

Religious conservative clergy [Several high-ranking clerics have previously stated this, such as Javadi Amoli, Mesbah Yazdi, and Ahmad Jannati] considered sporting activities for women to be incompatible with Islam, disrespectful of women's virtues, and contributing to the vulgarization and denigration of female bodies.²⁰² This has resulted in the concept of sporting women being developed into a platform for women in Muslim communities, such as Iran, to oppose both government and unofficial figures and contest their prevailing absence from sports. It has become increasingly evident that women's marginalization is a reflection of deeper negative views concerning women as the sporting events have evolved into a place of communal gathering and public exhibition for asserting and demonstrating belonging.²⁰³

In the same vein, due to the regime's embrace of the entirety of God and government, this domain has been reduced to the point of almost being obliterated. Iranian women's commitment to feminism in the pursuit of establishing their own social platform and the Iranian regime's attempt to sculpt women in its sacred figuration share a degree of philosophical similarity.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ Shahrokni, "State and Paradox of Gender Segregation in Iran (PhD diss.)," 33-34.

²⁰⁰ Homa Hoodfar and Shadi Sadr, "Politics Religion, and Gender Equality," in *Can women act as agents of a democratization of theocracy in Iran?* (Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, October 2009): 3.

[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Can_women_act_as_agents_of_a_democratiza%20\(3\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Can_women_act_as_agents_of_a_democratiza%20(3).pdf).

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Homa Hoodfar, *Women's Sport as Politics in Muslim Contexts*, (London: Women Living Under Muslim Laws, 2015): 32.

[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Can_women_act_as_agents_of_a_democratiza%20\(4\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Can_women_act_as_agents_of_a_democratiza%20(4).pdf).

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Najmabadi, "Hazards of modernity and morality: Women, state and ideology in contemporary Iran," 70.

The Consequence of IRI's "Chastity" and "Morality" in Sports

As part of my trip to Tehran in February 2023, I had the opportunity to speak with three sporty girls in Qeytariéh park, which is located in the northern part of Tehran, regarding a question that had been on my mind: Does wearing a hijab limit their freedom? They shared a range of perspectives on the issue.

"It can be uncomfortable to play in full clothing while it limits my range of motion and ability to see the field. During extreme heat, keeping cool and staying hydrated can be a challenge."

Said Atusa, a stylish and sporty member of the group. Atusa added that it is important to be able to exercise in a way that is comfortable for us. It is not our intention to have to explain ourselves or our choice of clothing to anyone, especially the morale police who patrol the park on a regular basis. There was one of them, Maryam, who was a great critic. She said:

"I believe it is better if my boyfriend can attend the same gym as I do. It does not feel comfortable for me to exercise in a gym that is segregated. Why is everything arranged according to gender segregation? The gyms are segregated! The swimming pools are segregated! It is not possible for us to attend football matches in stadiums. Those of us who wish to train without wearing a hijab should go to the segregated parks. The situation does not satisfy me, as I would like to have more freedom, as do girls in European countries."

Now, however, I observe that all of you are not wearing hijab here while many boys are in the park and no one has issued you with a warning. I asked them.

They stated that there is a change in the situation now. It is necessary for the Islamic regime to hear our voice and to provide more freedom to our generation, which is quite different from the last generation. After the campaign of "women, life, freedom,"²⁰⁵ many girls no longer take hijab seriously and come out without wearing their hair. So, it is not only the physical freedom to participate in sports that Iranian women seek. Additionally, they are seeking the right to watch sports, access to sports media, and representation in athletic governing bodies. The push for greater representation and access to sports media is intended to help break down gender barriers and empower Iranian women in all areas of their lives.

²⁰⁵ In response to Mahsa Amini's death in September 2022 in Tehran due to her inappropriate hijab, several protests took place under the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom."

When it comes to sports, many factors contribute to the marginalization of women in Islamic countries [like Iran.] There are several examples to illustrate this point, such as the adherence to strict rules and regulations in modern sports, as well as the application of Sharia principles and limitations derived from religious norms.²⁰⁶ After the IRI, fundamentalists [High-ranking religious leaders under the leadership of Khomeini] intended to isolate women from mainstream society.²⁰⁷ Women who were seeking inclusion in society stated that Islam does not prohibit them from participating in sports²⁰⁸ and that the regime should render services to women in order to prevent their marginalization.²⁰⁹ Regarding this issue, Shohreh Bayat in an interview with *The Times of India* said:

“Women must not be treated as second-class citizens, and mandatory hijab is a sign of constant, misogynistic oppression. The fight against is a fight for equality, freedom of choice and human rights.”²¹⁰

Furthermore, I can refer to Shiva Amini. In opposition to the compulsory dress code in sports she said:

“In my opinion, the hijab in Iran is something that a female athlete has accepted only because of her love for football. But [by surprise], when we went to the federation, from the ground floor to the women's section, they would offer us sex and offer concubines about three or four times.”²¹¹

Women athletes' endless grievances against restrictions have sometimes led to their deciding to migrate or withdraw from sports competitions even though they are at the peak of physical fitness.²¹² Apart from those who agreed to forced migration or to give up a championship sports and stay in Iran, there are many people who are still struggling with

²⁰⁶ Pfister, “Women and Sport in Islamic Countries,” 46.

²⁰⁷ Hoodfar, *Against all Odds: The Building of a Women's Movement in the Islamic Republic in Iran*, 7. Also see: Gertrude Pfister, “Equality and Social missions: Muslim Women and their Opportunities to participate in Sport and Physical Activities,” *Hacettepe Journal of Sports Sciences* 19, no. 4 (2008): 256.

[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Equality and social missions muslim women and thei.pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/Equality%20and%20social%20missions%20muslim%20women%20and%20thei.pdf).

²⁰⁸ Leila Sfeir, “The Status of Muslim Women in Sport: Conflict between Cultural Tradition and Modernization,” *International Review for the sociology of sport* 20, no. 4 (1985): 300.

[file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/10672656%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/nerim/Downloads/10672656%20(1).pdf).

²⁰⁹ Hoodfar, *Against all Odds: The Building of a Women's Movement in the Islamic Republic in Iran*, 7.

²¹⁰ Samridhhi Bisht, “Mandatory hijab is a sign of oppression, but I also believe in freedom of choice, says Iranian chess arbiter Shohreh Bayat,” *The Times of India*, July 24, 2022.

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/home/sunday-times/mandatory-hijab-is-a-sign-of-oppression-but-i-also-believe-in-freedom-of-choice-says-iranian-chess-arbiter-shohreh-bayat/articleshow/93077217.cms>.

²¹¹ “Chand chand: Varzish-i zanān zīr-i sāh-yi tab‘īz [Women's Sport under the Shadow of Discrimination].”

²¹² Ibid.

various problems such as lack of facilities.²¹³ They are also dealing with other serious problems, such as the lack of media coverage and telecasting of women's sports competitions; the existence of a patriarchal culture in the country's sports; the lack of sponsorships, the low budgets allocated for sports federations; the lack of equality with men, anti-gender, and discriminatory views; and the lack of equal rights laws to establish gender justice are among the serious problems.²¹⁴

Most female athletes are too afraid to speak out publicly when they disagree with the system, although some do so occasionally. It is because they are aware of the potential consequences, such as the possibility of being permanently removed from the team or being blacklisted from participating in future sporting events.²¹⁵ But there are some women athletes who opposed the samples of discriminations, removed their hijab and left the country.

For instance, I can mention Mitra Hejazipour. As part of the World Rapid and Blitz Chess Championship in Moscow in 2019, Hejazipour removed her headscarf. A month later, the Iran Chess Federation expelled her from the team. Hejazipour opted to remain in France in refugee status.²¹⁶ According to her:

“Forced hijab represents an ideology that considers women to be the second class of human beings.”²¹⁷

The other example is Shohreh Bayat. Besides being a chess champion, Shohreh Bayat is also a highly regarded referee in the field of chess. She expressed concern about returning to Iran following the dissemination of photographs showing her being unveiled at the 2020 "International Chess Federation Women's World Chess Championship" in Shanghai.²¹⁸ Additionally, she explained to the news channel, CNN:

“People must be allowed to wear what they wish, and I was only wearing a hijab because I live in Iran, and I had to wear it.”²¹⁹

Also, regarding this issue Shohreh Bayat said:

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Mohammadi, “A Critical Study of State Control, Elite Female Athletes and Fans’ Resistance in Post-Revolutionary Iran,” 62.

²¹⁶ “Iran’s War on its Own Athletes,” *The Iran Primer*, February 2, 2022, <https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2022/feb/02/iran%E2%80%99s-war-its-own-athletes>.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

“I believe it takes courage to risk expressing your opinions while you are living under the yoke of a dictatorship’s regime, and change can only be a gradual process. As an Iranian, I can see how we (Iranian women) are getting brave and braver... It was a massive step for me in 2020 to be able to say NO to the Iranian regime, and sacrifice many things to stand for what I believe in. I know now how vital it is to stand up for the right things.”²²⁰

While societal disapproval of professional sportswomen is relatively low, largely because of their omission from the country's team, female sports enthusiasts have been passionate advocates almost since the Iranian revolution began. It is due to the absence of open and inclusive forums to address Iranian women's and men's concerns that both have been gradually turning to social media and digital platforms in order to share information, promote equality, empower women, and speak out against discrimination as well.²²¹ With the help of viral campaigns titled "Open Stadiums" and "My Stealthy Freedom," women entered stadiums to pose for pictures and share their stories. This is noteworthy because nonviolent demonstrations outside the Azadi Stadium and signing statements and forwarding them to global sports organizations such as FIFA and FIVB have been used to demonstrate the continued opposition to the government's feminist agenda in competitive sports.²²²

As far as Iranian women's sports are concerned, Kimia Alizadeh set records for being the first Iranian female athlete since 1979 to take home a bronze medal at the Rio Olympics. Over a century has passed since she emerged as the most successful sportswoman in a country that has struggled to Islamic norms and values.²²³ She confirmed her departure from the country in an Instagram post published on January 11, 2020. Her frustration stems from the injustice of a system that, according to her, exploits her sports accomplishments for political purposes and only marginalizes her.²²⁴ In her Instagram, she writes:

“I am one of the millions of suppressed women in Iran who have played me as they wanted for years. They took it wherever they wanted. I wore everything they said. I repeated every sentence they ordered. They put my medals under the compulsory hijab and attributed it to their management and directives. I was not important to them. None of us care, we are tools. Only those metal medals are important to buy from us at whatever price they rate themselves

²²⁰ Bisht, “Mandatory hijab is a sign of oppression but I also believe in freedom of choice, says Iranian chess arbiter Shohreh Bayat.”

²²¹ Mohammadi, “A Critical Study of State Control, Elite Female Athletes and Fans’ Resistance in Post-Revolutionary Iran,” 64.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Javani, "Sport and Gender Equity, The Case of Iran," 188.

²²⁴ Ibid, 198.

and to take political advantage, but at the same time for humiliation, they say: the virtue of a woman is not to stretch her legs!”²²⁵

Thus, although the government regards the Islamic dress code as a sign of chastity and a rational solution for Iranian women athletes participating in international sports competitions, these female athletes do not hold that view and according to the above-mentioned female athletes, hijab and Islamic dress codes are barriers that limit their opportunities in sports.

While watching Iranian female athletes compete against foreign opponents, they are often concerned about keeping their sports caps from falling off. As a result of the conditions of the Asian Handball and Taekwondo Championships in 2018, many players experienced their caps falling off and were forced to take care of their hijab so as to avoid further exclusions instead of focusing on the competition.²²⁶ On the other hand, media coverage of women's sports is less extensive. As a result, sponsors do not wish to invest in female athletes despite all these problems and complaints because the lack of spectators and the restriction on female athletes appearing in advertisements. There is no economic justification for financial support for women's sports because women's matches are not televised and the media are less interested in following up and publishing news in this area.²²⁷ Regarding this issue, A former head coach of the Kuwait women's national futsal team, Shahrzad Mozafar, previously stated:

“It is a very important issue that women's sports receive little media attention. Sports are connected to fame. Whatever the reason, sports are played indoors and not seen, which hinders progress. As an example, we attended the finals in Incheon Korea, which were very well received until that point. I would just like to know if this final game could not be broadcast over the radio? "How would it affect the children's morale?" I mean, it was enough for me to tell the children that your game is being broadcast on the radio throughout Iran. Women's sports radio broadcasts can be very helpful and provide them with motivation.”²²⁸

A reaction to these restrictions, particularly the compulsory hijab, can be seen in the devastation of Elnaz Rekabi in Seoul, South Korea at the IFSC Climbing Asian

²²⁵ Kimia Alizadeh (@kimiya.alizade), “Should I start with hello, goodbye, or condolences?,” Instagram photo, January 11, 2020, <https://www.instagram.com/p/B7LtxeOnZZU/>.

²²⁶ Farideh Reihani, “Az hijab tā nabūdan-i Sponsor. Vaz’iyyat-i varzish-i zanān dar Iran [from the Hijab to the lack of Sponsorship, the Statuse of Women’s Sports in Iran],” Persian BBC NEWS, accessed May 5, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/persian/blogs-48168105>.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

Championships in 2022²²⁹ or as well as immigrating some others, such as Kimai Alizadeh and Shohreh Bayat. A number of women athletes have expressed their reaction to restrictions in sports by immigrating to European countries to play in European leagues, including Ghazaleh Salehipour, an Iranian international football player, Atefeh Ahmadi, an Olympic skier, and Sadaf Khadem, an Iranian boxer.²³⁰ They have no hope of returning to Iran until the Islamic regime is in power.

²²⁹ Emma Specter, “Who is Elnaz Rekabi, the Iranian Female Climber who Competed Without a Hijab?,” *Vogue*, October 20, 2022, <https://www.vogue.com/article/elnaz-rekabi>.

²³⁰ Tara Kangarlou, “These Iranian athletes are sharing such powerful messages for International Women’s Day,” *Glamour*, March 8, 2023, <https://www.glamourmagazine.co.uk/article/iranian-athletes-international-womens-day-message>.

Conclusion

During my research, I investigated the ways in which Islamic values such as *ifāf* "chastity" and *akhlāq* "morality" have influenced Iranian female athletes since the Islamic Republic came to power in 1979. In addition, it was discussed how the Islamic Republic of Iran relies on the Islamized bodies of female athletes to promote the mentioned Islamic principles in the international arena.

As Ruhollah Khomeini established the Islamic Republic, he aimed to provide an environment based on Islamic values and concepts in which people could meet and express their religious beliefs.²³¹ As a result of the Iranian Revolution, women in Iran owe a great debt of gratitude to "God", not only for proclaiming its message, but also for making use of all the resources and capabilities that "God" has given them to implement the regime. To make this expression of thanks viable, the involvement and meaningful contribution of women are essential. Regarding this, following the Iranian Revolution, significant social tasks have been handed down to women that must be met by devoted and enthusiastic women.²³²

The regime sought to create a new, more conservative and Islamic-based society, and the body of a woman was seen as a symbol of the society's transformation. To achieve this, the government implemented a number of social and cultural reforms,²³³ which included the introduction of a mandatory hijab for women, the banning of certain clothing items, and the enforcement of strict gender roles. The body of a woman became a focal point of these reforms, as the government sought to control and regulate how women dressed and acted in public.

On the basis of Foucault's concept of governmentality, it was discussed that the Islamic regime governs the bodies of its women athletes' citizens to serve as the voice of its religious values. In controlling and manipulating the presentation of women in public, it can consolidate its authority by mandating adherence to certain standards of dress and morality. Iranian women athletes, in particular, are subject to a system based on enforcing regulations that restrict their freedoms, including restrictions on their dress, behavior, speech, and interactions with the opposite sex so that they may serve as examples of the ideals of modest,

²³¹ Batmanghelichi, "Revolutions and Rough Cuts: Bodily Technologies for Regulating Sexuality in Contemporary Iran PhD diss.," 330.

²³² Najmabadi, "Hazards of modernity and morality: Women, state and ideology in contemporary Iran," 68-69.

²³³

chaste female behavior. The dress code has been enforced by Iran's Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs and is policed by the Women's Committee, who have the authority to remove any female athlete from any competition if they are deemed to have violated the dress code or failed to adhere to the chastity requirements. This has led to numerous athletes being banned from competing, including track and field athletes, wrestlers, and boxers in which I can mention to Sadaf Khadem and Kimia Alizadeh.

On the other hand, the Islamic regime has shown willingness to adapt to modern times by allowing female athletes to participate in international sports events. By taking this step forward, they send a strong message that women are valued and respected in the Islamic world and should have equal opportunities in sports. It was inevitable that the Islamic regime would have to adapt and accept women participating in international sports events as the world advanced. Even so, they adhered to their legal and accepted dress code, which symbolized chastity and morality and that women athletes should be respected and dignified while still having the opportunity to compete with the rest of the world. This allowed the Islamic regime to remain true to its principles, such as modesty and chastity, while still allowing women to compete on a global level. In this way, a key objective of the regime is to ensure that its message is heard throughout the world and to ensure that no woman is held back by her hijab, it is essential that the regime's values are spread to everyone.

However, following the IRI, these reforms were seen as having an adverse effect on many women athletes, causing their voices of criticism against the regime to be raised. So, unlike other women athletes from other countries who enjoy considerable freedom in Sports events, Iranian women athletes participate in international sporting events to give the impression of being apolitists and Islamicized products of the regime rather than as independent players. Their concern about falling off their hijabs while playing prevents them from taking into consideration the competition they are participating in. many Iranian women athletes immigrate or leave the sport as a result of these issues.

This research aimed to uncover how Iranian women are subjected to Islamization in accordance with religious norms and values. To achieve this goal, two feminist theories (by Shahla Haeri and Ziba Mir-Hosseini) and government regulations were analyzed to gain insights into the particular context of Iran. Whether women should adhere to Shari'a values or continue to strive to alter the existing social and legal conditions remains a hotly contested

issue. Regardless of the outcome of this debate, it is imperative that future research examine the efficacy of both approaches.

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