

The Veil: Symbol and State Identity

Iran and France

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	3
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	5
CHAPTERS	Page
ABSTRACT.....	6
INTRODUCTION .....	7
1. THEORIES AND METHODOLOGY.....	10
Identity Politics.....	10
Social Constructivism.....	13
2. THE VEIL.....	16
The Veil as a Means of Social Distance .....	16
The Veil as a Means of Ritual: Islamic, Personal, and Cultural Identity.....	21
Conceptualization .....	25
3. SYMBOL AND IDENTITY.....	26
The State: Symbol, Culture, Ideology, and Identity .....	26
State Identity: Symbols and Emotions in Political Discourse	35
State Identity and Individual Identity in Global Perspective	38
State and Religion.....	46
State Identity, Liberalism, and Secularism.....	49
Islam, State Identity, and Multiculturalism in Global Perspective	52
4. STATE AND WOMEN’S IMAGE .....	55
Revolutions and Women’s Image.....	55
State and the Veil.....	62
Iran.....	62
France.....	66
6. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS.....	69
5. CONCLUSION.....	72
REFERENCE LIST .....	75

## Preface

Although the idea of this research came to me decades ago when I was an eight-year-old girl back in Iran, I only began to express my experience and feelings about “the veil” in my International Relations graduate program at UMass Boston. I took on a simultaneous challenge: exploring the English language and learning about international politics. I needed to learn a new language to express my suppressed personal feelings for the first time in opposition to my assigned role as a “decent” Muslim woman who lived within the Islamic boundaries of Iranian political structure. I have been living in the U.S. for almost nine years; as a single mother without available family members. English has become the dialect of my survival, the language of love, and of my connection with my English-speaking friends, teachers, and mentors.

In Iran people are defined as part and parcel of society, a piece of a bigger context; a member of a family, community, city, and finally a living part of the state’s ecosystem. People voluntarily or forcibly, must adjust their individual identity accordingly, when the identity of our societal system changes.

The sociopolitical changes in Iran (the Revolution of 1979) happened when I was two years old. I did not have a chance to participate in it. The main societal changes had already happened prior to the Revolution. When I reached my teens I developed my personal opinion about the social politics of Iran; the Revolution rigidly opposed any opinion that might challenge the power of government. Feeling powerless and unheard, the only choice I had was to wait. The Revolution caused me to suppress my very own soul. I numbed my sense of being to accept my obligatory assignment. I became “a good” Muslim girl, “a decent-looking” college student, soon afterwards “a dependent” wife, and for years “a sacrificial” mother. No one would care if I was wholeheartedly or spiritually Muslim. I have met so many iconic veiled women who got the best

#### THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

sociopolitical and academic positions only because they were good actresses; they faked Islam by covering the surface of their bodies with layers and layers of dark fabric. Being a good role player, a static picture framed by the veil, became my everyday public image of existence. I was neither a good listener nor ever wished to be a living advertising puppet for the Islamic Revolution. But I confess that I was a powerless girl whose love for her family was keeping her sane by safeguarding the family and her grandfather's reputation.

Over time I came to realize that sometimes I accepted the reality of the external political power and let the feelings of powerlessness within the social structure sink in and become part of my identity. My brain, however, started to pinpoint other possibilities which made me more creative and engaged in fighting and resisting my feelings of victimization.

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As a single mother the primary person who was forced to share hard times with me and yet stay patient, I thank my son, Hassan.

I am grateful to my late parents, from whom I inherited the love, determination, and resilience that I have needed for survival.

## Abstract

This paper explores the symbolic meaning of state identity and interprets the veil as a symbol of how that identity has regulated Muslim females' veiling in Iran and France to express these states' association (or dissociation) with Islam. The veil has been used as a symbol of political and religious identity of the state. The Islamic veiling of women represents one aspect of state identity: the relationship between the state's power politics and Islamic culture and ideology. This paper examines the impact of globalization on cultural integration and increasing Muslim minority immigrants in non-Muslim countries. The Muslim minorities more than ever feel the need to reconnect and revitalize their original identity. It also explores the connection between symbolic, ideological, individual, and political meanings of the veil and its relation to the concept of identity. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, enforcing women to wear the veil was intended to ensure the clear image of an Islamic state, without regard for what the Iranian female population wanted or hoped for, despite the fact that women played an important role in participating in the Revolution. In contrast, the multiple bans on Islamic veiling in France has turned this symbol into a secular icon of the French government which gains credit for its contribution for safeguarding the French culture that has felt under siege by the growing Muslim immigrant population. The veil remains a personal symbol for many Muslims (females), but it has also become a political symbol to reassure states of their secular or theological status in the global context. Growing conflict about the meaning of veiling and unveiling both within Muslim and non-Muslim countries has caused Muslim women to play devil's advocate and their body image to become a symbol of "Islamic identity" rather than their personal identity as a veiled or unveiled, French or Iranian identity.

*Keywords:* Veil, Iran, France, Symbol, Identity

### Introduction

States, like individuals, want to advance development and economic growth, but they are equally hesitant to lose the essence of who they are and where they come from. The search for cultural roots and tradition has crystalized in different images and responses. One element of states' struggle for cultural autonomy is constant: the symbolic perception of a nation's uniqueness. This paper discusses the symbolic factor of state identity by examining the legislation of Islamic veiling in Iran and France.

The research addresses a unique view of Islamic veiling as an attribute of the state identity, national and international; a complex interplay between Muslim women's body image and the states' identity as a symbol which shapes both a national image and over time transforms the states' international image. In other words, it works as an objective symbol of state identity; a multi-dimensional sign to reinforce either secular or theocratic image of state identity. The political actors of some states, Iran and France, have regulated women's Islamic veiling in order to identify the state with secular or theocratic image in the global setting.

Many articles and books that have been written about the issue of Islamic veiling extensively examined, described, and explained different aspects of this issue from different perspectives, like legal, religious, psychology, anthropology, political and social sciences. However, little attention has been paid to the fact that Islamic veiling, especially with the global controversy around it nowadays, has been used as a symbolic identity of a sovereign state. Especially in the world of political and ideological pluralism, the identical image of states is threatened and floated in a pool of many political and ideological symbols to choose from. This has been resulted the states to fight for their unique identity and image.

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

The wearing of hijab<sup>1</sup> —a religious head covering or the more progressive whole-body concealing for Muslim women— is a traditional Islamic practice meant to indicate modesty. This traditional significance has persisted for hundreds of years, and is not likely to change anytime soon. However, like many other forms of symbols, hijab also carries a political message. This iconic usage of veil as a political tool identifies the state with a secular or a theological status in the global context.

My interest in this subject goes back to my childhood growing up in Iran. Iranian women born like me on the eve of the Revolution or within twenty years of the revolution experienced a strong impulse to emulate an iconic image of a perfect Muslim woman in mind and in practice. As a nine year old child, I was obligated to wear hijab in public and not the colorful shirts or jeans I would have liked. It was a role I was assigned to and I had to follow the iconic representation of a woman in the Islamic Republic of Iran. I felt like I had to be a perfect picture in a picture frame that constantly has exposed to public judgment. One day in school I was asked to return home to change my shoes because they were not black, brown or grey. Shirin Ebadi, the Noble Peace Prize winner in 2003, in an interview with *Le Monde* said, “It is not easy to be a woman in Iran” (Sedghi, 2007, p. 245) Women’s covering became an influential aspect of the Islamic nature of the revolution representing a strong anti-Western, anti-imperialist ideology. And women, not the revolutionary Muslim men, have been assigned to carry this symbolic identity of the state.

The political and ideological identity of the new revolutionary government was to define the state as an Islamic and anti-Western. The veil turned out to be the symbol of this new identity; the state passed the hijab law and women’s appearances have become a symbol to

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<sup>1</sup>. Throughout the text, the terms Hijab, veil, chador and head- scarf have been used interchangeably.



## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

safeguard the state's image. Iranian women have turned into walking national flags to represent "the Islamic state" in the national as well as global context.

For the first time Western countries responding to the increased Muslim immigrant populations, they focused on the role of the veil and reacted to the different dress-codes of Muslim immigrants particularly the veil. This was the beginning of the international controversy about the veil. The laws that have passed banning the veil have not been a coincidence. It seems like the politicization of the veil is about the religious identity of the state. Similar to women's covering in Iran that is an icon of the Islamic state, banning the veil in France became a reason for safeguarding its secular status. The politicization of the veil in turn has transformed both the way we understood the personal meanings of it as well as the very concept of the state identity in national and international setting.

After clarifying the theories, this paper analyzes the general and visual meaning of the veil in different contexts especially Islamic recommendation and interpretations. Veil as the most apparent visual representation of Islamic culture becomes a complex symbol that carries political implications interrelating the identity politics of Muslims (females) in both theocratic governments like Iran (since the 1979's Revolution) and secular states like France within their social context (social constructivism). By discussing facts about the veil (and usage of the visual representation of women in politics in general), symbols, and identity within different contexts, this paper concludes that one of the underlying factors of the regulations of the veil in Iran and France, in both international and domestic politics is that this symbol as the most visible sign of Islamic ideology and culture, directly relates the state identity with Islam and Islamic culture.

**Theories and methodology: Identity politics and social constructivism****Identity Politics**

For thirty years the politicization of the veil has engaged scholars and journalists, who have written extensively especially about the personal beliefs and life stories of Muslim women. Theories have come from the disciplines of anthropology, psychology, feminism, sociology, as well as philosophy and political science. Although this paper emphasizes the theory of Social Constructivism to gain a better understanding of identity in general and state identity in particular, I also apply the theory of Identity Politics to examine the veil as symbol.

During the 1980s, the issue of the identity came to the forefront of political representation. Many civil and political movements led to reexamining cultural, religious, national, even sexual identity. The time was right for the borderless concept of identity to gain its uniqueness and recreation. During this era the Islamic identity of many Muslim nations in different regions, especially in the Middle East, experienced a “cultural revivalism” through politicization. But the quest for identity was not limited to Muslim states and continued through the 1990s while anti-communism was spreading not only in the Soviet but all over the Eastern Europe. The unfolding process was “destroying old solidarities and redefining group identity and boundaries between groups” (M. Moghadam, 1994). One of the important aspects of the identity movements in general and particularly in Europe was the simultaneous growth of “immigration and the consolidation of the European community,” which was promoting the definition of national identity. Some Western countries adapted cultural rights and ethnicity to design the “multicultural” society. For instance British socialists backed “Muslim demands for state-funded religious schools rather than insist on secularization” (M. Moghadam, 1994).

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

The fate of women's empowerment during this era however was paradoxical. It has been a consistent struggle for women from the religious or cultural minority, especially coming from underrepresented classes, to assert their individual identity. The powerful societal and political forces have pushed them to accept the dominant culture. Identity politics in the case of women's identity clarifies some of the misperceptions. "Consciousness-raising" is a strong tool in identity politics theory that "can empower people, bond them together in a sense of solidarity which is emotional as well as intellectual or political, and can also problematize arenas of life and social norms which tend to be 'naturalized' within hegemonic cultures which were formerly considered to be outside of 'normal' politics" (Yuval-Davis, 1994). During the process of consciousness-raising (1980s) certain political realities pinpointed and modified--based on the collective identity that the individuals wanted to be associated with—rather than recreating them. The trend of associating individual identity to collective identity shapes, when people from the powerful sects use their influence to define others' identity. Many women's movements have used identity politics as a means of consciousness-raising and reducing this tendency (Yuval-Davis, 1994). According to Rosalind Brunt (1992) "representation" is an important aspect of the politics of identity. In her view representation can be understood through two questions: first, how our identities are demonstrated in cultures and also given a place within those cultures; second, who and which political parties are representing and taking action for us. Marie-Aimee Helie-Lucas says the fundamental ideologies impact women's reaction toward states' regulations, especially the laws that affect them. She adds "it is important to fully realize the extent of fundamentalists' attempts to enforce their views of Islamic society through the adoption of Muslim Personal Laws."(Helie-Lucas, 1994) One of the reasons Muslim women are reacting to secular states by wearing the veil comes from "the fear of betraying their identity—defined as a group identity,

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

rather than their gender identity in the group.” This is how they identify their role in identity politics (Helie-Lucas, 1994).

Rita Putins Peters elaborates on the usefulness of identity politics to better understand the twenty-first century version of ethnic restoration, especially in Europe, starting around three decades ago. She points out that “the rapid influx of millions of non-European immigrants and asylum seekers in the 1980s and 1990s” brought the initial threat to “the very identity of European nations” (Putins Peters, 2005). In her view this identity crisis comes from the “liberal ideological preference for a dissolution or assimilation of distinct ethnic identity groups, multiculturalism notwithstanding.” Europe’s right-wing politicians, from Dutch to French, more than ever lobby for the containment of immigration, especially immigrants that have any relation to Islam or Islamic states. Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan believe that ethnic identity is more a matter of politics than one of assimilation or displacement by cosmopolitan identity or classes (1975); it is a conceptualization of nationalism but based on ethnicity (Putins Peters, 2005). Anthony D. Smith (1981), a significant scholar in the field of ethnic identity, emphasizes the political significance of this field while asserting that ethnic identity has been underestimated by many liberals and rationalists. In his book, *The Ethnic Revival*, he elaborates on the diverse manifestation of ethnic identity in different states. Sonia Kruks summarizes identity politics:

What makes identity politics a significant departure from earlier, pre-identarian forms of the politics of recognition is its demand for recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied: it is *qua* women, *qua* blacks, *qua* lesbians, that groups demand recognition. The demand is not for inclusion within the fold of “universal humankind” on the basis of shared human attributes; nor is it for respect “in

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

spite of” one’s differences. Rather, what demanded is respect for oneself *as* different (Kruks, 2001).

When we look at the way European states have preserved their individual identity, after the Cold War, it is evident that they are facing a growing trend of immigration and multiculturalism, and that they need to maintain their eroding language, culture, and customs -- the main factors that characterize their national identity (Wæver, Buzan, & Kelstrup, 1993). Although immigrant labor has contributed to the economic development of Western democracies, there is still tremendous political pressure on limiting the immigration trend. Especially in France, as James F. Hollifield (1992) notes, globalization unites the state’s policies yet undermines state’s efforts to limit the participation of non-European immigrants (at work and as residents). The significance of ethnic identity is causing the minorities to “remain distinct and unwilling or unwelcome to be reconciled to a dominant ethnic national identity. The fundamental tension between integration policies and perception of existing national identities as under siege will remain unresolved for the foreseeable future. Indeed, the precipitous rise in fear of Islamic attacks throughout Europe is redefining the academic agenda of ethnic identity” (Putins Peters, 2005).

### **Social Constructivism**

To better understand the symbolic character of the state identity, it is to examine it with constructivist accounts. How well does the evidence support “the veil” as a symbol of state identity in the study of international relations and the changing state policies? Two factors help answer this question: first, the impact of globalization and multiculturalism on states’ identity; and second, the controllability and resilience or flexibility of the veil as a symbol of cultural

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

Islam, connecting individual identity to group identity and, in a broader context, to the identity of the state and its relations with Islam.

One of the main aspects of constructivist theory is the usage of meaning, knowledge, and ideas within any given social context (Towns, 2010). States' historical and geographical factors also affect their policies, and are important in understanding the reasons beyond the face value of their policies. "Communicative structure among actors ought to constitute the referential framework for attempts to understand why actors do the things they do," says Kratochwil (1988, p. 277). To better understand an idea, a symbol or a phenomenon, constructivists place it—or examine it—within a larger structure. So to improve the understanding and the meaning of the veil in its political context and why the actors, states, use this symbol in their decision and policy making toward Islam, we observe the veil within the international setting.

The changing behavior of a given state is a matter of desire, constructivists believe. They point us to "which actor to study, where they are constructed, and even how and why change is brought about," says Towns (2010, p. 17). Constructivists can locate and explain global changes in the state's behavior. While they lack thoroughness, they are helpful in providing a realistic and practical sense of changing policies.

The explanatory framework of this theory "is the most ambitious and comprehensive, insisting on a global social structure with a specified substantive content which constitutes states' identity and aims (Towns, 2010). If the world polity strongly relies on "modernization theory's notions of 'culture contact' and natural selection, the mere exposure to rational (modern) scripts leads states to abandon the 'old,' as the anticipated benefits of Western rationality somehow automatically triumph over alternatives" (Towns, 2010). The "cultural contradictions" can go hand in hand with the stateless world. Constructivists like Alexander Wendt believe that the "the

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

notions of culture as internally consistent, closed and thereby static and in demand of a non-cultural source of agency for change” is not how the world polity is functioning (Towns, 2010). According to Meyer *et al.* “the cultural construction of rational actorhood endows individuals and groups with exalted spiritual properties that justify and motivate mobilization, innovation and protest” (1997, p. 172).

Constructivist theory gives us great insights into understanding the symbol of the veil in state policies and legal regulations for the sake of its identity and its relations with Islam. The institutional structure of world politics explains the homogenization of cultural norms and symbols as one of its components. The critical constructivist focus on different ideas and cultural norms attests to the importance of understanding the worldwide changes in state behavior toward the veil and Islam. However none of the different methods of the constructivist view approaches international society as a place where states are socially constructed; with no means “international society being a singular and coherent system of meaning and relations within which all actors share certain common values” (Towns, 2010, p. 42). Alexander Wendt (1994, p. 384) says “that the interaction at the systematic level changes state identities and interests.” He also articulates that the constant interaction between the state actors is exposed with external factors and at times causes the states to cooperate as to protect their interests from exogenous forces. According to Wendt (1994, p. 384), “Systematic interest does not transform state interests.” In other words, constructivists are simultaneously interested in identity and interest. In sum, the theory of constructivism takes states as the main unit of analysis and the international system as the context in which states are “inter-subjective,” not material, and “state identities and interests are important parts constructed by social structures” (Wendt, 1994, p. 385). In fact state satisfaction depends on its definition of the “self,” and social identity which are shaped through

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

its actions (nationally and internationally), and the “systematic level of analysis.” Here the significance of the role of non-materials, *the ideas* in world politics becomes evidence. How can certain images and symbols – like *the veil* — become strong enough to override the religious and individual freedom in some states?

### **The veil**

Merriam Webster’s first definition of the word *veil* is “a length of cloth worn by women as a covering for the head and shoulders and, especially in Eastern countries, for the face.” The first usage of this word goes back to 13<sup>th</sup> century; some of its synonyms are blanket, mask, and robe. The image this word brings to mind, after being defined in context and used for hundreds of years, is the covering that Muslim women wear. The ongoing debate about the perception of the veil is a direct result of its politicization, especially by governmental regulations that enforce or ban it. This view is reinforced by national and international media coverage that emphasizes the veil as the most obvious manifestation of conservative Islam.

This section explains the multidimensional meaning and usage of the veil, focusing on the natural changes in its symbolic meaning according to the social context and its relation to the personal and social identity of individuals and groups. It also elaborates on the veil as a mean of social distance, and relates its symbolic usage to both, cultural identity and state identity.

### **The Veil as a Means of Social Distance**

The veil is not an assigned gesture for Muslim women, as it has been practiced by male Muslims as well. Robert Murphy who studied Tuareg males’ veiling saw the veil “an exposition of a certain dialectical process in social life” (1964, p. 1257). The intriguing question that he sought to answer was “Why do Tuareg males cover their faces so completely that only areas around the eyes and nose may be seen?”



## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

The short answer he found through his field work later explained that these people used veil as a symbol for creating a social space between themselves and their surroundings. In Murphy's words, "the veil, though providing neither isolation nor anonymity, bestows facelessness and the idiom of privacy upon its wearer and allows him to stand somewhat aloof from the perils of social interaction while remaining a part of it" (1964, p. 1257).

Here we are getting to the personal identity and its relationship with the veil. In Georg Simmel's view (1950), the individual's need for social detachment applies to all social relations. However, he asserts that the knowledge a person needs to measure his/her social distance depends on the type of relationship he has with other people. According to his theory, people strive for privacy and self-restriction to maintain their social relations. Park and Burgess (1924) and Merton (1957) have also emphasized the veil's role of "segregation." Individuals' social life would not function properly if people know too much about one another. In other words, to maintain "role set" in social life, public and private life must simultaneously respect their separate roles. According to Murphy (1964) the veil becomes a tool for helping Tuareg men to maintain their privacy within their social circle. The veil provides "a restriction of information within the confines of the role set" and helps the "actor" to "promote the solidarity of the relationship itself" (F. Murphy, 1964). Similar to the rhetoric of Islamic veiling for women, Murphy (1964, p. 1258) expands on the interpretation of the veil: "just as the impersonator of a god must wear a mask to erase his other *roles*—for everybody surely knows who he is—the actor in the profane situation must stylize his impersonation of the moment in such a way that he can be at some future moment one of the many other persons he is thought to be."

Individual identity and the veil are closely connected. According to Goffman (1956), the man as a divine object needs to safeguard his sense of "worth and significance." The veil in his

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

deliberation stabilizes the definition of the person who is continuing the social life and relations with others. Who we are as people, the self, is shaped through our interaction with others. This interaction forms people's individual identity and has power to modify it. The veil can be seen as a tool to help protect individual identity in the course of inevitable social exchanges.

In the era of the globalization, societal interactions become more complex. Knowledge about others becomes harder to obtain, and individuals need to define their societal roles more specifically. For instance, a veiled woman or a man who goes to a shop has no other role than as consumer. Socially and personally, this person is there to shop (F. Murphy, 1964). Regardless of whether this person is an executive director, a celebrity, or even the manager of that shop, it makes no difference in her/his role as a customer. The limitation of roles that can be assigned to one person at any given time is one of the benefits of the veil; "as the sphere of knowledge increases, the defenses about certain residual private sphere must be correspondingly strengthened" (F. Murphy, 1964). Veiling also structures the sense of social distance between different groups while maintaining the identity of the veiled person.

The veil works within a social system whose cultural factors define its symbolic meaning. For instance, the symbolic meaning of the veil in Iran, now an Islamic state, forces women to veil in public, has a completely different meaning than wearing the veil by Muslim women in France, which has multiple legal bans on the veil. Even if the government does not ban or enforce wearing the veil, the cultural difference, values, and religious perspectives in Iran and France would allot it with two different meanings. "Just as the territorial requirements of different species of animals vary, it might be that human spacing, accomplished by symbolic, cultural means, is similarly different from one society to another" (F. Murphy, 1964).

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

The interesting factor about the need for distance for human species is that it is not gender-oriented. For instance while Muslim Tuareg males completely cover themselves, except the areas around the eyes and nose, their female counterparts enjoy an unusual freedom permitted to Muslim women. They are free to express themselves in the public, to be present at social gatherings with their male counterparts, to engage in premarital sex, and stay in touch with their male friends even after marriage. They also can file for divorce and get the custody of their children, which is rare in Islamic-influenced judicial systems. Arab visitors are shocked to see Tuareg men veiled but the women unveiled (F. Murphy, 1964).

The continuing practice of veiling in different settings for diverse reasons over a course of hundreds of years makes it a fascinating and strong social symbol. This same symbol has become modified and modernized according to context. For example, the Tuareg men in their home country dress their whole body exclusively in the color blue with variations in its shades. When living in another country, they keep their veil but dress in colorful shirts, shorts, and shoes. Veiling the face is the one unchangeable symbol of the Tuareg men, no matter how far they are from home (F. Murphy, 1964).

The veil as a unique and fascinating way of covering has been interpreted differently according to the context. The social distance application of the veil forms within social system and changes by the fluctuations of the social structure. One unfamiliar (in some extent contrary to the recent interpretation of the veil) comes from the French geographer, Henri Duveyrier (Heffernan, 1989). He says Tuareg veiling is used to protect them from their enemies, (not the opposite, disguising them as enemies of unveiled people, which is the current understanding). Tuareg men personalized their veil by choosing different shades of blue and “individualizing the mode of wearing.” Another factor in veiling is that the facial expressions during conversation are

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

visible only in the movement of the eyes, because the mouth is covered. However, according to Murphy (F. Murphy, 1964) “everything is watched and used as a cue. The position of the eyelids, the lines and the wrinkles of the eyes and nose, the set of the body and the tone of voice are all part of the Tuareg’s gestalt of the situation, so the outsider must adapt to this and learn to control these stimuli in himself and observe them in the other if he is to correctly interpret the behavior of his subjects.”

Covering the mouth allows the Tuareg men to narrow the “communication zone” and become symbolically less available, under the reasoning that exposing the face causes them to lose self-control and feel defenseless. Another reason for veiling is privacy. Tuareg men feel shame when they expose their mouth during their interactions—especially when they are encountering a person with higher power or position--with others that again goes back to the need for social distance. Privacy is a “quality of life in society” that contributes in maintaining the self-esteem. Veiled Tuareg men achieve a better position within conflicting situations because the veil symbolically eliminates part of their individual identity from the situation (the need for social distance varies from one setting to another) (Murphy, 1964).

The symbolic usage of veil in achieving social distance is universal. In modern society some people withdraw from social situations by wearing dark glasses both, indoors and outdoors which also can be a sign of prestige (Murphy, 1964). The veil is not a static way of covering; its shape, style, disposition, and reasoning—formality and informality—depends on “its specific situational uses.” The changes in the veil happen when “different individuals in a group readjust their veils as the tune of relationship subtly shifts or persons enter or leave the sitting” (F. Murphy, 1964).

### **The Veil as a Means of Ritual: Islamic, Personal, and Cultural Identity**

The veil is a big or small piece of cloth that Muslim women traditionally wear. But recently the veil has become more than just a traditional cover since it has become legally regulated in states like Iran and France. The veil represents a kind of visual identity for whoever wears it. The context in which the veil is displayed makes a difference in its identity especially because the dissimilarities between immigrants and the native Europeans is rising, like in the case of France. As Caryle Murphy puts it “as an increasingly visible symbol of Islam, the veil has become a complex social issue in the West as well as in the Muslim World. Who wears it - and why?” (2009, p. 12). Muslim women’s veiling, has been under extensive attention mainly for its interpretations related to denial of freedom, oppression, and subjugation of women, especially among Western culture and politics (Ahmed, 1992; Davary, 2009; Fernea, 1998; Hafez Barzangi, 2004; Muge Gocek & Balaghi, 1994; Wadud, 1999). Muslim women’s veiling is widely misunderstood especially in the West while the real reasons have not yet been clearly explored.

Besides the religious factor of veiling, the visual representation of this form of covering is also seen as a fashion. “Hijab Fashion” has found its place within fashion magazines displaying beautiful faces framed with fabrics and colors. Turning pages of one of these magazines Reem Osama says, “we have fashion of our own: we, Muslim ladies, can cover and be beautiful” (Murphy, 2009). Matching head scarves with other clothing has become an art and as a symbol for demonstrating a visual representation for Muslim women’s body image. In fact some women feel and look more beautiful in colorful coverings. In racially sensitive contexts, a Black Muslim woman who wears the veil is seen as only a Muslim in her community. This might be less sensitive than being black; it makes her feel more integrated because the mixture of

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

colors and fabric of the veil cuts down her skin color. The question here is: Is the discrimination against veiling less damaging than racial discrimination of skin color?

The most common reason for veiling is religious. Muslim women also use this covering to defend and distinguish themselves from non-Muslims. Many Muslim women, who were not wearing the veil before, presently adopt the veil “to show their pride in their faith, particularly in times like these when Islam is under attack from non-Muslims” (Murphy, 2009). It is a way for women to show that they are proud to be Muslim, also a way of presenting a kind of visual identity and to be respected by others as who they are. Murphy mentions “this is an especially strong sentiment in Muslim countries where people feel their Islamic identity is threatened by the global spread of Western cultures. For many women in these countries, being ‘authentic’ means wearing the Islamic head scarf” (2009, p. 13). Jennifer Heath (2008) states that the symbolic image of the veil has become more like a cliché in the Western culture as it becomes equal with terms like: oppositions, tyranny, and zealotry. None of these terms have anything to do with the real reason for Muslim women’s veiling. Here is a particularly comprehensive definition of veiling from her:

Veiling- of women, men, and sacred places and objects- has existed among people of countless cultures and religions from time immemorial. Yet the veil is vastly misunderstood. Once upon a time, the veil in all its multiplicity was more or less taken for granted everywhere as, at the very least, an essential expression of the divine mysteries. Today, veiling has become globally polarizing, a focus for the struggle between Islam and the West and between contemporary and traditional interpretations of Islam. (Heath, 2008)

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

Since the nineteenth century with the emergence of colonial powers, the veil became a visible way of identification for Muslim women to show their anti-Western identification. This created an innovative political definition of veil, adding another layer of meaning to the Islamic veiling. The socio-political context of women's identification has risen from the traditional Islamic recommendations of wearing the veil adding an emphasis to a symbolic role of Muslim women in social contexts. Ziba Mir-Hosseini argues that "in doing so, they are challenging both Islamist and orientalist notions of hijab, and giving it a new meaning and symbolic value" (Mir-Hosseini, 2007). In contrast, Ibrahim B. Syed explains that "in the contemporary, normative Islamic language of Egypt and elsewhere the hijab now denotes more a way of dressing than a way of life, a (portable) 'veil' rather than a fixed domestic screen/seclusion" (Syed, 2001). However, some believe the Islamic law, an interpretation of the word of God, it is not fixed and changes with the time and social circumstances and the veil is not a necessary requirement of Islam. "Some view the veil as a symbol of spatial gender boundaries, boundaries that were not established by God and the Prophets but by the male authority. In this context the veil refers to a particular spatial dimension and indicates as assigned private space for women, a space that should not be trespassed" (Davary, 2009, p. 49).

The question here then is: what is the intent of Islam regarding veiling of women?<sup>2</sup> This is a translation of one of Quran's verses regarding the veil:

Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: that will make for greater purity for them: and God is well acquainted with all that they do.

And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty: and they should not display beauty and ornaments except what (must

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<sup>2</sup>. The Islamic republic of Iran's interpretation of Islamic law regarding the veil is different than what Quran says.

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

ordinarily) appear thereof; that they must draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, or their men, or their slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their ornaments. (Yusuf Ali, 1989)

Therefore according to Quran, hijab, veiling or modesty is required by both men and women. The Quran advises men and women to respect “a new public modesty.” The ideal view of social relations between men and women is considered a mutual understanding of Islamic law from both men and women. “While modesty is a religious prescription, the wearing of a veil is not a religious requirement of Islam, but a matter of culture milieu” says Cyril Glasse (1989). The main point of this Quran verse is the general fairness that must be applied to both men and women. Modesty should be respected in all relationships, whether between man and man, man and woman, woman and woman. The rights of women as delicate and sexual individuals are emphasized in Islam by the importance of covering their beauty, and their protecting from the “inequities and vicious practices (such as female infanticide, unlimited polygamy, or concubine, etc.), which prevailed in the pre-Islamic Arabia” (Syed, 2001).

Increasingly growing numbers of Muslim women are questioning the legitimacy of Quran’s interpretations about the veil and the obligatory requirements for women by the governments that legally regulate it. In a telephone interview with *The Christian Science Monitor* professor of political science at Ithaca College, Asma Barlas says “...why is the onus always on women to be custodians of the community’s morality or identity?” Then she adds that the reason for this purely patriarchic interpretation of Quran is because “historically only male scholars



## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

have read the Koran [Quran]...always within patriarchies. That is why I call the dominant reading of Islam a misreading” (Murphy, 2009).

### Conceptualization

Here is the list of several terms regarding the specific kind of covering in different countries which in the English language all are known by the general term of “veil”. *Head scarf* usually just covers the hair and can be small to wrap around the head, or bigger to flow over the shoulders as well—colors are depend on the taste, the level of conservative view of person, and the age of who wears it. *Chador* is a big cone shape piece of cloth—traditional covering in Iran—that covers women’s body from head to toe. *Abaya*, worn by mostly Saudi females, is “a loose black robe [and] many [Muslim women] add the *niqab*, a square piece of cloth that covers the mouth and nose, or sometimes hides the entire face with only a slit for the eyes.” *Burqa* is the most restricted way of veiling, and mainly Afghan women wear it. It is “a long billowy smock that totally covers a woman from head to toe, including her face” (Murphy, 2009). She is able to see just through a small piece of webby cloth in front of her eye.

The central point of this article is the notion that women’s body image become a symbol of their representation in sociopolitical contexts both secular and theocratic. Islamic veiling particularly as a visible sign of Muslim females’ body image affects the state identity as much as it “affects women’s power, subjectivity, and identity” (Davary, 2009, p. 47). Some of the views and meanings about the veil either from Muslim or non-Muslims are based on the sense of what counts as normal look and behavior and what is not. For instance in France the veil is seen as a sign of rigid religiosity, while wearing the veil in Iran regardless of females’ relationship with religion is the only way of dressing for women or more accurately as the government dress code.

## Symbol and identity

### The State: Symbol, Culture, Ideology, and Identity

Governments like people want to promote development and economic growth, but both are equally hesitant to lose the essence of who they are and where they come from. The search for cultural roots and tradition has crystalized itself in different images and actions. One element of “the struggle for cultural autonomy” is constant: the symbolic perception of its uniqueness. This chapter discusses the symbolic factor of identity. The veil represents and intertwines with the symbolic interpretation of Islamic tradition. In the contemporary politics the Muslim women’s veiling is also representational image of the states’ identity especially in regard to their relations with their Muslim population. The emergence of political and legal regulations on the veil by both Muslim and non-Muslim states show that the symbol of the veil has enough weight to challenge the international image of a state as Islamic or secular—or a non-Muslim dominated state.

The process for cultural autonomy is happening all around the world. “Religious fundamentalism and the formation of the nation states in previously tribal societies are aspects of this process” says Zdzistaw Mach (Mach, 1993, p. ix). However this does not mean that the process is not happening in the modern societies. The demand to keep the traditions and the common ethnic origin often ends up with tensions between groups and at times between states.

For the purpose of saving the features of a culture, creation and recreation of its symbolic representations have a very important role. It is essential to take into account that symbols find their meanings in the context; likewise, the social structure of the context impacts the symbol’s meaning. “Every culture contains a cognitive model of the world which defines its own group

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

and other groups in terms of value, ideologies, and stereotypes,” states Mach. (Mach, p. x) A set of symbols helps this cognitive model to shape and translate into the identity unity of a group or a nation. This unified identity helps the group to distinguish itself from others, define its boundaries and maintain its relations with the other identities from outside context.

To maintain, change, create, and recreate identities in the global context we need to pay attention to the effect of relevant symbols. We also need to pay attention to the fact that symbols are formed within context and in relation to the power structure of the society. The unpreparedness of different groups in respecting collective relationship and understanding the symbolic representations of the structure may end up in a conflict.

In this chapter I analyze the effect of the symbolic representations of state identity in different cultures. I look at the important role of symbols in forming identity. Religious practices and their symbols are very much imbedded in social relations and cultural identities of different groups and states. In Andrew J. Reck's book (1964) *Selected writings: George Herbert Mead*, the sociologist George Herbert Mead believes, for people –as well as states — the process of identification is through the relation and interaction with others. According to him, people identify themselves by envisioning their own behavior through the perspective of others. The individual identity is shaped by a series of actions in relation to other people. Some of these actions reflect through signs and symbols that show an individual's connection or disconnection to another group or groups. Mach (1993) articulates that symbolic characters and their relations with identity would shape one's self-image. In Erik Erikson's (1968, p. 61) view, personal identity consists of “a subjective sense of continuous existence and a coherent memory.” Identity is a multifaceted concept that cannot be studied in a series of separate pieces as a person's role in different contexts differs, but it has to be looked on as an integrated whole that represents the

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

complexity of a person's personality, (Erikson, 1968). Even though the individual identity must be looked at as a whole, it goes through different phases and crises; the past and future actions as well as the past and future structure of the society contribute to its formation. "Psychological identity strives for identical unity...identity formation thus involves a continuous conflict with powerful negative identity elements" (Erikson, 1968, p. 62). The identity crisis is a result of the individual's contrary perception toward unfamiliar others. As Mach puts it, "such a crisis consists in fear of intrusion of strange elements into one's own domain and in attempts at defending one's own distinct character defined in opposition to that of others" (1993, p. 4).

Similarly, this can be the case in regard to state identity. The international interactions between the states are increasing because, in the contemporary world with globalization, the rise of immigration, and movement between different groups representing different cultures, values and traditions. At this level of interaction, the question of identity is: What is the unique character of one state in relation to other states? Here it is evident that both individual and state identities share aspects, mainly because in both cases, identity is formed by integration, adaptation, and sometimes conflict and encounter. Additionally, in both, individual and state cases identity "is a subjective and symbolic character" (Mach, 1993, p. 4). Identity in general is defined as "an object of our perception, and thus forms an essential basis of our action in relation to this object" stated Mach (1993, p. 5). For instance for a Muslim, religious identity is defined by her/his perception toward Islam. The Islamic identity of a Muslim in Iran is different from the identity of a Muslim in France, depending on the context and the way that person defines and perceives Islamic doctrine. The individual representation of this identity also differs. A Muslim girl in Iran may not see the wearing of the veil a necessary part of her religion or a need to prove

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

her Islamic identity through her body image, by contrast a Muslim girl in France sees the veil as a very important perception of her personal and religious identity in that context.

Thus, “identity is formed in action, or rather in interaction, in the process of exchange of the messages we send, receive, and interpret, until a general, relatively coherent image is achieved”; identity is formed in a process and also is a result of the cultural and ideological structure in which people prioritize perception of the world around them (Mach, 1993, p. 5). Mach also states that “establishing identities of objects through acts of identification composes” an aspect of this perception which is a stage in creating cultures (1993, p. 5). Similarly, if we presume the veil as an object that Muslim and non-Muslim people and states identify themselves with, it establishes a dominant perception not only about individual Muslims but also about the Islamic culture and identity. Thus, this perception has both an individual and universal ramification.

Identity is not an isolated concept that can be defined by only a person or a state, Edwin Ardener (1987) said. “We don’t have an identity—what we see are simple ways that we are identified (passive) and ways we identify (active)” asserted Mach (1993, p. 6). Ardener (1987) points to the importance of the power relation between the parties in different groups as a factor in their process of identification. As a result, how identity comes out of the power struggle depends on the kind of relationship between the dominant group and the less powerful ones. Norbert Elias in his book, *The Established and the Outsiders* (1965), realizes that the establishment of the perception and image of every group depends on the power relation between that group and others (Elias & Scotson 1965; Mennell, 1990).

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

The well-defined social categories by which some groups automatically are assigned or others are excluded, are the main reason for formation of the concepts and symbols. For instance, in Iran, after the Revolution of 1979, the state declared its commitment to implementing the Islamic law by adding the word “Islam” to its name as “the Islamic Republic of Iran.” In France, however, the French Revolution resulted in a separation of church and state. In recent years we see how French government is increasingly regulating the Islamic veiling to disengage itself from its Muslim population of three and a half million. When a veiled Muslim girl walks on a main urban street in France the general public perception automatically excludes her from the French identity, just because she does not fit in the accepted “French-looking-female” category. On the other hand, a Muslim girl who is not wearing her veil properly, on the streets of Tehran, is accused of being “Westernized and ill mannered.” Because of her look she has no privilege or authenticity as a Muslim girl. She will be looked at as so called “nation-seller” or “vatan-foroush,” someone who has no respect for her religion, no matter how much she wholeheartedly believes in God and follows the other religious recommendation and values. What matters is the image of her body image which mainly defined by the government as a “decent” Iranian female or a French female citizen. Female’s social identity is perceived by the political definition of “decency” which is predicated by living in such societies and constrained by what is accepted by the powerful group (usually the state).

People reflect and act in relation to what they see in the society around them. In other words “people’s behavior is determined directly by their views and interpretation of reality and not by the reality as it is objectively structured and as it may appear to an external observer at any particular moment,” clarifies Mach (1993, p. 7). Therefore, if we take this statement as our assumption that people’s behavior and actions are the result of their understanding of their

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

realities of their surroundings, especially enforcement of laws — also taking human nature into account — it should not be hard to understand the reactionary emphasis on identical symbols in the societies that want to isolate, confine or discredit a certain way of looking for Muslim females by regulating the veil. What is significant in the regulatory actions from both Iranian and French government is the way they are using the significance symbolic meaning of the veil to translate, transfer, and expand it toward creating a factor of state representation, showing they are pro or against Islamic ideology, or at least to emphasize its influence on their cultural and political identity.

The question that can be raised is: Why did these governments (Iran and France) choose to focus on the Islamic veil? The designation of the veil as a political image, in which both individuals and states can identify with, shows the ability of the veil to embody and identify the distinction between pro-Islamic states and secular governments. The Islamic veil “plain and obvious in a form of a contrastive model” clarifies the differences between Muslim and non-Muslim states (Mach, 1993, p. 7). Humans are prone to construct an image of their cultures to make it bold in the face of other cultures. For doing that they choose to define some symbols to differentiate and emphasize their own uniqueness.

Culture can be represented through set of structured symbols. Most of symbols are ideas that are elaborated into more touchable and realistic ways. For example the veil is a symbol that is based on the concepts of modesty and restraint for female Muslims. Regardless of how constrained veiled women may look, this symbol carries enough weight and reasons for women to practice it. Some of the reasons are: religious, modesty, sexual protection, political defiance, social revenge, and cultural preservation. The personal reasons for veiling and unveiling can vary. However, the symbolic usage of the veil in politics and its legal regulations does not

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

fluctuate very much. States' main reason for legalizing or banning the veil is focused on freeing women from oppression of this patriarchal practice and the theological/secular nature of the states. Many social realities that are represented through symbols can be misunderstood if they are analyzed out of the context. For instance, many stories that reflect individual reasons of veiling and unveiling are difficult to understand, especially in terms of clarifying the logic behind its usage which differs from one context to another. According to Edwin W. Ardener (1987) the internal and external identification differs. Sometimes the pressure of the external identification causes individuals and states to accept it internally. For instance, a non-conservative Muslim Iranian woman who, according to law, has no choice except to wear hijab in a public and wears hijab every day for years and years can develop an internal identity through veiling which happens as a result of an eventual psychological absorption. Over time she may think and feel attached to the veil even if she has a choice to not wear it, she comes to prefer covering herself because the veil has become part of her internal identity. Another reason for women to wear veil is because their individual identity is constructed by the power of social contacts, belonging to a group, culture or tradition of the context.

Many Iranian women after the Revolution disguised themselves in the required dress code to demonstrate their Islamic decency and get the best positions in the government and private sectors. Knowing some of these women personally, I discovered after a few years of getting paid very well from the Islamic government, their internal identity also changed as they became very conservative Muslims. They disposed of their photo collections to erase the memory of their previous identity that not very long ago displayed them enjoying vacations, wearing bathing suits in the beaches of United States or European countries where they were attending their higher educations.



## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

The power gap between different groups in the society can cause the weaker groups to adapt the dominant identity, sometimes only for the sake of survival and economic interests (Elias & Scotson, 1965). This adaptation can also cause some repercussions that appear over time especially when the adaptations are the result of enforcements from the powerful groups or governments. France and the legal ban on Islamic head scarf along with the most recent ban on the face veil is a relevant example of this kind that has increased the unhappiness among the three and half millions French Muslim population. What is important is the relations between the identity of the state and individuals through the representation of symbols in national and international context. For instance, Ardener (1987) points out that the generic perception of American Indians by European as all Indians, disregarding the differences carrying various tribal and communal identities. French Muslims seem, similarly, have difficulty seeing their individual, ideological, and national differences because they all are described as Muslim French citizens. The variation of Muslim women's covering in the types and colors, besides its generic Islamic identification, also displays a unique image for different Muslim sects within Muslim communities. Mach (1993) identifies a correlation between the cultural distance of the dominant cultural and the weaker ethnics. As the gap gets more distant the prejudices and generalizations about the unrepresented culture becomes more likely. French Muslims original nationalities and their preferred subdivisions of Islam have been reduced to only Muslim by the French culture and Christian ideology.

Identity, both individual and social, links people to a broader social context. People experience deep emotional attachments to their identity. The formation of individual identity starts in early years of people's life and that is why it is very important for them to protect it. People are willing to go through many burdens to safeguard their individual and social identity

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

(Stern, 1995). According to Vamik D. Volkan psychoanalysis of ethnicity and nationality reveals that people have emotional attachments to their tribes or communities. He adds that “the sense of self is intertwined at a primitive level with the identity of the group. Membership in these groups is not like that in the club or professional organizations, since it is tinged with raw and primitive affects pertaining to one’s sense of self and others and to their externalization and projections” (Volkan & Julius, 1990, p. 36). In another work Volkan relates people’s symbolic and ritual behavior to their emotional attachment to their group identity (Volkan, 1997). Herbert C. Kelman claims the central position of identity as an important reason of many ethnic clashes because of the deep sense of defenselessness and fears that if one side accepts the other’s identity or nationality it would mean losing their own sense of self and identity (Kelman, 1991). “Each side seems concerned , then—perhaps at an unconscious level—that acceptance of the other’s nationhood would undermine the moral basis of its own claims...fulfillment of the other’s national identity is perceived by each side as equivalent to the destruction of its own identity” (Kelman, 1987, p. 170).

Norms and symbols are very crucial elements of the international society. “A norm is thus not a mere generalization of regular practices but rather refers to recognition or knowledge of relations between specified behaviors and stated identity” says Towns (2010, p. 42). Norms and identity are closely related. When we comprehend the action of norms then we can understand identity. Towns defines identity as “the social meanings and practices through which an actor becomes distinctively recognizable or known as such, enabling the becoming of an acting “self” (2010, p. 43). The only possible way to be identified as a being is through a distinction from others.

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

By looking at recent international news it is clear that many of the uprisings in different regions are not only evidence of a need for political and economic changes/reforms but an evidence of a need for reconnection of tradition and cultural identity. Cultural identity is usually defined in political contexts, either through connection with different social groups or in broader settings like national and global environments. The global economic development has caused nations to grow more interdependent. Therefore, the social structure of developing nations has been more cautious about the global cultural influences to keep the authenticity, privilege and power of their dominant cultural identity.

### **State Identity: Symbols and Emotions in Political Discourse**

The internal/personal and global/social identities are two forms of state identity. Like individuals states define themselves by their link to the history, ideology, political affiliation and also by their interactions with their neighbors and friends within a bigger sociopolitical context. The complex relationship between the state and its individuals help to understand the state identity better. It is true to some extent that states are the main instruments in reflecting their individuals' political and ideological affiliation internally and externally. The question here is how much the state identity reflects the individual identity and vice versa. For states, like individuals, it is also easier to change or modify the internal identity within their boundaries than their global identity.

Often when we talk about the state the first thing that comes to mind is the "politics". Politics is woven into the everyday life of the people. Politics gets its definition from the ways and means in which people find connection with it especially through emotional and symbolic understanding. The power of emotion behind politics comes from the way individuals define

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

politics in their minds, both valuing and identifying with it. The effect of emotion in political discourse comes from the natural effect of the political constituents' behavior. Similarly, the identity of people especially the political leaders affect the political identity of the institution that they represent. In this equation symbols works as a channel that both individual and political events define them as tools to identify themselves with. Ted Brader and Nicholas A. Valentino say "different people, or the same people at different times, may have dramatically different emotional experiences in response to the same political" symbol, issue, or event (Brader & Valentino, 2007, p. 180). Like peoples' emotional attachment to their symbolic identities, political bodies (states) carry emotional attachment to their symbolic dispositions. States' response to their threatened symbolic representation can cause them to make policies that are not based on facts or rational, even at times not serving their best interests. Here I briefly examine the relationship between the state identity and emotions through symbols.

Studies show how the forces of self-interest can be in contrast with symbolic representations (Sears & Funk, 1991). According to the affective intelligence theory most political behaviors are led by two emotional factors: "the disposition system which generates enthusiasm, facilitates the development and execution of learned routines by monitoring the environment for signs that one's goals are being met [and] the surveillance system which generates anxiety or fear, facilitates the redirection of attention and higher reasoning functions when a potential threat to one's well-being is detected" (Brader & Valentino, 2007, p. 182). The affective intelligence theory consists of two major emotions: enthusiasm and fear; "both emotions can emerge in response to threats and, indeed, in response to the same threat" (like what the veil is for safeguarding the Islamic identity in Iran and inversely is threatening the secular status of the French identity) (Brader & Valentino, 2007, p. 183).

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

Politics arouses so much emotion. Fear and hatred are two main emotions that shape political images and realities. As David C. Leege and Kenneth D. Wald say “hatred is easily stoked. Scapegoating and other transfer mechanisms are there for choosing. Once the image is shaped, it is hard to recover any other reality” (Leege & Wald, 2007, p. 292). Culture can determine human behavior in three ways: “to establish *identity*, to define *norms* from behavior, and to set *boundaries* on appropriate relationships. Culture is allied with many ways of knowing: science, intuition, myth, and religion” state Leege and Wald (2007, p. 292). This is the reason that the culture “is not monolithic for nation-state, those who have the same national identity often embrace conflicting norms and set boundaries differently. Some values matter more than others to specific primary groups and secondary associations based on race, ethnicity, religious denomination...[for this reason] the preferred values have prior claim to governmental action. In a democratic society, in particular, they compete with people who embrace a different value priority” (Leege & Wald, 2007, p. 293).

It is important to understand the “cultural wars.” Some governments are particularly more concern about the cultural and religious differences of their citizens. Although some cultural norms may seem clear cut and fixed but “frequently they are malleable and become the means for politicians or regimes to achieve a goal” (Leege & Wald, 2007, p. 294). Sometimes political parties unite their members around an ideology, cultural norms/symbols, and the ways and means to safeguard or recreate it. For instance, the French ruling political party has tried to gain the popular support by debating Islam and pointing out its opposing cultural and practicing norms with the French secularity. This is a device to secure the upcoming election for President Sarkozy. Cultural politics also recognizes that people and groups classify themselves with their group and choose a “social identification.” People show their connection with the politics and

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

parties by voting which is a symbol that defines the context that people are placed in (Leege & Wald, 2007). In sum, emotion is deeply imbedded in politics. Symbols are effective ways for both people and political parties to gain support through building a unique identification. Customized symbols, media and advertising channels can encourage people to respond to different group identification through stimulating, and mobilizing national symbols. Especially during major voting seasons, like presidential elections, if a political party loses its enemies, “it must create new ones to remain in power.” For instance, when a political candidate (like in France) talks about Islam and its opposing backward culture of female’s veiling this evokes rhetoric, *other* sentiments, and helps the candidate to fulfill his/her political ambition (Leege & Wald, 2007, p. 298). Social threats and anxieties activate peoples’ emotional motivations (the theory of affective intelligence) through cultural politics and “politicians deploy efficient symbols to alert [their constituents] to danger to their cherished social values”, all for the purpose of their political goals (Leege & Wald, 2007, p. 298).

### **State Identity and Individual Identity in Global Perspective**

The state identity, like the individuals within it, is composed of different characteristics. The internal/personal and global/social identities are two forms of state identity. Like individuals, states define themselves by their link to the history, ideology, political affiliation and also with their interactions with their neighbors and friends within a large sociopolitical context. For states, like individuals, it is also easier to change or modify the internal identity, within their boundaries, than their global identity. Often changing the internal identical factors is the first step toward the initiation of an external identity transformation. For instance, French government’s ban on Muslim veiling which is seen as a sign of oppression is a way to keep its visual image as a liberal, modern, and secular state. Inversely, in Iran the enforcement of the veil for all women,

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

is a way for government to control its internal/individual image as an Islamic nation rule by Islamic law.

States, like individuals, strive to establish an identity. This identity is constructed not only through the multiple identities of constituents, but also through states' relationships with other nations. Individuals acquire their social identities through the influences of their family, religious background, political affiliation, and their relationships with friends, neighbors, and other individuals.

States also have two forms of identity: a national identity and an international identity. National identity consists of distinctive ideology, history, demographic, institutions, and political affiliation. More broadly, however, the state's international identity consists of its relations with other countries, its geographic location, and its overall political ideology, and these identities shape its relations with other states. John Palfrey and Urs Gasser say that, for individuals, both personal and social identity are not "completely static" (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008, p. 17). Individuals have control over their personal identities and the way they are perceived by others. However, like changing international image for states, it is much more difficult to change one's social identity because it may require drastic changes, such as distancing oneself from one's family, changing one's friends and group affiliations, and relations with neighbors to change social status. These changes take much more time to gradually build a new social identity. For instance a person, who moves to a complete new faraway location where nobody knows her, has an opportunity to transform her social identity.

Just like individual who has more control over her personal identity than her social identity, the state has more control over its sovereign identity than its international image. One

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

way for the state to create a unique cultural image for itself is to regulate the dress and outward display visualization of its constituents. States, like individuals, have more control over their internal image than their international role, which mainly comes from their interactions with other states. As it is the case with individuals, states change or modify their internal image often in hope of eventually changing in their international posture.

It is impossible for a state to change its geographical location in order to redefine its international identity but for them regulating the visible factors of its constituents seem to be the only way to change/safeguard its international identity and image. For example, in Iran after the revolution of 1979, the Islamic veiling as an internal, both religious and political identity factor became mandated by law for all females over age 8 or 9 years old, whether or not they are Muslim. On the other hand, in France in September 2004, the government banned wearing of visible sign of religious affiliation in the state-funded schools. In the words of Simon Thompson “although the law officially banned all religious symbols, it was widely understood that it was directed primarily against Muslim headscarves” (2006, p. 5).

The relationship between the factors of state identity and individual identity can be political and ideological. Politics and dominant religious affiliation of the state are closely intertwined in the everyday life of the citizens. Politics and religion as two abstract concepts get their definition through the ways and means in which people find connection with them especially through deep emotional and symbolic understandings. Sometimes symbolic understanding of the religion and politics are so powerful that they can unite individual and states while other times can take them apart and make them enemies. The power of emotion behind these concepts comes from the way individuals define them in their minds, according to their desire and need, signifying them until they become strong enough to work as identifying



## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

factors for those who created the symbols. As a result of the process of symbolization, politics and religion first become part of peoples' identity and later on some of these signs find their ways to symbolize a visual representation of the state.

There are many religious and political symbols defined and available for states and individuals to choose from and associate themselves with the ideas they represent. It is through these chosen set of symbols that states and individuals, to some extent, prioritize their relationship with one another. Prioritization means sometimes that the symbolic identity of the state threatens the symbolic identity of the individual and vice versa (Edelman, 1985). Therefore, the states and their constituents are not always on the same page in terms of their political and religious symbolic identity. It is not that they must have absolute harmony agreement between their symbolic identical characteristics. However, for the sake of harmony, there must be a respectful acceptance between the states and their constituents' identical factors. Otherwise individuals and groups who feel their political or ideological symbols are ignored or disrespected by their residing state feel victimized and excluded from the domain of ideology or politics (sometimes both). The outcome of this oppressed feeling eventually shows itself in resentment. Usually the anger of the unrepresented minority shows itself in different ways. One of the common ways that these groups or individuals use, is to emphasize their political or religious symbols in the public domain for the purpose of getting attention and feel existed. The exaggerated display of symbols from the unrepresented political or ideological individuals, especially comes through the most visible and iconic symbols to get the most attention. States' flags are also used. They are political and sometimes carry religious symbols. The Iranian flag, for example, has displays word of God in Arabic.

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

Also some special ways of dressing carry political or religious meanings for individuals but when states regulate the dress code, it becomes part of the image and symbol of the state which happened in Iran after the Islamic revolution of 1979 when the wearing of the veil was enforced. However, it is evident that the state as the sole, traditional but still valid power mechanism does not necessarily reflect its individuals' pluralistic identity. Iran and France are the two well-known theocratic and secular states that have regulated this Islamic symbol in their legal systems. These states have used this symbol as a political tool, and this is again one of those individual symbols/identity characters that, upon being transformed by powerful political or religious figures into the symbolic identity of the state, has lost its original meaning and significance. Now Islamic veiling is known more as a political symbol of the state identity rather than its ideological symbol of Muslim females. There are so many shared or unshared symbols between individuals and states. The question is why the Islamic veiling became the symbol of Islamic or non-Islamic identity in Iran and France?

Individuals and states identify themselves with either political affiliation or religious beliefs. At any given time more than several political or religious symbols are available to them. Usually they do not feel the urgency of understanding the "other" symbols beside the one that serves either solely their interest or the interest of the majorities of their constituents for states and their communities for individuals. That is why, at the end of the day, the "other" political or religious symbols are consciously or unconsciously disrespected, unrepresented, misused, or simply ignored by some governments. It is because especially the states do not familiarize themselves with the quality and purpose of "other" political and religious symbols. The states misinterpretations of the "other" symbols have provoked populations to turn against them.

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

In Iran and France, the veil as an individual ideological symbol has been interpreted wrongly by both states just because they want to take advantage of its unifying powerful image. They transform its meaning and organic nature to a symbol of oppression and backwardness (France) or vice versa as a symbol of anti-Western and God-loving spiritually messianic (Iran). Islamic veiling has been a powerful multidimensional bridge between individual, political, and religious identity for hundreds of years. In the last three decades in Iranian society, especially before and during the revolution of 1979, veiling became a uniting, anti-monarch symbol that mobilized the mass popular uprising against the Shah's regime, but after 1979, its symbolic meaning was changed, and to some extent was lost in transition; it became an identifying symbol of state identity, this time to prove and legitimize the new state, name given by religious politicians, "the Islamic Republic of Iran". The veil transformed to a symbolic image that its color and length—its look--was rigidly defined by the Iranian state. The government perceived it as a new sign for its new Islamic identity. The veil was to prove not just internal but also to begin transforming the Iranian international identity as an Islamic state. In this context women, as the carriers of the veil, were being forced to be the perpetual walking flags in public as well as in all the pictures and banners not only domestically representing Iranian society but also representing Iran in the international media and news coverage.

A state needs to associate itself with one or more political and religious icons and beliefs. However, there are times when the state preferences and interests in identifying itself with some groups and individual symbols conflict with other groups, usually the minorities in which a clash between the two reflects in the disaffiliating language as "us" and "them." Samuel Huntington states:

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

As people define their identity in ethnic and religious terms, they are likely to see an “us” versus “them” relation existing between themselves and people of different ethnicity or religion. The end of ideologically defined states in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union permits traditional ethnic identities and animosities to come to the fore.

Differences in culture and religion create differences over policy issues, ranging from human rights to immigration to trade and commerce to the environment...Most important, the efforts of the West to promote its values of democracy and liberalism as universal values, to maintain its military predominance and to advance its economic interests engender countering responses from other civilizations. Decreasingly able to mobilize support and form coalitions on the basis of ideology, governments and groups will increasingly attempt to mobilize support by appealing to common religion and civilization identity. (Huntington, 1993; Lechner & Boli, 2008, p. 43)

If states want the underrepresented political and religious minorities to accept and respect their identifying symbols, they must create a mechanism by which a diverse range of symbols can keep their voice alive through being respected by the government, otherwise without tolerance the “clash of civilizations” that Samuel P. Huntington predicted would be inevitable.

Starting the sixteenth-century the initiation of global trade by Europeans opened the door to interaction between different regions and cultures around the world. However starting in the nineteenth-century, increased immigration and more international trade with the help of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) expanded the globalization trend. Hence, as Lechner and Boli (2008) conclude the globalization is not a new phenomenon. Moreover, in their words “if there are more global linkages, global institutions, and global values, presumably this means that more people will have more in common...[in which] globalization thus entails cultural

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

imperialism” (2008, p. 3). States and regional entities’ reactionary response to global changes provokes the state’s need to safeguard its unique identity, but this behavior at times evokes resistance. Ironically, the similarities of global culture have ignited “the action of indigenous peoples to claim their rights to cultural survival” (Lechner & Boli, 2008, p.3). It is important to understand the evolving dynamic of globalization; its two-way local/global and at times conflicting environment “alters the habitat of specific groups” (2008, p. 4). In addition Lechner and Boli understand the growing fear of the local cultures being melted and fading away. However, this same fear ignites healthy cross cultural debates as a way to stay unique within the global melting pot as another important contribution of the globalization trend.

In the world where institutions and humans, more than ever, work within a system of shared knowledge and information, individual and state identity are affected by global systems and world culture. The power of online social networking like Facebook has made the globalization trend more than just an economic interdependency but also encourages a sociopolitical, ideological and personal connection between individuals in different states. If we look at the world news it is evident that the governments of many unpopular and oppressive states feel threatened by the globalized mobilizing power. They close down Internet connections or censor international news cables. A reformer or activist doesn’t necessary need to be physically present to mobilize her/his oppressed countrymen. An Egyptian Google manager recently mobilized Egyptian youth through Facebook to confront the authoritarian regime in Egypt. For better or worse the globalization trend has made states more interdependent. For example, there is no need to travel to Japan to taste sushi, as it has found its way into many restaurants all around the world (Lechner & Boli, 2008). The identical factors of people and

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

states, like political and ideological characters, are exposed to a wider view as “the world is becoming a single place” (Lechner & Boli, 2008, p. 2).

States still want to exercise their unique identical attributes along with the fast growing global culture. The nation–state is still “structurally similar in many unexpected dimensions and change unexpectedly in similar ways” (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997, p. 81). They desire to follow a fixed identity at least in internal governing level. According to Meyer, et al., three identifying elements explain the self-definition of sovereign states within the global culture. They are as follow: “the construction of identity and purpose, systematic maintenance of actor identity and legitimation of the actorhood of such subnational unite as individuals and organized interests” (Meyer, et al., 1997, p. 81). Nations’ decolonization in the twentieth-century, along with the notion of self-determination legitimizes a need for a unique nation-state identity for all states, acting to preserve their political and ideological characters (Meyer, et al., 1997). Paradoxically, Richard Vernon quotes Comte, the French philosopher from two hundred years ago on his proposal of the decentralization of the states when he says “men and nations are continually driven to form wider and wider associations” (Comte, 1929; Vernon, 2005, p. 94). Comte’s remark goes well beyond the contemporary concerns states have about how to safeguard their identity as a sovereign entity.

### **State and Religion**

As Scott Marrison mentions, “initially there was no distinction between church and state, and religion was considered a governmental function, with many early church leaders also being the political leaders. As time went on, countries moved largely, but not exclusively, away from

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

that” (Marriman, 2009, p. xv). The old interaction between these two has caused some societies to legitimize themselves with the religion as a mean to get popular support from their people.

During the Cold War, in some countries especially European, minorities were suppressed and “deprived from any official, public existence; minority questions, along with nationalist issues, largely disappeared from the agenda of European international relations; and several Western European countries became, for the first time, countries of large-scale immigration, host to new, non-historic, minorities” (Kerr, 1992, p. xv). In many states with a revolutionary background, “religion was often denied a public role and many functions it had previously monopolized, were removed from its control (after the French Revolution), yet by the middle of the [twentieth century] it could not be said that its importance had diminished. Religion, sometimes facilitated assimilation by the dominant group (Islamists in Iran) within a state” (Kerr, 1992, p. 1). The vague concept of secularity, however, has not made a distinction between religion and the government as “privileges to certain churches became the standard approach of many [states] in the process of modernization” (Kerr, 1992, p. 7). Religion, even in the Modern Europe has a “public political role” although the right of people as a citizen of a state is more valued than their membership to a certain religious group.

There have been always religious minorities in many regimes that were not in favor of the dominating government. The way the state has treated these groups has been different, some governments treat them like other minorities (cultural and ethnic), but others has tried to eliminate if not erase them. The tactic of ignorance and holding services has also used as an alternative, in some cases, causing these groups to withdraw from the territory without a major conflict. For instance, in the Middle East, Wahhabi minorities who wanted to refine the Islamic values were defeated by the Ottoman Empire. However later they took power in Saudi Arabia

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

under the leadership of Ibn Saud in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. France also has a history of crushing its opposing religious minorities—the Huguenots (Protestants) between 1562 and 1598 who were not explicitly a plebian dissident religious group were showing unhappiness toward the government this friction caused many years of brutal fighting (Marriman, 2009, p. 18). In the case of Iran, looking back at the history of the Persian Empire, we see Cyrus the Great allowed other religions to practice their faith, and he chose to define his empire with a collective religious identity. By contrast after the 1979 revolution the Iranian government defined itself as a Muslim country (Marriman, 2009).

In many societies religion has been used as a supporting instrument for the states. “In many early modern societies, particularly in Europe, nation builders used religion as an element of national identity...religion is still important to national identity, both inside and outside of many nations” (Marriman, 2009, p. 67). For example, even though the Protestants were often being accused of not being French, they helped to save the French left wing. Although, the French marginalized them, the Protestants managed to shape the national identity of France. Scott Marriman says “one’s religion in that nation is often used as an equivalency for a larger identity, which includes in many people’s minds a national identity” (Marriman, 2009, p. 69). Even though the role of religion in French government is limited the politics are the determining factor, still the religious identity of the minorities and especially Muslim population, is affectively shaping the national and international identity of France. Scott Marriman states “religion still plays a part in France, as the recent riots in 2005 involving Muslim youth shows” (Marriman, 2009, p. 69). He also says “religion is seen by many, particularly outsiders, as a part of citizenship...and still is a strong connection in many people’s minds between being of the correct religion and belonging to the nation” (Marriman, 2009, p. 70).



## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

Christian Joppke mentions Fukuyama's statement about the difference between politics and identity in Europe and the United States. In Europe "national Identities [is] far more blood-and-soil based" than its political weight in the United States (Joppke, 2009, p. 107). European Muslim population is under pressure mostly because of the European Christian mentality which also explains the French problem with Islamic values (Joppke, 2009, p. 107).

### **State Identity, Liberalism, and Secularism**

Classical Liberalism which encourages governments to let people enjoy full freedom but this freedom, does not necessary ensure the freedom of religion since the "individual political discrimination was still fully allowed". But over time, liberalism was modified in practice, and governments became obliged to help people to exercise their freedom. This newer version of liberalism says that governments should help their religious minorities have a chance to exercise their religions freely. In other words, liberalism must stay neutral and not show any preference toward any religion. However, critiques argue that the neutrality of liberalism over religion would reduce its essence to "secular humanism." They claim that there must be a decision on what religion should be presented as the preference. Some say "as long as no religion is favored, religion as general would be favored, as the opposite would be favoring irreligion or atheism [while] others object, that leaving religion out of the public sphere, [would] discriminate against religious people" (Marriman, 2009, p. 52). Objections continue and liberalism stays effective in the matter of religion. Its effects are seen in French Revolution as well as in Iranian Revolution. Liberalism's slogan for decreasing the promotion of one religion over others has not been implemented in reality (Marriman, 2009).

Although, according to D. A. Kerr "if some churches, and Catholicism in particular, [are] opposed liberalism, it could not be said that liberalism was always well disposed to the identity

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

of non-dominant groups. Liberalism in France, Italy, Germany and Switzerland was often as opposed to local minorities as it was to the churches in its desire to promote national unity. Yet liberalism charter, derived from the French revolution, of the 'rights of man', sometimes made it easier for ethnic groups to claim those rights which led towards recognition of their national identity" (Kerr, 1992, p. 21).

The question here is, if both Iran and France disregard the liberalism recommendation, why is the domination of one religion, Islam, in Iran more under debate than Christianity is in France? After all liberalism does not care what is the name of the religion or in which region it is being practiced. But this concept points to the importance of giving a fair chance and freedom to all human beings to fulfill their spiritual needs and desires.

Wendy Brown critiques the assumption of "autonomous liberal individual self". She believes liberals should not see individuals as subjects that are free from cultural values that enter and exit different cultures. In contrary, the non-liberals are rooted in communal connections; there are categorized as illiberal because they are oppressing individual choices internally and are externally disregarding the liberal values. People considered illiberal "represent the 'enemy within' civilization as well as civilization's external enemy" (Brown, 2004).

The liberal debate in France about giving individuals a choice to practice their religious beliefs in public is not going to be helpful as long as the critics consider a religious person part of a community of believers. For this reason a veiled Muslim women does not count as an independent person, "she is always already constituted as a figure of subjugation, embedded and controlled by a community. Her veil, always a sign of her oppression, thus falls outside the domain of liberal choice" (Najmabadi, 2006, p. 241).

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

The definition of secularity in the Merriam Webster online dictionary says, “not overtly of or specifically religious” and it is synonymous with “nonreligious”, “profane” and antonyms with “religious” and “sacred”. Both secular and theocratic states define their religious identity by expecting the population to practice the faith of the government. The debate over secularity or theocracy is simply a matter of preference. For instance, the increasing international activity of Muslim extremists has caused many European countries to urge the elimination of public practice and presence of Islamic culture and identity. Similarly, France constitutional secularity that generally means “the separation of church and state” has been exclusively focused on the separation of Islam from its public and sociocultural context. Obviously the ban on veil in France violates and limits the individual right to practice their faith freely and keeps some Muslim women from pursuing their education. “In the Western view, especially orientalist and even some feminist perspectives, the veil has been singled out as a symbol of oppression of the Muslim women and its practice is often criticized” (Davary, 2009, p. 50). The French panel on the nature of secularism and the challenges of Islam was held in April 2011 at a Paris hotel, brought over 600 religious, legislators, and journalists together. The three hour debate received a mixture of criticism and support. French President, Nicholas Sarkozy initiated this debate after two months of political conflict. Prime minister, Francois Fillon however refused to attend the panel worrying that this kind of debates might end up to “a stigmatization of Muslims” (Erlanger, 2011). The president reason for organizing this event was to open doors to “help along a westernized version of Islam that fits within the behavior and cultural norms of France.” Leader of Mr. President’s party, Jean-Francois Cope says the debate was “controversial but necessary, as the values of France are like the Three Musketeers: liberty, equality, fraternity” while he adds the fourth, secularism (Erlanger, 2011). Yazid Sabeg, an adviser to President,

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

showed the debate unnecessary and said that the actual issue for Muslim immigrants (five to six millions about 10 percent of the French population) is “youth unemployment, ghettoization, and fair access to education, not Islam” (Erlanger, 2011). Mr. Sarkozy’s goal is to defend the “French values” as he was showing his dissatisfaction with Muslim’s public prayers, “I don’t want any minarets, any calls for prayer in the public space, or street prayers” (Erlanger, 2011). The argument was based on the assumption that some religious practices are challenging the secular status of France which was built on the 1905 law that separates the church and the state. However, government financially aids churches and synagogues.

### **Islam, State Identity, and Multiculturalism in Global Perspective**

The globalization trends incorporate not only the economics of the states but also their culture, politics, and ideology. The world is more integrated. John Meyer and his friends describe the world society as potentially *stateless*, an idea that has originated to the surprise of political leaders of every state, “the operation of world society through peculiarly cultural and associational processes depends heavily on its statelessness” (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997). One of the major factors of the world culture is “the competitive effects of having multiple actors in a common world frame” (Towns, 2010); Meyer *et al.* also argue that “given actors’ common identity and ultimate similarity, competition is not only the prevailing theory of interaction but a source of collective moral meaning” (Meyer et al., 1997).

Stuart J. Kaufman points to the significant role of political rulers in manipulating the national symbols in the face of safeguarding state identity, particularly in the European states with large numbers of immigrants (Kaufman, 2001).

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

The terrorist activities of international Islamist groups in recent years, especially after September 11, 2001, have regenerated Islamophobia not only in international media but also by influencing the policy and legal regulations that put more limitations on Muslim citizens. The identity crisis not only hit the hosting states but is reinforcing more limitations from Islamic governments to keep their Islamic legacy alive while facing growing international opposition.

The failure of multiculturalism has been blamed mainly on the rise of the Islamophobia. The sad fact about this rise of negative prejudice towards Islamic culture and Muslims is it is causing a growing clash with the Western politics and culture and is that it is not based on facts. It reflects a trend that is based on exaggerated examples that have happened around the world. For example September 11, 2001 has been used to develop assumptions on how Muslims treat freedom. Much of the international animosities toward Islam and Muslims come through symbols. As the globalized identity of nations becomes an inevitable feature of international stage, women's Islamic image plays an important role. The governments' legal and policy regulations toward their Muslim populations especially their female citizens, in both Islamic and secular states, have begun through some symbolic speeches from either a political or religious leader. The power that these speeches carry support arrangements to those prejudiced against Muslims. For instance, the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, in his speech to the forty-seventh Munich Security Conference was basically about the threat of the Islamist extremists. He focused on the domestic security and said "Europe needs to wake up to what is happening in our own countries." In Mr. Cameron's word "under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives." This clearly shows that the mentality of pluralism goes down to the extent that Mr. Cameron asserts "we have even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values" (Collins,

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

2011). On the same line as British prime Minister, President Sarkozy in a nationwide debate on Islam, declared that “the truth is that in all our democracies we have been too concerned about the identity of the new arrivals and not enough about the identity of the country receiving them” (Collins, 2011). Last October Angela Merkel German’s Chancellor, also asserted that she believes the German’s effort in living and accepting the outsiders to “live side by side,” has “failed, utterly failed” (Collins, 2011). It seems the cultural stresses are mainly about the preservation of the liberal democracy and the loss of the European way of life. The crisis of individual identity of immigrant Muslims has been precipitated by the fear of the erosion of the European character (Collins, 2011).

What makes Europe, Europe? And “what constitutes publicly visible signs of being secular and French?” (Najmabadi, 2006, p. 239). The “veil wars” that began in 1989 in France, brought the issue of Muslim women’s veiling to the center of cultural debates in both Middle East and Europe. The most recent debate over the ban of veiling especially in Europe is “the emergence of political Islam”. As Katherine Pratt Ewing argues the presence of Muslim immigrants unlike other minorities in Europe and North America is very visible. Muslim minorities are perceived as part of a larger global Islamic community that is a danger to the national identity of the host state. For this reason Muslims living in these states are perceived as untrustworthy (Pratt Ewing, 2003).

Most of the rhetoric about banning the veil has been under the rhetoric of ‘political liberalization’, while the enforcement of veiling in public is a reverse state intervention. The global perception of the veil is basically based on the imagination and meaning of the veil “in Turkey, in Iran, in Egypt, in Afghanistan-past and present-often ignoring the voices and ‘choices’ of Muslim women themselves” (Najmabadi, 2006, p. 242). The veil has become a

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

global sign of Muslim immigrant minorities, an alienated culture and political threat toward European states (Najmabadi, 2006). Najmabadi quotes Joan W. Scott regarding French ban on hijab as it is “not about practicality, but about symbolic gestures... [it] provided a way of acting out tremendous anxiety not so much about fundamentalism, but about Islam itself” (Wallach Scott, 2007). The hijab has become a major sign of incompatibility between Islam and European culture and politics of secularity, Scott says “the head scarf is tangible sign of intolerable difference...it stands for everything that is thought to be wrong with Islam: porous boundaries between public and private and between politics and religion; the supposed degradation of female sexuality and subordination of women” (Wallach Scott, 2007, p. 7) . Although according to Najmabadi the veil is not only a sign of cultural difference but also “the most visible signifier of gender homosociality” (Najmabadi, 2006, p. 246).

### **States and women’s image**

#### **Revolutions and Women’s Image**

*Woman was transformed in this society so that the revolution could occur.*<sup>3</sup>  
*--Iranian magazine editorial*

During the intense cultural and societal changes of the nineteenth century, bodies became objects for many debates and celebrations, a subject for “philosophical and feminist fascinations” that formed within a very short period of time (Grosz, 1995, p. 5). The debate over the outward beauty, pleasure, and politics of body has gone beyond the real world and became a subject of debates even within the virtual world “transcending itself into the infinity of the cyberspace” says Grosz (1995, p. 2). The political perception and representation of females’ body image however, goes further back to the eighteenth century, before and during the French revolution.

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<sup>3</sup>. It was quoted in *Modernizing Women* page 79.

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

What is remarkable about the newer considerations of body is in contrast with what Foucault explained as a passive concept. The subjectivity and self-regulatory of body is something that the feminist and philosophical theories brought to the current debate. Body is not only subject to “regulation and control” but that also a complex and pragmatic matter (Grosz, 1995). Therefore, understanding the body takes more understanding of the subjectivity as well as “space, time, materiality,...knowledge, power,...social and cultural production[s]” (Grosz, 1995, p. 2). Human bodies are seen as natural distinction between themselves and other species. The question here is why should bodies become objects of investigations? Franz Fanon’s remark answers this question:

Look a Negro! ... Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened! ... I could no longer laugh, because I already knew there were legends, stories, history and above all historicity...Then, assailed at various points, the corporal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema ... it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person ... I was responsible for my body, for my race, for my ancestors (Fanon, 1986, p. 112).

“Oppression, then, is the systematic limiting of opportunity or constraints on self-determination because of such membership” of the body (Grosz, 1995). The visual identity of female’s body is used by many “nationalist movements” around the world as a symbol of their nationalist representation (Grosz, 1995).

Similarly, many revolutions have been changing women’s status around the world. What is fascinating about the relationship between revolutions and women is not that revolutions have been affecting the socioeconomic and political participation of women but also many of the



## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

revolutions around the world have used women's image to achieve their goals in either safeguarding or recreating their political and ideological preferences. According to Valentine Moghadam, in many countries, "the emancipation of women emerged in the context of national liberation, state building, and self-conscious attempts to achieve modernity in the early part of the century" (M. Moghadam, 2003).

The transformations of females' image in many regions during or after revolutions have happened. For instance many politicians, revolutionary, and intellectuals have supported "the emancipation of women through unveiling [and] elimination of seclusion" especially in the first half of the twentieth century. Although this chapter does not intend to describe the political participation of women in different revolutions around the world, it examines a number of transformation in women's image because the revolutions especially in Iran and France, during and after the Cuban revolution of 1959.

As early as 1789-1795 the "representations of women within popular imagery promoted the ideals of French republicanism and contributed to individuals' self-understanding as citizens of the nation-state" says Joan B. Landes (Landes, 2001). During the French revolutionary era, besides other changes and expectations, the difference between the role of men and women, in both private and public life, formed through shaping genders' role that "was deeply embedded in the process by which courtly culture was reduplicated and femininity [was] associated with its most decadent and corrupt features" (Landes, 2001). By looking at the printed images during that era, it becomes evident that these images had the power to disrupt as much as make some desired identifications secure. The power of women's body image during the revolutionary time proved what otherwise would be unaccepted. This shows "the affection and sensuality of femininity in Old Regime culture, as well as independent agency of women in republican society" states

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

Landes (2001, p. 1). Therefore the visual representation of women's body has the influence to alter the "gender ideology". French revolution examined this representation as it had the capacity to both create and challenge "the boundaries between the material and immaterial, the conscious and unconscious, the personal and the political, [and] the individual and the collective" identity (Landes, 2001, p. 2). The females' body image, "feminine iconography" of the state intrigue peoples' emotion to participate in the revolution as well as uniting "passion attachments to home and homeland" Landes adds (2001). Therefore, women's body image had the power to discredit the past regime's symbols and icons and establish a new icon for the new state which was the republicanism in the case of the French revolution. Women's image became a part of the creation of the sovereign body of the state during and after the revolution. It was also being affected as a "person *subject to the superior*" (Landes, 2001) because the nationalism over shadowed the individual identity says Hannah Ardent (Arendt, 1979). Lynn Hunt (Hunt, 1998) in his essay called *Freedom of Dress in Revolutionary France* talks about the French nationalism as a politics that is complemented by a new identity which is closely related to the individual identity, especially females' body image and sexuality. In his view, even the most intimate choice of a dress became politically significant. In George L. Mosse's view (Mosse, 1988) the correct manner in regard to sexuality had a direct connection with our understanding of the "modern nationalism." Women's visual representation was very much related to the French revolutionary political and cultural identity as "women's bodies were everywhere to be found in public imagery circulating within the new political culture" (Landes, 2001, p. 6). The significance of females' image in the public was that the republicans wanted to make sure that women would stay in their proper place—as surely they did not achieve political, social or economic equality until late twentieth century. Ironically the publicizing women's body image was in contrast with

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

the goal of republicans in domestication of women as a mean to their good governance (Landes, 2001). The emphasis on women's body image was to show "the association of visibility with the scorned feminized behavior of Old Regime society" as "the female body offered a symbolic representation that could be claimed by any party. A representation of women might function positively as a symbol of liberty, equality, nature, or truth. But, negatively, she might embody all of the worst features of the enemies of republican freedom for some or of the republican Terror for others" (Landes, 2001, p. 20). The new national "(hetero) sexual identity" of the French state during and after revolution was formed by women's body image which was displayed publicly to "lure men to attach deep romantic longing to the state" (Landes, 2001). For example a female's noble was pictured in a relaxing pose wearing casual clothing, showing one of her breasts while pulling her skirt up. Happily welcoming the Revolution she was saying: "Thanks to the constitution, we will soon go without our skirts" (Landes, 2001, p. 47). Landes adds that this poor woman was a victim of "the new patriot mentality wherein aristocracy and whoredom were often equated" (2001, p. 47). This imagery represents its effectiveness. The relationship between an image and our thought is not a symbolic process because visual representation has a direct effect on people as they are "pre- symbolic and immediate" (Landes, 2001). The visual representation of women during the French revolution helped to dismiss "past symbols and images" and helped to create a new visual identity for the new political culture. Finally the external role that women were assigned to, after the revolution, was internalized when "in 1791, the women citizens of Clermont-Ferrand wrote to the French National Assembly, "We see to it that our children drink an incorruptible milk and we clarify it for that purpose with the natural and agreeable spirit of liberty"; "the theme of motherhood is also presented iconographically as a political salient symbol of reformed manners and family life in the new political order" (Landes,

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

2001, p. 98). Women's role became limited in the domestic realm of family, reproducing and upbringing the kids. Rousseau dismisses these political trends of domestication of women and says women should not accept these habitual constrains as in reality "they never cease to be subjected either to a man or to the judgments of men" (Rousseau, 2010, p. 370).

Similarly, right after the Cuban revolution of 1959, the new state tried to reconstruct the society by implementing a new gender politics. This process was based on the social life of the Cuban society (these policies that were socially constructed, are examples of social constructivism) "sexual differences and roles came to serve the needs of the new political agenda [and] new ideas about womanhood were produced" (I. Moya Fabregas, 2010, p. 61). But in fact the new gender politics did not occur during the first twenty years of the revolution. Cuban society after the revolution was based on the pre-revolutionary (traditional) gender roles, identity and politics. There is a contrast between the images that pre-revolutionary force displayed from Cuban women than the image that came after the revolution. The "contradictory notions of womanhood, shed light on the evolution of Cuban women's gender identities under a socialist government" (I. Moya Fabregas, 2010, p. 62). Cuban female warriors earned special place "in the state's revolutionary discourse" during the pre-revolutionary era because these activists was fighting for Cuba's sovereignty and revolutionary programs. "The language, images, and values used both to address and represent women in magazines and newspapers echoed general assumption of women's roles as mothers, wives, and girlfriends." The 1950s representation of motherhood was to mobilize females as a mere political strategy "that justified women's participation in social movements geared to improve their children's lives" (I. Moya Fabregas, 2010, p. 64). Women's political participation was only valued if it was stemmed from their concerns for the well-being of their children as a mother or wives. Later on women's personal

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

appearance and their homes “considered a reflection of their success as mothers and wives...women’s body attributes were constantly emphasized” and finally drawing a direct connection between hygiene as an expected achievement of females emphasized. The Cuban government did not pay attention to the gender participation and equality until the second decades after the revolution “when the problems caused by women’s double burden began to interfere with the production goals of the state” (I. Moya Fabregas, 2010, p. 67). The comparison of the gender representation in Cuban society during and after the revolution shows “how patriarchal ideas, without necessarily posing a conflict, were embedded in capitalist as well as Marxist ideologies” of the of state and how this ideology uses and envisions women’s role in the society (I. Moya Fabregas, 2010, p. 67).

In Davary’s view the main issue is, entering women’s body into the field of identity. She states that “whether we are covered or not, as women, we are still defined by our bodies.” The meaning of the veil is better to be understood in the different contexts otherwise the misconception continues while women are the ones suffer the consequences and pay the price. For example wearing the veil can be as simple as respecting family tradition and values including commitment and sexual transparency (Davary, 2009).

In both Iran and France, the revolution had an important impact on women’s involvement in the sociopolitical matters of the state (especially during the revolutions). Women have contributed to political affairs of these states, not only by taking action, but also through their public visibility and body image which project a religious/secular or moral/immoral status of their affiliated political parties. For instance, during the redefinition of the Iranian state after the revolution of 1979 “everything about women, from their attire to their speech, emotions, and thoughts, became the basis for an ethical debate and a point about which moral judgment should

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

be made” says Davary (Davary, 2009, p. 58). It is not uncommon that women become the representation of a weakening state or vice versa when a state tries to find its feet in power and gain popular support. For instance, “during the period of the revolution, two distinct images of Turkish women emerged. In the works of Turkish literati and satirists, Turkish women became the representation of the nation that was increasingly weakening, an impure that was not only bereft of its previous glory but which had also lost most of its territory and sovereignty” (Davary, 2009, p. 58).

### **State and the Veil**

It is evident from the history of many societies, the political power of a nation that has usually been controlled by powerful male leaders, who have used women’s image and visual representation of their bodies to support the state religious or secular status. This has helped some governments to gain or regain their political power and popular support of the majorities especially in sensitive transitional times.

### **Iran**

The twentieth-century history of Iranian political intervention in regard to women’s covering exhibits a pattern of drastic shifts which by itself illustrates the importance of the veil in Iran’s politics as well as its usage in state identity. The legal mandate on veil however has changed its historical meanings as a cultural factors or a symbol of determining women’s social status. During the 1930s, there was increasing arguments about the public signs and symbols of modernity, which put two groups of women against each other: women who advocated for unveiling and the ones who wanted “to combine their quest for modernity with the reconfiguration of Islam” (Najmabadi, 2006). The reason was any identification with Islam

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

became equal with “traditional and anti-modern”. This was the beginning of the change in the meaning of modernity, nationalism and its opposition with Islam. In the words of Najmabadi, “this process changed the meaning of modernity, nationalism, and Islam. Modernity increasingly took on a non-Islamic (although not necessarily anti-Islamic) meaning, and was critically reshaped through the marginalization and, at times, expulsion of that form of modernity that had attempted a grafting of nationalism with Islam” (Najmabadi, 2006, p. 249). In the words of Bahar Davary:

While Iran was not directly colonized at this time, [in the 1930s], it was indirectly controlled by foreign powers through the establishment of foreign oil, sugar, and tobacco industries along with unfair capitulation agreements. In the opinion of the masses, the national-secular government was a puppet in the hands of foreign powers, concerned mostly that debts they did not owe be paid to foreign creditors. Those debts were not just covered by Iran natural resources but also by the dishonoring of its women. (Davary, 2009, p. 52)

Reza Shah banned the veil in 1936. He wanted to promote the Western secular culture by forcing women to unveil and wear Western clothing. The legal ban on hijab was so strict that if a woman was not complying with the law, she would have suffered severe consequences, such as her veil would have been pulled off her head in the public by the government’s policemen, sometimes being detained or even financially fined. The Islamic Revolution of 1979 however reversed the relationship between the state and religion. Wearing the veil became legally obligatory with harsher punishments for women who were rebellious with the dress code and were not wearing the veil properly. The Iranian women’s body image became the target of political identity or propaganda under the name of Islamic state for the new theocratic regime.

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

Obviously both banning and enforcing hijab have had so much emotional impact on Iranian women, especially the older generation of women who have had hard time adjusting to the wished of the government. These governmental actions can hurt the collective identity of the Iranian nation and the state. The sudden shift to an extreme Islamization after the revolution of 1979 was a reaction to the forces of modernization which also encouraged by colonization and secularization (Davary, 2009).

The tension between modernity and tradition in Iran caused unease between those who maintained Islamic dress and those who were "Western-looking". Accordingly, new ideas about the significance of the hijab were introduced. In the 1970s two new meanings for the hijab were introduced: one through the Islamic discourse and the other through the revolutionary movement. Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, a high-ranking cleric in the 1960s, rationalized the hijab using the history of Islamic society and arguing its purpose was to offer protection for women. Ali Shariati's reasoning for the hijab, on the other hand, was not based on Islam at all. For Shariati, wearing a hijab was a symbolic action supporting the revolutionary ideal. Eventually, both of these interpretations were replaced by a new and more oppressive religious doctrine (Tabatabai, 2009). Bahar Davary states that "one means of sustaining female purity in a time of drastic change was through dress and the old familiar symbol, the veil" (Davary, 2009, p. 58).

The mission of the 1979 Iranian revolution was to improve Iran's economic equality, political freedom, and international independency. However, soon it became an Islamic state. The revolutionary forces used the intense anti-Western and anti-monarch public emotion and translated it into an Islamic state as the best possible alternative. Islam became the best solution in keeping Iran's unsettled population together while revolutionaries were gaining authority to manage the state's affairs. The veiling mandate did not come without opposition, but because



## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

people still felt an emotional after-shock from the revolution, the veiling mandate was signed into the law. Unveiling became the most visible sign of “public corruption and Western influence” and very soon it was defined as an absolutely contradictory to the revolution’s mission. Women who were not cooperating with the veiling law were warned, fined and at times detained. Even the shopkeepers were not supposed to serve the improperly veiled women called *bad hijab* to their shops (Zahedi, 2008). “The regime has been trying hard to confine the image of Iranian women to the one congruent with its ideology” says Ashraf Zahedi (2008, p. 262). The Islamic mandate of hijab (veiling) for all women became a strategy to fill the power vacuum to visibly show the Islamic identity of the state as well as giving Iran a unique national self-image.

Although the veil has mainly functioned as a tool of oppression, the many definitions the hijab has been given make its role far from simple. All of the new meanings imposed on the act of veiling demonstrate how powerful a symbol the veil has been in Iran since the revolution. Each new political movement of the last thirty years has remade the significance of the veil and the women who veil are a symbol of the revolutionary cause. The story of the veil, therefore, is an excellent perspective from which to examine the contemporary identity of Iranian state (Tabatabai, 2009). According to Zahedi, “women’s resistance to unveiling and reviling has been resistance to assigned identity, assigned image, assigned symbolism, and assigned gender roles” (Zahedi, 2008, p. 263).

The recent clash between Iranian secular leaders and the clerical establishment is causing religious leaders to argue that the President, Ahmadinejad “is not doing enough to ensure that the dress-code is strictly enforced” (Erdbrink, 2011). The recent violence against women who are not wearing their veil *properly* is a sign of severe political clash between ruling parties in Iran. Wearing long coats and tight headscarf in public for women according to the clerics protects

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

women's purity. Whenever women are defiant or because of hot summer days wear "tight-fitting coats and loosely fitted scarfs, clerics complain that Iranian cities increasingly resemble Western metropolises where women roam the streets "practically naked" (Erdbrink, 2011). Ali Reza Alavitabar, an Iranian political strategist and an advocate for more individual freedom, says the issue of veiling "has turned into a lever for the government and its opponents trying to enforce their supremacy on the other side". The pressure about the veil has become a political sign "showing the country which side is really in power" (Erdbrink, 2011). Fadwa El Guindi in her book *Veil: Modesty, Privacy, and Resistance* quotes Ziba Mir-Hosseini states that the veiling in Iran, already a dress code, has also been used as a "field of operation" (El Guindi, 2003). Shirin Ebadi the Iranian Noble Prize winner in 2003 wears hijab when she is in Iran because it is mandated by law. In her view "it is not the state's business to tell women whether to cover their heads or not." She adds "what we have in Iran today is not a religious regime, but a regime in which the people holding the power exploit religion in order to remain in power" (Joppke, 2009, p. 162).

### **France**

What the political philosopher Michael Sandel says "encumbered selves, claimed by duties they cannot renounce, even in the face of civil obligations that may conflict" (J. Sandel, 1998, p. xiii) still does not maintain the principles of individual in the French constitution. In the words of Joan Wallach Scott "unless individuals could be divided between public (secular) commitments and private (religious) ones," they are not being able to be part of the French republicanism (2007, p. 124-5).

In France since September 2004 the intent of ban on hijab is to free oppressed girls from their conservative tradition. However this contradicts the principle of individual freedom. Veiled

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

students were expelled from school because they refused to take off their head coverings and this was interpreted by France as a public symbol of religion and against French secular constitution, *laïcité* emphasizing the absence of religion in the government. To defend the banning of Islamic covering (head scarf) some have said veiled girls are victimized by the oppressive demand of their communities while they do not realize that the enforcement of banning hijab denies individual freedom to Muslim girls. For many of these girls wearing hijab is part of their individual and religious identity and not only a matter of social distance and privacy. Many think wearing the veil is backward for these young girls, but what they do not realize the religious revival of a young generation, especially minorities, is a modern phenomenon. As Joan Wallach Scott states, it is a sign of “their adoption of the values of Western individualism, whether or not they define their practice as the subordination of the self to God” (Wallach Scott, 2007, p. 126)(Scott, 2005). For instance, some French Muslim girls veiled themselves in cloth that has red, white, and blue stripes symbolizing the French national flag they are trying to visualize the compatibility between the two identities; French and Muslim. French lawmakers however, since they do not understand these artifacts and signs, place more limitation on Islamic symbols and have caused French Muslims to feel alienated and foreign in the country where many of them were and are a legal citizen or a residing immigrant. The head scarf, symbolically demonstrates the Islamic values, culture, and identity but French see it as contrary to their culture, identity and accepted ideology (Wallach Scott, 2007). One of the many reasons that France bans the veil is because wants to express its distance from Islam and Islamic culture and assert its own identity.

This demonstration of norms (symbols) within the social context, proves the applicability of both social constructivism and identity politics in which the symbolic factor of individual

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

identity is socially constructed and can visualize the identity of the context (here state identity).

Towns states that the “process of connecting behavior with identity is inter-subjective, or socially shared. And the inter-subjective character of norms in turns means that the analysis of norms is not about seemingly subjective or private beliefs inside people’s heads” (Towns, 2010, p. 42).

Z. Gabriel Arkles in an Article called *The Scarf* mentions that “it was impossible to be calm in a discussion of this intense policing of French Muslim women’s bodies and attempted erasing of their identities, supposedly for their own goods” (Arkles, 2006, p. 247). Likewise Sarah Husain in *The Voices of Resistance* says “our bodies become mapped images, sites, and constructs of multiple wars. It is a body on whose back the nation reproduces its laws, its armies, and its decisions, as it is simultaneously a body of the outsider, the other the foreigner” (Husain, 2006, p. 7).

The veil has become equated with oppression and backwardness visualizing lives of women in the third world, “colonizing the material discursively by simply negating a composite singular representation of the ‘veiled third-world woman’” (Davary, 2009, p. 48). The ban on the veil in France, in contrast with the legal dress code compulsion in Iran, has made this issue complex with “conflicting responses/reactions” says Davary. In addition, the veil represents both a traditional and a modern image or at least it is a good measuring stick. “For the young sister-citizens of today who wish to examine the lures and threats of the dominant European culture critically, wearing both the veil and Western attire is both a symbol of their personal and national honor...” (Davary, 2009, p. 59). However, banning the veil in France is based on a very narrow aspiration, labeling it as a “fundamentalism of another kind” (Davary, 2009). This is a natural human quest to define her or himself without outside forces as Wendy Doniger says “there is always a self beyond the one we inhabit at any minutes..” (Doniger, 2005, p. 229). It is important

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

to keep in mind that our identity is multilayered and “people often see themselves in terms of whichever one of their allegiances is most under attack” says Doniger. Therefore, when an aspect of one’s identity is threatened, it is important to safeguard the symbolic representation of the struggled layer of identity. Thus both, the ban and enforcement of the veil can be assumed as an assault to one’s identity which creates a singular identity.

### **The policy recommendation**

In the diverse nature of a global world, one simple and practical solution for living together would be that parties—political, cultural, or ideological—come to an agreement instead of compromise. According to Anthony Simon Laden the result of such an agreement would be a “shared decision” (Simon Laden, 2001). But the question here is how we can achieve this seemingly simple solution? As the structure of world more than ever brings people together, some groups and sectors are in a situation in which they would never chose to live together (they do not share any commonality). Building a legitimate structure that enables the regulation of interaction between diverse people needs to be based on shared political principles (Simon Laden, 2001). According to Charles Taylor (Taylor, 1992), human diversity is much deeper than the difference between appearances. Human nature consists of many commonalities but still some people always get excluded. Therefore, “forging political principles that neither exclude nor assimilate, coming to terms with the fact of deep diversity” would be crucial (Simon Laden, 2001). These are some basic questions that Taylor addresses in his discussion about multiculturalism: “Can a democratic society treat all its members as equals and also recognize their specific cultural identities? Should it try to ensure the survival of specific cultural groups? Is political recognition of ethnicity or gender essential to a person's dignity?” (1992, p. 132). Before coming to recommend any policy and answering these questions, it is vital to understand

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

what we mean by *liberalism* and *politics of identity*. Some of the fundamental factors of liberalism are: basic individual rights, liberty for all human beings and that political power derives from reason (Simon Laden, 2001). The politics of identity claims that the personal identity of a human being (a member of a group, culture, or ideology), cannot be explained by state's policy involving interest, class, ideology, and culture preferences. Politics of identity is best explained by Simon Laden: when members of a social group object to the social structure that determine their group membership, then, they make a personal claim because they are being prevented and have reasons to practice based on their attributed identity (Simon Laden, 2001). Both liberal and politics of identity recognize this form of personal identity claim and formation. But how much state policies and interests are open to let people from diverse backgrounds exercise their claim, is something that carries an uncertain amount of political weight. One thing however is certain "that aspects of our identity are of political significance whether or not they can be reduced to categories like interest and preference" (Simon Laden, 2001).

The social structure of world politics in the twenty -first century has taken a political significance and has expanded the symbolic and personal expression of the veil to a political symbol of Islamic culture and ideology. The veil is debated at national and international levels and has formed legal significance. As a result of political extension of this symbol, the identical meaning of the veil and the people who wear it has changed. The new political meaning has tarnished its personal ritual and identity reasons, making the veil less understandable, adding more room for prejudices and political punishments. The political meaning of this symbol has helped unveiled people imagine it as a mysterious and scary cover, alienating the human beings behind it. In this paper my intention has been focused on a bird's eye view of the veil and how this view has been distorted by politics around it. If we assume that politics, a journey within the

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

time and space but created by human interest and imaginations, the only way that governments can make policies that simultaneously serve the purpose of power politics and people is by coming to a consensus that include people and their uniqueness “rather than to submerge them.”

The cultural or identity unification of the states is not a new subject. Bringing “unity out of plurality without imposing a new problem” is something that needs political open-mindedness and an active consideration of other ideologies and cultures. Simon Laden (2001) states that the liberalism that we take as an assumption of our contemporary politics, is a corrupted version of what Rousseau and Hegel defined. Similarly, these terms: freedom for women, the veil, and its mandatory practice are issues that have been exploited by states misusing terms and symbols for their self-interest. The legitimacy of the state was the central question for Rousseau’s political philosophy: “I want to inquire whether in the civil order there can be some legitimate and sure rule of administration, taking men as they are, and the laws as they can be” (Rousseau, 1997).

My recommendation is to pay attention to the personal symbolic meaning of the veil. The outreach Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University give an understanding of the veil to the public, and, as a result a more transparent vision about it to the policy maker and political representatives. They work with schools and communities. They give informal lectures about Islam, and let people try on the veiling materials and express what they feel. These exercises help people to understand the process of personal identity formation as well as how we connect to the outside world through others’ perception about us. The veil triggers visualization, feelings, and understandings of a symbol. The veil is, both an international symbol that has social, cultural, and political meaning, but also has personal and ritual meaning.

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

People need to be able to exercise personal desires for identity and to craft their lives without being forced to comply with dogmatic laws states choose for them. The focus on assimilating Muslim immigrants has brought resistance and ethnic conflict. As a result there is need for more international actions, through institutions and governments to diversify, recreate, and rethink the policies regarding the Muslim population, especially the women (Putins Peters, 2005).

States volunteer affection toward their diverse members can ease their concerns over the preservation of their unique culture and self-fashioning which would naturally sustain their “political order and equal freedom amid pluralism” (Button, 2008, p. 237). The more states are aware of the delicacy and diversity of the individualistic ritual and identity matters, the more their policies distance from it.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has examined the symbolic representation of the veil as a symbol of Islamic culture, and the usage of the veil in politics and state identity. I have explored the interpretation of the veil as a mean of cultural, ideological, and personal identity. Globalization has created large groups of Muslim minorities in the non-Muslim states. They are, increasingly practicing wearing of the veil. Governmental regulations of the veil in non-Muslim states are for the sake of safeguarding the unique identity of the state and its sole relation with Islam.

This paper has discussed how symbols are defined contextually. States as political bodies consist of multiple sects, cultures, and ideologies. Information technology of public media has exaggerated the Islamic culture. The recent terror attacks by Islamic extremists make the symbolic representation of Islam bolder. The multiple regulations on the veil, in different states



## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

and regions, *symbolically* represent that those states express their separation from Islam and Muslim population. However they cover it under the pragmatic and international friendly rhetoric like: freeing and empowering women or their constitutional amendments regarding the separation of state and church. The exercise of secularity or theocracy obviously should not limit the very basic freedom of religion especially in developed countries like France.

This paper explored the veil in general as well as in its current political usage. It also examined certain other factors that tend to give the veil a meaning that makes its departure from politics difficult. Nonetheless, the international regimes need wise management and flexible leadership if they want to withstand the current challenges regarding the regulations on the veil and Islam per se. What apparent is that the Islamic veiling is considered a threat to secularism—France sees wearing the veil as anti-French—even though in both Islamic states and European countries with Muslim immigrants Muslim women are altering and reforming the meaning of the veil. The recent legal bans on hijab in France clearly undermine the individualistic meaning of the veil. I hope this paper clarifies some of the historical, geographical, cultural, as well as political and symbolic meaning of the veil which has been changed over time and according to different sociopolitical contexts. I am also hopeful to reduce the prejudices by keeping some of the veil's 'forgotten' meanings in mind, the ones that made the veil a symbol of individual identity and not the ones that stimulated political propagandas against Islam and Muslims. As Najmabadi states: "Is it possible that by remembering these forgotten meanings, one could jettison further current meanings and open up possibilities not caught in the polarities of liberatory versus oppressive, religious versus secular, national versus extra territorial?" (Najmabadi, 2006, p. 243). Revealing historical and cultural facts about the veil expand the politicians' understanding about it which would result in the recognition of the veil as a unique

## THE VEIL: SYMBOL AND STATE IDENTITY

chain of different interpretation and purposes. This would also help naturalizing and removing the veil from political issues. The more we understand about the true identity of the veil, the more we disconnect it as a symbol of state identity as well as other negative interpretations like, oppression and backwardness. This vision would result in accepting the veil “as an affirmative feature of pluralistic liberal--[and non-liberal]—societies [proving] the idea that in the politics, there can be no permanent” animosity or loyalty about a faith or identity of a certain group (Button, 2008, p. 239).

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