



The “Automobile Religiosity” in Iran: A Study on Religious Meanings and Functions of Automobile in Contemporary Tehranian Culture

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Research Article

Abstract

Although the automobile has had common functions among various cultures, some unique patterns of car consumption, as secondary functions, appear in each society proportional to cultural and social backgrounds. What makes “the automobile in Iran” different is that it has been transformed into a religious object affected by society’s religious structure. The present paper endeavors to find motivations and manners of this transformation to decoding religious semiology and categorize religious functions of the automobile.

To achieve the deepest layer of consumers’ motivations, a qualitative method in the framework of grounded theory was chosen. We collected our data by deep semi-structured interviews with car consumers in Tehran, in addition to field observations, pictures and films. These data were analyzed in an analytical-descriptive method.

The study led us to the main category saying that the automobile represents religious identity. This is usually exposed by two main strategies, the inside automobile activities and manipulating of the automobile’s appearance, and is revealed in three models of secondary function: resistive, confirmative, and privacy function. These functions represent a new religiosity in Iran that can be called the “automobile religiosity.”

Keywords: Automobile, Religiosity, Religious Function, Tehran, Iran.

1. Introduction

By providing expected and unexpected new functions, technology has turned into a subject for social and cultural studies. Various features of technology interact with people’s mentality, individual behaviors, social activities, and cultural changes. Applying Barthes’s terminology, these features of technology work today as a myth that imposes itself upon human society

through its secondary significance. The relationship between technology and human beings unavoidably depends on ontological and theological aspects.

With the dramatic growth of technology, "consumption" has been considered as a marker of identity. Quantity and quality of consumption play a significant role in forming a social and individual identity and indicate class, community, and lifestyle. In particular, consumption is a modern factor to form the religious identity transforming daily life goods, which are not originally related to the religion, to the religious objects through specific strategies.

Among various manifestations of technology, automobiles have been one of the widespread, accessible, and loveliest types in almost all societies. During the years following road developments, automobiles have become a necessary part of everyday life. Meanwhile, people have developed a deep emotional relationship with the automobile beyond an inanimate object. This has caused people to attribute novel meanings and functions to automobiles. Automobiles have also formed life patterns and styles, where automobiles have become a socio-technical complex. However, these meanings and functions have not been the same in various societies. They vary depending on nationality, ethnicity, generation, politics, religion and the other cultural factors.

The present paper focuses on the automobile-religion relevance in the current Tehran's social texture. Of course, this relevance has several aspects, as well as there are various shapes of religiosity and different consumer tastes. We study the motivations and manners of attributing religious meanings to the automobiles, and to transforming the automobile into a religious object. Although the concentration of this research is on people of Tehran, the results can be generalized over the entire Iran. This is because Tehran has a central role in cultural changes and is imitated by the other cities of Iran. Therefore, discovering religious meanings and functions of the automobile can finally help us to have a correct comprehension of the forms and contents of religiosity in Iran. In other words, this research is a sociological approach of knowing various religiosities in Iran, using an inductive manner from a fine level of car consumption to Iranian society.

2. Religion-Automobile Collision in Iran, Past and Present

When the automobile entered in Iran around 1900, it faced a rigorous social resistance. In the beginning, the automobile belonged to the king (Mozaffar-o-Din Shah) and royal family, whereas people were extremely impoverished and living in a miserable condition (Mo'tazed, 2007, pp. 103-104). Therefore, the automobile was known as a symbol of kingdom despotism. This conception aroused a social resistance against the automobile, while people did not have a clear perception of the automobile's entity and its complicated technology. Moreover, upon the commencement of World War I, many alien automobiles entered Iran as occupiers (Mo'tazed, 2007 p. 111). It caused an intensified protest against automobiles because they were known as the sings of colonialism in addition to despotism.

At the beginning of people's familiarity with the automobile, some people, who acclimatized to gharry and horses, considered this new technology as an iron earsplitting alien with the outgoing smoke. Their familiarity with this strange phenomenon was amalgamated by fear,

bewilderment, ambiguity, and concern (Gha'nei Raad, 2012, p. 10). From their perspective, the automobile was considered a fearsome invention which was a rival for God's authority. In this context, the zealous opinions could be known by the prejudice people's terminology. The automobile, drivers, and gasoline were respectively called the devil's horse, devil's son and devil's spittle (Shahri, 1990, p. 548).

At the same time, some jurists showed a religious resistance against the automobile. This opposition was considerable and effective because Iran's social texture has always been religious as most people adjust their everyday life with Islamic rules and rituals. The main reason for the jurists' opposition is the aforementioned despotism and colonialism (Taymoori, 1953, p. 123). However, this is not the sole reason. Narrow alleys and lack of driving rules caused many accidents that were the catastrophic consequences of using automobiles. The other reason is that drivers were usually without Islamic dress, Hijab and behaviors¹. Moreover, many drivers in old Tehran were from western countries who were not limited to Islamic restrictions and did some anti-Islamic behaviors. According to the official reports, foreign men rode young girls, who were mesmerized by this peculiar technology, for sexual abuse (Mo'tazed, 2007, p. 155). These reasons were sufficient to consider the automobile as a satanic object.

After years, another group of elite people, such as Ale-Ahmad in *Curse of the Earth* (1967) and *Westernization* (2004), Jamalzadeh in *Old and New* (2000, pp. 82-91) and *Bitter and Sweet* (2000, pp. 188-191), and Hedayat in *A Woman Who Lost Her Man* (2000, pp. 230-240), joined in opposition of the automobile. This group was remarkable writers and novelists with a profound impact on the intellectual class. The automobile had a negative representation in their writings in several aspects. Considering the automobile as the symbol of Western culture, they showed great concern about Iranian culture that was being threatened by the domination of the Westernization and technocracy. Additionally, they were worried about the environmental negative effects of the automobile and about wasting natural resources, such as oil, that should be spent to import automobiles.

Despite all these resistances, a few years after World War I, the automobile came over the oppositions and found its place in Iran's society, and gradually became a domestic good. The import of automobiles was increasing every year, and the number of car consumers was growing exponentially. In the 1970s, the automobile had become one of the most important everyday-life vehicles, and Iran's cities were full of various automobiles with various drivers: religious, and secular, young, and old, man and woman. Few car factories started operating in Iran and some types of indigenous automobiles were produced. The Iranian automobiles became the symbol of national pride, and TV commercials on the car became the everyday TV program and a popular material for magazines and newspapers (Mo'tazed, 2007, p. 405). In these advertisements, the automobile was shown as good for leisure that usually was exhibited along with pleasure, drinks, and women.

¹ For example Claude Anet was one the first foreign nationals who brought the automobile in Iran. See his diary: Anet, Claude. (2016). *Ariane, Jeune Fille Russe*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.



Fig. 1. Cars' Role in the Islamic Revolution

In those years, in spite of cultural exchanges of Iranian society and altering public viewpoints on the automobile, religious beliefs were still effective on car consumption. There still were a lot of people who used some amulets, religious writings, and symbols to keep their automobile and passengers safe against accidents.

During the Islamic revolution in 1979, automobiles' functions and advertisements were totally changed. Automobiles participated in the revolution by pasting Ayatollah Khomeini's pictures, the founder of the Islamic revolution, on their glasses and side doors. People celebrated the exit of Shah and the coming of Ayatollah Khomeini to Iran. During the celebration, people used to drive automobiles with continuous beeps and decorate with pictures, flowers, statements, which signifies the victory of the Islamic revolution (Fig 1).

The American automobile that took Ayatollah Khomeini from the airport, became a holy object (Fig 2). Those days were extremely fervent and the Islamic government was not established yet.

After the Islamic revolution and the establishment of the new government, the appearance of Sharia in Iran was seen more than ever; the government called itself the Islamic Republic and legislation was based on Islamic rules. Although the political reading of Islam was not the only one, it was imposed upon society. Hijab and Islamic dress became mandatory,



Fig. 2. An American Holy Car

Islamic groups became powerful, and some social freedoms were altered in order to conform to Islamic rules. Public spaces, such as streets, coffee shops, and cinemas were monitored by the Moral Police, concerning violation of Islamic rules. This situation brought some changes to car consumption. For example, legislators and the Moral Police executed maneuvers to apply more controls on the inside automobile space. Mix gender riding, loud music, and unusual decorations were prohibited, and women were instructed to drive with Hijab. Religious verdicts were given for traffic laws by religious leaders and violating traffic laws was considered as both illegal and anti-Islamic (Amani, 2013).

3. Religious Ritual Opportunity

The most important religious rituals in Iranian Shia society occur in two months: Muharram and Safar² (MS). Although, there are many other days in which various rituals are

² Shias believe that in the tenth day of Muharram, (known as Ashura), Imam Hossain [The grandson of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)] and his companions were unjustly murdered around 1400 years ago. For many centuries Shias have set up mourning rituals on the 10th day of Muharram around the world. Safar is the preceding month of Muharram when Imam Hasan, the elder brother of Imam Hossain was killed.

accomplished³, for this research, MS is accorded special significance. This is because of the longer duration of rituals (throughout two months), the historical importance, and participation of the enormous mass of people (including religious minorities.) This turns out to be seasonal,



Fig. 3. Motion Rituals

but the most significant, religious carnival. More importantly, MS has a great capacity to illustrate the mythology and aesthetical aspects of Shi'ism, such as visual and musical arts.

There is homogeneity between MS's rituals and car consumption that is related to "motion." Historically, MS's rituals were mixed with coming to the roads and streets to march. Since fourteen centuries ago, Shias have walked a

ties and musical mourning in these rituals. There is an intrinsic motion in MS's rituals that has been transforming to the car's mobility in the modern era. Considering the automobile as the continuation of "human's feet," we can analogize driving in MS's rituals to the traditional marching with the same musical mourning and symbols (Fig 3.)

This "motion homogeneity" shows that despite having a fourteen-century history, MS's rituals have received new forms in recent years, affected by new features of the technology. Moreover, in these two months, the urban space experiences less control by Morality Police. Particularly in the first ten days of Muharram, the face of Iran's society is changed; public order goes far away from its regular structure and, consequently, there are more social freedoms. The government shows less sensitivity to the religious customs that do not have conformity with a formal opinion. The Morality Police does not seriously care about mix gender riding, inside automobile activities, and the veil of women while driving. This gives a rare opportunity to people, especially youth, to be more active agents in urban spaces. Car consumers decorate automobiles with religious symbols, paintings, portraitures, and writings. In fact, MS's rituals prepare a context for the automobile's religious functions and meanings.

4. Theoretical Foundations

This research follows the third category of Gartman's triple cultural logic (Gartman, 2004.) He holds that the automobile, in each period of time and regarding the produce-consumption process, has a dynamic cultural logic. The automobile's effects upon each society reveal a new meaning of automobility which is represented in three cultural logics: Class Distinction, Frankfurt School and Fordism, and Postmodernism/Post-Fordism or the Logic of Sub Cultural Difference. Gartman expresses the third logic, which is applied in this research, is based on some postmodern thinkers, such as Hebdige and Miller, and is the most efficient theory to explain the relationship between popular culture and car consumption. According to this theory, in Postmodernism/Post-Fordism era, public culture has been transformed from a passive acceptor to an active car consumption. The new culture has changed automobile functions and

³ Such as Fatemiyeh, Ghadir, and Sha'baan. Some of these rituals are mourning and some are feasts that carry religious happiness. Also, Ramadan is an important month for Islamic rituals. In Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn to dusk. This month, there are three important nights that are called Great Nights. Muslims attempt to be awake throughout these nights for praying.

meanings conforming consumers' subcultural identities, gender, ethnicity, and lifestyles. In fact, in this era, the automobile is not only physical property, but it also is a mental property that can represent the mind and culture of its owner. It could be done by manipulating the face of the automobile, adding some symbols to the automobile, and changing the driving style. Hebdige describes this personalization in American society as follows:

American popular culture ... offers a rich iconography or set of symbols, objects, and artifacts that can be assembled and reassembled by different groups in a literally limitless number of combinations. And the meaning of each selection is transformed as individual objects ... They are taken out of original historical and cultural contexts and juxtaposed against other signs from other sources (1988, p. 74).

Gartman supplements this quotation by:

This multiplicity of meanings freely constructed by different groups to express their own identities makes this leveled consumer culture "a new language of dissent" (2004, p.189).

Similar to Hebdige, Miller analogizes the automobile to a mirror that people see and explain themselves in it. He assumes different car consumer groups as different cultural forms (Miller, 2001, p. 12). This theory also has been, more or less, accepted by Birmingham Culture Studies School, as it is illustrated in Longhurst and Carrabine's work (2002, pp. 185-189) in which they consider active car consumption as the conscious process of meaningfulness and resistance against prevalent consumption logic.

Also, Barthes's semiology has inspired the first idea of this research. He believes that the simple everyday life objects, including the automobile, are the myths of the current era; all activities and objects in everyday life hold the non-neutral cultural meanings that should be decoded and readout. Barthes indicates that people's interaction with these objects is a kind of idolization, and shows that everyday life trivial things are informative. He distinguishes between denotation and connotation significations of objects. Denotation is the straight and explicit meaning of the objects, whereas connotation refers to the mythical or ideological meanings which are behind the straight ones. Therefore, a meta-language is required to understand connotations and secondary meanings. For instance, he asserts that the meta-language of brand new Citroens indicates their secondary function precisely the same as the Gothic Cathedrals. He says that these amazing objects are the metaphysical messengers and places to worship (Barthes, 1991, pp. 88-90).

5. Methodology

In this research, a qualitative method in the form of Grounded Theory is employed. Some of the reasons to choose a qualitative method include the impossibility of numbering the mental meanings, the access to depth meanings, and the compatibility of this method with cultural values and beliefs. Although, qualitative methods cannot achieve a generalization as well as the quantitative ones, in this current study authors have attempted to reach a moderated generalization using diverse and multiple samples.

Samples were selected according to the theoretical sampling and were selected in three stages: open, axial and selective, and depth interviews were accomplished with 20 Tehrani individual

samples between the ages of 19 and 49. In the open sampling, selecting interviewees required ignoring differences in order to obtain an extreme knowledge of data. In the axial stage, sampling focused on differences and contradictions to reach an acceptable diversity. Selective sampling concentrated on finding the maximal relationship between various categories and continued until the theoretical saturation of each category occurred.

The process of coding was completed in three levels of open, axial and selective too. Open coding figured out the data from concepts to categories and subcategories. In the axial coding, causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, action/interaction strategies, and consequences, were known and connected together in a causal-effect process, inspired by Pomrenke's paradigm model (Pomrenke, 2007, p. 365). The relationship between elements of axial coding is shown in Fig 4. The selective coding was employed to create a semi-theory about a new form of religiosity in Iran.

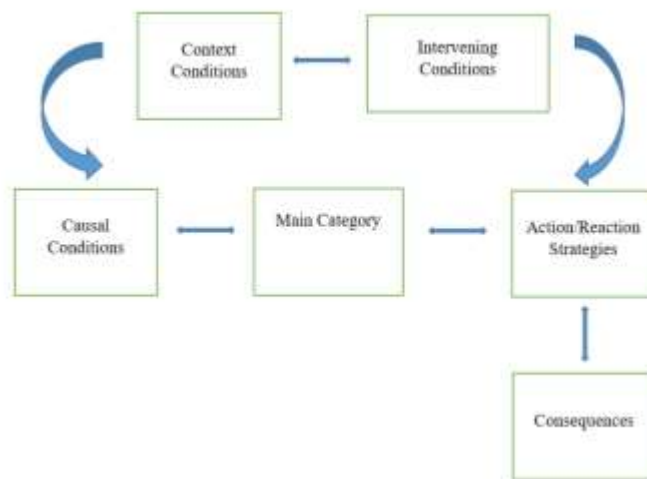


Fig. 4. Paradigm Model of Axial Coding

6. Categories

The automobile in Iran has been consumed for religious purposes affected by religious society's structure and the prevalent religious rituals. Mutually, the automobile represents the religious identity of consumers and works as a religious media which reflexes various features of religiosity and is read as a mobile cultural-religious text. On this basis, the main category found through the open coding is the relevancy between the automobile and religiosity, while subcategories can be divided into three types of religious functions as follows.

6.1 Resistive Function

The automobile represents resistance against two kinds of power: religious reigning power and widespread religious culture. Even though these powers are separate, the car consumers' strategies are almost the same against them. They attempt, the interviewees claim, to change the "street world" and "urban space" which are "suffocating" and restricted by imperative-dominative religious culture. They employ symbols that sometimes are obviously anti-Islamic, such as signs and songs of Satanism, pictures

of anti-Islamic singers, statements with anti-Islamic contents, and stickers of alcoholic drinks (Fig 5).

Some other symbols are not anti-Islamic, but are non-Islamic symbols and signify an incidental protest, such as signs of other religions, symbols of pre-Islamic Iran (Fig 6), and stickers of marijuana⁴.

Drivers' activities also include anti-Islamic and non-Islamic ones, such as not using Hijab by the women drivers, listening to prohibited songs⁵, dress-up and facial make-up that go against the cultural norms, friendly gatherings in the automobile, and singing resistive poems.



Fig. 5. Police Consider X as a sign of Satanism

The other type of symbols and activities are neither anti nor non-Islamic ones. They are Islamic but confiscated symbols by people who believe that having an obvious protest has punitive consequences in the current socio-political environment. Therefore, they attempt to exhibit their protest with enduing the resistive meanings to the religious symbols and activities, and so drawing the automobile to the resistive religiosity scene.

This kind of resistive function specifically unfolds in MS. In this context, resistive symbols and activities come from inside Shi'ism, while they have a protest entity with specific codes. Some people, for example, listen to the religious speeches that propagate Shi'ism. Some write on their automobiles the statements with resistive contents that, according to historical references, have been expressed by the third holy Imam of Shias in the day of Ashura. The sentences such as "this is far from us to be humiliated," or "we prefer death to life with oppressors." In the context of MS and with the specific writing styles, they can be signs of resistance.



Fig. 6. The Sign of Pre-Islamic Iran as a Protest Symbol

In the other version of resistive religiosity, some symbols are not rooted in the official Shi'ism, but car consumers create them as their shape of religiosity. Our data illustrate that this version of religiosity is stuffed by paradoxes, and it can be called a bricolage religiosity. Specific makeups for female drivers who draw the name of holy imams on their nails or cheeks, atypical black T-shirts of male drivers with a picture of a skeleton⁶,

⁴ Other religions have been respected by the Quran and the other Islamic texts. Also, pre-Islamic Iran does not have any anti-Islamic factor. However, its signs are used as connotations which refer to a conflict with present religion-based regime and a demand to go back to the original Iranian culture.

⁵ According to the Islamic Republic of Iran's rules, listening to female singers is not permitted. There are some other prohibitions in the context of music.

⁶ Black dress is a sign of mourning in MS, while skeleton has no root in Islamic traditions. It has borrowed from the West.

automobiles decorated with mud⁷ and portraits of holy Imams⁸ are the paradoxical features of this function (Fig 7 & 8).

Listening to the monodies that their contents or rhythms are not seen in Shia's traditions, is also



Fig. 7. Car Decorations in MS

one of the resistive innovative activities. There are also some people who use these resistive symbols and activities, but not with protest or resistive motivation. They use them just under the effect of the urban atmosphere without having a clear understanding of what they are doing. They have found the traditional religiosity tedious, and attempt to reform it by their own innovation and by creating a new version of rituals. It can also be a kind of leisure time in which people mix religiosity with pleasure, a religious-riding that can substitute for prohibited recreations, pleasure, and individual freedom. These people use MS in their own way to enjoy a kind of

religious independence and satisfy their psychological needs.

From the reigning power's perspective, however, resistive function and breaking the uniformity of religious practices are viewed as the socio-cultural challenge and a threat to the government's authority. Especially, when car consumers launch teams and groups to promote their religiosity, this is crucial for the government to prevent them. Therefore, the police consider these symbols and activities as social abuses, something like violence or drug addiction.

On the other hand, some of the religious scholars hold that this group should be seen as Shia's exhibition. Keeping all groups and all types of religiosities, they believe, causes Shi'ism to thrive and become more powerful, even though some of them contradict Shia's traditions. In these scholars' viewpoints, adopting new mourning styles, forms, and contents to Shi'ism is not serious harm, but removing a large group of people has detrimental consequences. The paradoxical debates about resistive function have put reigning power into a dilemma and cause difficulties in legislation and enforcement.



Fig. 8. Car Decorations in MS

⁷ People daub mud on their head and shoulder for mourning. However, daubing mud on the automobile is a recently practiced ritual.

⁸ This is apparently a religious endeavor, while the reigning power does not agree with holy persons' portrayals. Consequently, it is considered as a symbol of protest to reigning power.

6.2. Confirmative Function

This function has been raised by a wide range of people whose motivation is showing a kind of confirmation of religious reigning power, prevalent religious culture, or their own religious beliefs with no protest. The strategy of car consumers is again adding symbols and doing special activities. Even though some of these factors are similar to resistive ones, they convey totally different meanings. The people who manifest this function can be categorized as follows, although the activities of these groups overlap each other.



Fig. 9. The Name of the Holy Imam in the Car to Have a Spiritual Relationship

6.2.1. The first group belongs to the traditional religiosity. They are literally believers who will have a sign of their beliefs on their properties, including their automobile, house, cloth, bag, and even their body. They like to express their religious mentality to all the spaces they live in and have access to. Revealing religious signs causes a social correlation between the members of this group to confirm their common beliefs and religiosity. This does not mean that they talk together or they know each other closely but means that they can find themselves in a community with members who are distributed around the city and give each other a kind of peace, safety, mental satisfaction, and affirmative feelings.

In addition to the social function, hanging the religious signs in the automobile, such as a Quranic verse or one of God's name, is a means for some people to reinforce their beliefs and to intensify their relationship with God. The religious symbols, as these people believe, protect them from possible accidents and

the other dangers. These symbols work as metaphysical insurance and are mostly special verses in which the name of God is mentioned as a protector, as compassionate, as merciful, or as a beneficent. Sometimes the Quranic verses and the God's names are also viewed not only as of the protectors of their body and properties, but also a protector of their mind to keep them away from sin and to immune them against bad deeds (Fig 9).

For some people, the metaphysical insurance is performed by smearing the automobile with the blood of a sacrificed animal (usually a sheep or rooster,) or, at least, putting two eggs under the automobile's tires to smearing tires with broken eggs.

6.2.2. The second group is hardly considered as believers, however, they employ confirming symbols and activities seeking social approval from the religious majority and/or dominating religious power. This property of the modern era helps to appear this function that the people's connection is rarely face to face and personal. Instead, the automobile plays the role of a face at the street, and shows the car consumers' socio-cultural class, economic conditions, political opinions, and religious beliefs. People on the street are judged through their automobiles and

this is an opportunity to upgrade the social, religious, and political positions⁹. This is such an important factor that, according to some interviewees, some governmental administrators have



Fig. 10. Car Writing to Invite People to Spirituality

more than one automobile; a cheap one that is religious decorated for going to work and the others, which are luxury, for the other consumptions. Grasping social and occupational opportunities can be more successful when religious signs go along with political ones. Pasting the pictures of religious-political leaders and listening to the religious radio programs which are under the control of reigning power clearly indicate

their connection to the reigning power.

6.2.3. On the opposite side, there is the third group who employ religious-political symbols because they deeply

believe that the only "pure" version of Islam is performed by reigning power. They can be called conservative believers. They employ the symbols and activities similar to the second group, however, they do not expect any opportunity for social position. Their ultimate goal is supporting Islam and deceleration of solidarity with dominating religious power. They ride around the city, go to "Friday Prayer" every week, and go out for mourning in MS with decorated automobiles that convey religious-political affirmative meaning.

6.2.4. The fourth group holds that religious signs and activities can invite other people to have similar religious beliefs and experiences. Indeed, as a religious task, they use the automobile to promote Islamic beliefs; what is called in Islamic terminology "promotion of right"¹⁰ and is one of the necessary commands in Islam. They want to stand against the secularization, westernization, or any state that lea people to forget God, and to bestow a religious feature to the city. The interviewees asserted that when they drove around the city, they gained a portion of Devine award that the God gives to the religious missionaries or combatants. Especially in MS, they believe, they can attract the attention of the holy Imams' soul by participating in mourning with their car writings, and reminding people the glory of MS's events (Fig 10). Wealthy people, who have the luxury and expensive automobiles, believe that using religious symbols and activities show their sympathy with the middle class of the society which is believed to be instrumental in eliminating class distances and exhibit humility of all people comparing the greatness of holy Imams.

6.3. Privacy Function

Some traditional, religious families use the automobile's private space to keep their women and daughters safe from masculine spaces. Historically, prejudiced people hold that women's outside connections must be limited or protected by a close relative, such as by the father,

⁹ Having a religious personality provides more opportunities for obtaining occupations and social positions. Using the "religious car," as an index for personality, is a way to reach to this goal.

¹⁰ Amr-e be- Maroof

brother or husband. Being in a public vehicle a woman's body and personality are susceptible to insult by physical touches, catcalls, or even an alien glance. Since the modern lifestyle does not allow this family protection, prejudiced people prefer women to drive by themselves. Indeed, the private space of the automobile is an enclosure in which the women's body and personality can be protected. Although this motivation is basically religious, it has helped to break the gender clichés that represent driving as a masculine activity¹¹. This is the reason that prejudiced people claim women's driving has some unpleasant consequences too.

For some car consumers, also, the automobile is a private space with the ability of mobility in which people can have relaxation as well as worship in solitary mode. They feel a deep need for religion. However, they want to keep themselves far from crowded mosques and mass worshipping. They acclimate that mosques are the dwelling places of superficial believers that have transformed mosques from a calm place of worshipping to a place of advertising political Islam and superficial rules of Sharia. Instead, they desire to go to calm and solitary places, approaching a religious individualism that is based on post-modernist trends and personal readings of religion. Meanwhile, they cannot tolerate closed-gloomy spaces. They need a border space, a semiprivate-semipublic one in which the human being can be alone and be with the other people at the same time. The automobile with its iron chamber and all-side glasses is exactly the ideal space that they look for. The chamber let them obtain some measure of privacy, while glasses put them in front of the people's eyes. Therefore, they prefer to stay in the automobile instead of going to the mosque or praying at home. In such a space, their religiosity has a multiform atmosphere in which a combination of moralism's elements and religious culture is seen. They pick up an ethical mode of religion, but they do not have a satisfying relationship with Sharia. There is an uncertainty in their point of view about formal religious doctrines while they struggle with religious-epistemic bewilderments.

All the employed symbols and activities are performed with the centrality of this ethical approach to religion. They hang God's names upon the mirror (in front of the driver's eyes) to remember that God is watching and protecting them. It causes them to experience a type of religious state in which they find themselves innocent. In addition to communication with God, they do good deeds in their mobile monastery. For example, they volunteer to take old patients to the doctor or to help people who face automobile breakdown in the road. They keep themselves far from showing off and exhibiting consumptions of the automobile. Along with this moralism, however, they participate in MS's rituals and respect the dominant religious culture. In the context of MS, these car consumers use car writings with deep meaningful content and try to increase their bits of help and good deeds. They distribute food to impoverished neighborhoods and listen to the mysterious music and monodies and, sometimes, Sufi poetries. This religiosity leads us to describe them "believers without belonging," which makes them pluralists that respect all people with any religious trend.

¹¹ For more information about women driving in Iran see: Hooshangi, Tahereh and Mahmood Shahabi (2012). The Analysis of Women's Experiences of Driving (a Qualitative Study of Reasons and Result of Women's Driving). *Journal of Woman in Culture Arts*, 4:1, pp. 65-84.

7. Action/Reaction Strategy

The main strategy employed by car consumers is manipulating the automobiles' appearance and doing the inside automobile activities. It can be executed by adding symbols, paintings, portraits, keeping a Quran, listening to favorite music, and more importantly, car writings including many types of spiritual poetries, Quranic verses, one of God's names, or non-religious writings that show the orientation of car consumers. We could illustrate this strategy with the method of picture analysis in addition to coding data.

The other strategy is the choice of driving style. In general, driving style can show the personal motivations of the drivers, such as driving to achieve personal identity, show off, pleasure, breaking gender clichés, and excitement. Many of these motivations can be chosen for religious purposes. In particular, some of the car consumers choose a driving style with spiral, rapid movements to show their protest against religious reigning power.

In addition to the above strategies, there is a strategy that is employed by specific car consumers. It is animalization that makes an emotional relationship with the automobile. In this strategy, consumers assume the automobile as a live friend who helps the owner to associate with his/her religiosity. In some cases, the interviewees mentioned that their automobiles were sacrificial, faithful friends that accepted changes and decorations aligned to their owners' choices. Some consumers acknowledged that their automobiles heard their monody and talking to God, and sometimes automobiles cry and sing with their owners. On the contrary, some interviewees explained that their automobiles are just inanimate objects nothing related to the religion.

8. Causal Conditions

The aforementioned religious functions of the automobile are effects of the necessity of having an "innovative religious identity" and emancipation of the uniform religiosity in the current Iranian society. For the domination of formal Islam upon all social, political, economic, and cultural structures has caused the uniform-imperative religious identity. However, people, regarding the attractive aspects of technology and increasing the importance of consumption in the process of building identity, prefer to have a postmodern, aesthetic, leisure, multiform, exiting, nonpolitical and independent religion that represents their selective religious identity. Even the car consumers whose approach is supporting the religious reigning power, apply the innovative manners to break the barren religious clichés. These manners pass through the portal of twofold technology-consumption, and obviously, an automobile is an available, easy, and known object to be employed for this purpose.

The automobile's religious functions are also effects of the lack of automobile diversity in Iran. In the literature of automobile culture, there is a deep relationship between personality and the type of automobile. Color, model and nationality of the automobile are of main factors to have a significant automobile selection. For example, having an old American automobile represents the interest of the owner in the power and masculinity, and most of these people have the same lifestyle, favorite sports, and dressing.

In Iran, however, car consumers do not have many choices, because there are only a few models that have occupied the Iranian market. It causes people to be motivated to manipulate automobiles to be "different." In other words, car consumers want to compensate for the lack of diversity by the diversity of religious functions. To overcome the lack of freedom to buy favorite automobiles, a sub-culture has been formed in Iran that is called a "loving car." Car lovers, using active initiation manners, assemble their automobiles in the way that their lifestyle, distinction, and socio-economic class can be represented. This is a meaningful production and a confliction against passive consumption.

9. Context

The causal conditions do not work independently and require an appropriate context to exert their causality. In this research, the context conditions have been recognized as the automobile's inherent attributes and religious rituals.

The intrinsic properties, such as mobility, attraction, beauty, power, speed, excitation, agency, activism, and emancipation, make the automobile the continuance of the human body. The automobile can compensate for human defects, break or expand the time-space borders and give to people the power of agency and emancipation of human limitations (Urry, 1999). These properties give the automobile extreme popularity which is enforced by media. As an important part of everyday life, the automobile has been highlighted in magazines, movies, music, and popular series since years ago. The automobile has been represented in media as the symbol of power, individualism, releasing from social bands, and a subject for class issues (Hirschman, 2003). Bristow, moreover, asserts that the most important theme of automobile advertising is "performance" (2001). Indeed, car consumers are riding on the previously prepared wave, which is the automobile's performance established by media. In this atmosphere, intrinsic attributes of the automobile make a context for exterior causes to manifest any related function.

In a psychoanalytic approach, the car consumers' desire to create religious functions is related to the aesthetic and emotional aspects of the automobile. For example, mobility as an inherent property is a context in which car consumers can show their protest or zealotry around the city. The beauty of the automobile is another example that makes a context to attract people's attention to the conveyed religious meanings. Also, driving is an experience for youth people to cross child-adult borders and to exhibit their innovations.

Among inherent properties, however, the automobile's inside space plays a special role. It is an intermediate space, between private and public that has a noticeable capacity for various applications. Having a visible-mobile space has transformed inside the automobile into a space that does not have a certain boundary with the public space.

Religious rituals are also a context condition to apply religious functions and meanings of the automobile. In ritual days, the car consumers have enough excuse to add writings, portraitures, and the other religious symbols to the automobiles. The automobiles' religious functions are revealed at the highest level, and society is ready to see these peculiar decorations every year. Our observations and data say that out of this context, religious functions and meanings of the

automobile did not have enough opportunity to be apparent, or with a high compromise, the shape of these functions and meanings were totally different.

10. Intervening Conditions

Intervening conditions are not the main causal agents that create the secondary functions, but they are subsidiary elements that can increase or decrease secondary functions and meanings. What we could find of the interviews is that the intervening conditions are, but not limited to, gender, age, marital status, education, and social class.

Interviewees held that emerging religious functions by boys are different from those that are exposed by the girls. It can be understood of the automobiles' decoration and music in ritual days. Sometimes, for instance, boys employ impolite words against who murdered holy Imams and have harsh decorations. Instead, girls use usually didactic poetries and decorate the automobiles moderately. On the other hand, girls show their protest against the dominating religious power by discovering Hijab, singing, and dancing in the automobile.

Also, data show that single, youth people use the more capacity of automobiles for religious purposes than the others. Writings, decorations, and inside automobile activities are obviously more prevalent between youth people than the elders. Normally, elder people are satisfied by writing a single statement or poetry on the rear glass, whereas youth people decorate and write on all sides, and also draw paintings and listen to the loud music. In the same way, the inside automobile activities and harsh decorations are mostly done by single people, while married ones perform a soft decoration, a light car writing, and use a small picture or portraiture.

As the other factor, we covered that harsh decorations and abnormal monodies are rarely found between high level educated people, such as university instructors, doctors, and lawyers. These behaviors come regularly from the people with low-level education and who are in low cultural (not necessarily economic) class. In many cases, harsh decorations are applied on the luxury automobiles, and this illustrates that the model of decorations and abnormal car writings are not directly restricted by economic conditions, but are affected by cultural status and educational class.

11. Consequences

Consequences are the byproducts of strategies and follow the main category. The main consequence of this research is the mental satisfaction resulted from renewed religious identity. The automobile works as a common-silent language that is shared by peer car consumers to intensify their religious identity and to register car consumers' religiosity in society. The audiences receive the message by seeing the automobiles around the city, decode the symbols, and feel companionship with the drivers' identity.

People with a resistive approach can obtain personal and social acknowledgments by demonstrating a technological, modern, and peaceful protest. It can alleviate intensification of the opposition's wrath, while it propels this religious approach to the public sphere. Meanwhile, developing this kind of religiosity has been transformed into a "threat" for the reigning power. Especially, in the MS's rituals, religious symbols assert protest contents against oppression and

injustice rather than mourning. This stimulates the government to increase restrictions. Police' control on the indoor automobile's acts has been escalated and punishments have been raised. Also, police have increased some ethical controls on driver's license exams. For example, people with apparent tattoos cannot receive a driver's license unless psychologists confirm their healthy mental status. These drivers have become the subject of moral panic in media so far as they are considered as people who commit crimes.

The other consequence has resulted in breaking gender roles, especially in religious-prejudiced families. Although women's driving helps them to be protected, it draws them into the society to give them independence, new connections, more accessibilities to urban spaces and institutes, social opportunities, performance, power, and freedom instead of dependency, staying at home, weakness, and lack of power. Driving has transformed traditional women to modern ones and has broken gender clichés.

12. Conclusion

According to our selective coding, the automobile in Tehran has crossed technological borders and should be understood as a religious object. Although the manifestations of technology and religiosity are defined by their relationship with the religious reigning power, some people, based on their religious and cultural backgrounds, have triumphed over these limitations with simple, creative, meaningful, and resistive actions, and propounded a new kind of religiosity related to their use of the automobile.

In the automobile religiosity, rituals are more significant than beliefs and religious knowledge. It satisfies the religious taste of people that prioritize leisure, pleasure, mobility, aesthetics, and emancipation. This religiosity is not bounded by traditional rituals and prefers to be free of Sharia's rules. All three aforementioned functions, viz. *resistive, confirmative, and privacy function* are, in different ways, act as the agents of this new religiosity that is dominating upon the society with the power, beauty, and charisma of the automobile.

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