

*Gender and Secularism
of Modernity:
How Can a
Muslim Woman
Be French?*

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IN THE EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, in the famous letter number thirty of Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, Rico writes to his friend Ibben at length about his troubles in Paris—his always being an object of intense curiosity for the public on account of his costume. Finding this situation burdensome, he finally decides “to give up Persian costume, and dress like a European to see if there was still anything remarkable about my countenance.” He finds out, to his dismay, that “Free of all foreign adornments, . . . all at once I fell into a terrible state of non-existence.” Now that he did not look Persian, he tells us, if someone in his company would find out that he was, they would ask: “What a most extraordinary thing! How can one be Persian?”¹

I want to echo this question in the context of the current struggles and debates in France over a Muslim woman's headscarf. How can one, a Muslim woman, be French? How can a French woman be Muslim? How can one be a secular and Muslim woman? In other words, what constitutes publicly visible signs of being secular and French? Who has, or should have, the power to decide on visible signs of belonging to a national or to an extraterritorialized Islamic community?

This article, based on a talk, does not claim to answer these questions,

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especially as I am not a scholar of French political culture or history. But the current controversy is in part defined by a historical legacy not of French making alone. My purpose, then, is to take this controversy back into other times and places, hoping that perhaps one way of opening up some of the seemingly hopeless dichotomies posed today would be through bringing out the multiple, historically-sedimented burdens that the veil has come to carry.²

Much has been written on this topic over the past decade and a half, since the new round of "veil wars" began in 1989, this time in France. For more than a century, the issue of women's veiling and unveiling has repeatedly been at the center of numerous culture wars, within Middle Eastern countries and now in Europe as well. For instance, Iran, the country from whose history and current politics I will take most of my examples, has been through two massive state-enforced campaigns: first, compulsory unveiling in the mid-1930s; and then, compulsory veiling since the 1979 revolution. Turkey has had a different history, where state intervention under Atatürk was largely mediated through ideological encouragement and political pressure rather than legal sanctions, although ironically with the political liberalization initiated in the 1950s, state intervention has increasingly taken the form of legal sanctions against women's observance of veiling in public institutions.³

The current debates in and about the veil in Europe carry with them not only the terms of the emergence of political Islam in the past several decades, but also this historical memory and that of the earlier cultural encounters and colonial wars between Europe and the domains now named the Middle East and North Africa.

The overall rhetoric of the current debates has been framed around three main issues:

- (1) The issue of individual choice and women's oppression: Are young women making a free choice in observing the headscarf in public? Or are they under the compelling influence, if not threat, of their (usually assumed) male kin or neighborhood vigilantes? Should women not be assisted in resisting the veil—a prime sign of women's oppression and gender control in Muslim immigrant communities—and overcoming what is sometimes called gender apartheid?⁴

(2) The domain of state sovereignty: Should the secular state support manifestations of religion in public institutions? Moreover, would allowing young adolescent women to wear the veil not constitute a failure to integrate immigrants out of their communal belongings and into the national culture?

(3) Transnational political implications: Is not the contemporary practice of veiling a sign of the transnational belonging of Muslim communities—a belonging that questions their loyalty as citizens of the nation-state? As may be imagined, in our post-9/11 world and in the face of perceived threats from transnationally imagined communities, state control over the modes of national belonging has become a critical issue.⁵

Many have already challenged the presumptions of these debates in important ways. Wendy Brown's work has extensively critiqued the presumption of the autonomous liberal individual self, a choosing subject free from culture, that is, one who freely and rationally chooses to enter and exit culture. In contrast to this liberal subject are those who are seen as embedded within communities, that is, inherently illiberal, internally oppressive of individual choice and externally threatening to the liberal state. These subjects, Brown points out, have historically constituted not only the radical "Other to liberalism, but represent the 'enemy within' civilization as well as civilization's external enemy. Most dangerous of all are transnational formations which link the two—Judaism in the nineteenth century, communism in the twentieth, and today, of course, Islam."⁶

What brings intolerable pressure on the liberal paradigm in the French context today is that an individual would choose to practice something marked religious *in public*. Although the choice of a liberal individual is located outside any network of power that shapes it, that of a religious individual is always an expression of coerced communalism. The challenge to a Muslim woman's autonomy is critical: 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. The placing of a Muslim woman's veiling practices outside an autonomous subjectivity is central to the arguments of those feminists who have supported the ban in France and elsewhere.

If accepted as a choice, on the other hand, this mark of individual subjectivity comes under a different pressure of delegitimatization: it is read as an abrogation of national belonging, marking an extraterritorial affiliation with an imagined postnational Islamic community. As Katherine Pratt Ewing points out, unlike other minority communities in Europe and North America and like other publicly visible, diasporic, practicing Muslim communities, Turkish immigrants in Germany are seen as part of the global Islamic community, as a "civilizational threat" within the nation. For this reason, she argues, what Muslim organizations and individuals say and do locally is always interpreted as deceitful. When Turkish immigrant organizations in Germany campaign for immigrants to become German citizens and participate in German political life, it is seen as yet another indication of their deceitful intent to take over the German political system in the service of their larger Islamic cause.⁷

In its global relocation, the meaning of a Muslim woman's veil is thus constituted through what it is imagined to mean in Turkey, in Iran, in Egypt, in Afghanistan—past and present—often ignoring the voices and "choices" of Muslim women themselves.⁸ It has become the transnational sign of migration—the migration of alien cultural values and political aspirations into European societies. In this sense, as Joan W. Scott has argued, the French ban 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."⁹

It would be an understatement, then, to say that the veil of a Muslim woman is an overdetermined sign. As a sign of belonging to a religious community and thus already disqualifying the woman as a liberal autonomous subject, a sign of extranational belongings that constitutes a civilizational threat, a sign of religious challenge to the secularism of modern states, and finally a sign of women's oppression, it is hard to imagine how this sign can be successfully renegotiated.

For those who oppose the ban, it becomes important to unpack these multiple burdens of the veil. To open up possibilities outside the embattled choice paradigm, I propose to make two interrelated moves. First, I bring out the historical contingency of these symbolic contestations, hoping to make us uncomfortable with some of the circulating contemporary

associative significations of the veil. And second, I refocus the discussion away from a paradigm of choice and onto the productive powers of the veil in order to examine the multiple, generative, and regulative cultural work that the veil performs.

If indeed the constitution of veiling as a sign of women's oppression or unveiling as a sign of the secularism of modernity in the Islamic Middle East and in Europe is historically contingent, then what I want to explore here are some of the meanings of the veil that have been forgotten that make it the sign that it has now become. 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 extraterritorial?

I began this essay with Rico's predicament because the question of public visual legibility is not a new one. Although Montesquieu's eighteenth-century character was fictional, many Middle Eastern men who traveled to Europe from the late-eighteenth century and, much more frequently, in the nineteenth century narrated somewhat similar experiences in their travelogues and memoirs.¹⁰ As Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi has insightfully argued, these men went to Europe as spectators but found themselves constituted as spectacles.¹¹ Like Rico, in order to fit in European society, many decided to change attire; not only did they abandon their Middle Eastern clothing and dress in a European manner; if they did not want to be objects of intense curiosity, they also shaved their beards. That transformation, they also painfully recorded.

But something has happened between then and now: the concern over publicly visible signs of being French has shifted from men's to women's bodies. Today, immigrant men's different modes of public presence does not provoke much controversy in Europe, although men's full beards have occasionally been a cause for comment and have been used, especially in the days immediately following 9/11, as a way of identifying and targeting Muslim men. Nevertheless, there is no suggestion of passing legislation that North African Muslim men should shave their beards. Surely their beards are as much a public sign of their religious belonging as is the headscarf of Muslim women? In fact, an observant Muslim man's beard is a sign of adult manhood as much as a woman's headscarf is a sign of her

adult womanhood. How is it then that one has become a singularly unbearable sign? How has the veil become the almost exclusive visual sign of radical cultural difference between Islam and Europe? In Scott's words, writing on the French controversy, "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."¹²

What I suggest here is to return to the nineteenth-century focus on men's beards as a visible public sign of belonging, tracing the process of the heterosexualization of desire and the interrelated resignification of the veil that became the ground for the shift to women's bodies and clothing as the key sign of cultural difference. I hope this historical (de)tour will provide us with the beginnings of a different mode of understanding the current debates and contests.

MEN'S BEARDS

In the nineteenth century, as I have suggested, men's public appearance, including the size and shape of their beard, hair, hat, and other outfits, was just as much at stake; for Muslim men all were deeply associated with the question of the desirability, or not, of looking like Europeans. To become modern seemed to require that one's modernity be legible for and recognized by the already modern Europeans. Thus many modernist men advocated a complete change of dress and customs. For others, including some supporters of change, looking European posed a problem: namely, the Islamic prohibition against looking like a non-Muslim, which was associated with a fear that looking like religious (or for that matter gender and sexual) others would cause one to acquire their characteristics. You would become what you perform.

At every step, this dilemma was compounded by a sexual anxiety. To Middle Eastern Muslim men's eyes, the beardless face of a European man looked perilously like a *mukhannās*—an adult man making himself look like an adolescent male—an abject figure of unmanliness.¹³ Even European-style clothes at times provoked that fear. Although through the late-nineteenth century, the figure of the young male adolescent had been an

accepted and culturally celebrated object of adult male desire, the passage of this figure into adulthood required becoming manly, a most important visual sign of which was the growth of a full beard. An adult man shaving his beard then signified a refusal to become a man—a refusal that threatened manhood itself. In the eyes of Middle Eastern Muslim men visiting Europe, European men's shaved faces made them look like this abject figure. It was a subject of much concern and wonderment as to why these men would submit themselves to such shameful dishonor. The later appearance of Europeanized men in one's own midst seemed nothing less than a sign of the end of the world. If the twentieth century was a century of the veil wars, the nineteenth century was the time of the beard wars.

By the 1920s, however, the battle for the beard was lost—for the moment, anyway. The tide of modernity seemed to ride upon and be supported by cleanly-shaven faces of national men. Despite its abject association with the *mukhannas*, beardlessness increasingly served to demarcate the public presentation of men of modernity against their backward religious-minded bearded folks. In the growing sector of state employment, for instance, and most emphatically in the regulations for army recruits and conscripts, shaving the beard became a requirement. Writing in the late 1920s in Iran, Kayvan Qazvini recalled with melancholy that in his younger days he had “forbidden the sin” by attacking and slapping the face of a bath-masseur who was shaving a client's beard, whereupon the client ran away with his half-shaven face and hid in a pool of hot water. “Yet today, everyone, in imitation, shaves his beard and moustache, leaving a bit of moustache in the middle over the lip so as not to look like a woman; and no one dares to object. If today someone were to prohibit such sinful acts, people would ridicule him and the government would put him in jail, or at least would declare him insane.” Qazvini lamented that although a few decades earlier bath masseurs were forbidden to shave a client's beard, instead a new institution, the barber shop (*salmani*), had emerged as a popular business.”

WOMEN'S VEIL

The politics and policies around the beard informed and were informed by another cultural shift in the nineteenth-century Middle East. This is the

period in which homoeroticism and same-sex practices became marked as a sign of backwardness in modernist discourse—a source of national shame. Heteronormalization of eros and sex became a condition of “achieving modernity,” a project that called for the heterosocialization of public space and a reconfiguration of family life.¹⁵ This process was by no means identical for men and women. Whereas male homoerotic affective bonds could be resignified as asexual sentiment among citizen-brothers, and men’s friendships were transformed into patriotic national camaraderie (critically de-eroticizing its homo-affectivity and reorienting its eroticism toward a female beloved homeland), female homosociality came to be seen as deeply implicated in the production of “the vice.” Within the modernist discourse, men’s same-sex practices were seen as caused by gender segregation. Men turned to other men, modernists argued, because they could not socialize with women. A woman’s veil was thus not only a visible marker of cultural difference between Islam and Europe; it was also the most visible signifier of gender homosociality. It became explicitly linked to what was now named “unnatural love” among men, and “unnatural sex” among men was in turn held responsible for “unnatural sex” among women. Modernist drives at gender desegregation, with unveiling as a central element of it, worked at once as an oblique campaign to eradicate same-sex practices and “unnatural sexualities.” The one and the same move was to produce a double miracle: overcome women’s backwardness (transform them into companionate wives, educated mothers, useful citizens) and make same-sex practices redundant. Historically, the modernist normative gender moves were at once setting the scene for the public performance of normative sexuality.

In this sense, when simply equated with progress-as-Europeanization, unveiling has screened its own heteronormalizing work. Modernist narratives have focused on the emancipatory effects of gender heterosocialization in general and unveiling in particular. In the modernist imagination, premodernity is that time when women were unseen and unheard; modernity was to transform the invisible and mute woman into an unveiled and vocal public presence. This emancipatory narrative is dependent on the silenced/voiceless, segregated, and oppressed woman for delineating its own temporality. Moreover, this narrative ignores the disciplinary ef-

fects of the very same process—upon which its own emancipatory work was dependent. The nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century gender heterosocialization rescripted women's language, reconfigured bodily presence in public, and recoded woman's knowledge. Women's language and body had been crafted in a homological female world, women's ways of knowing generally constructed through daily practices of life, often learned from other women. For the heterosocial scientifically rational world that modernity desired, all these were deemed inappropriate. Women's language had presumed a female audience, was affiliated with the informal orality of that world, and could be explicitly sexual and bawdy. This language had to be attenuated and its sexual markers sanitized. A similar process of attenuation and disciplinary shaping marked women's body as it was urged to join the heterosocializing spaces of the modern. Indeed, before the discarding of the physical veil could be imagined, it was replaced by a metaphorical veil: the veil of chastity, acquired through modern education. Rather than an emancipatory creativity out of the void of repression and oppression, woman's modern presence was a contingent embodiment of rationalized science and naturalized sexuality. The continued reading of the veil as backward misses its generative cultural labor.

It has become almost a truism that the structural work of the veil in Muslim societies and communities is based on the Islamic doctrine of an active female sexuality.¹⁶ If female sexuality is not contained and controlled, the argument goes, this powerful force would cause social chaos and threaten men's civic and religious lives. The veil then, and the closely related institution of gender segregation, are suggested to be the mechanisms through which Muslim societies contain and control female sexuality.

This proposition is predicated on the heterosexual presumption that active female sexuality is eternally searching for a phallus. If it were not, institutionalized gender segregation would hardly contain and control it—quite the contrary! Moreover, if we do not assume the naturalness of heterosociality, any more than the naturalness of heterosexuality, if we consider heterosocialization a social achievement, a learned performance, then the veil and gender segregation as institutions for the regulation of heterosociality and the prevention of unlicensed heterosexuality have to be radically rethought.

The proposition of the veil as an external controller of heterosexual desire also ignores the generative work of veiling and gender segregation. Regardless of what any institution, ritual, and daily practice are proclaimed to achieve, their cultural generative effects may be different. If we shift our thinking away from the proclaimed effects to actual cultural effects of the veil, then its daily practice—the patterns of who covers what in order to avoid a breakdown of the rules of seeing and being seen—can be argued to generate heterosexuality. It generates that which it disciplines and controls. In very broad terms, when, as a daily practice, growing young females learn that particular categories of males should not be able to eye them in the same way that it is fine for females of similar kin-status to do, the effect of such repeated performances of gender regulation is to incite heterosexuality; it is as if one is told over and over again who one may desire and be desired by (only certain categories of males) and who is assumed to be beyond desire (never females of the same category).¹⁷

THE VEIL AND SECULARISM

There is yet another set of associated presumptions that inform the current debates on the veil. While the veil became a visible marker of difference between Europe and Islam in the nineteenth century, the contention over women's veiling was (is) not simply between modernists and counter-modernists, as it is often assumed. The common assumption that Middle Eastern reformers considered the removal of the veil as essential to modern progress collapses all modernists into one particular trend that became dominant by the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century. It assumes all modernists advocated removal of the veil, thus conflating modernists with those who sought disaffiliation from an Islamic past, rather than with those who sought a reconfiguration of that past. It participates in the writing out of modernity those who worked for an Islamic modern. The latter, among them important groups of women, did not advocate, and at times opposed, women's unveiling, although they fully supported women's education, employment, and social participation. "Achieving modernity" was centered on the attainment of science and the rule of law—seen as the cornerstones of European progress. For modernist reformers of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, including

modernists who saw their project as fully compatible with the Muslimness of their societies, the central target of reform of women's status was education, not the veil. On this there was a strong consensus. But no fixed connection existed between the issue of veiling and women's education. Although some considered the veil and gender segregation signs of backwardness and impediments to women's progress, other reformers considered the veil an Islamic requirement to be respected and preserved. For the latter, the problem with Muslim domestic space was not that it imprisoned women, as the later cliché would have it, but that it was a site of unknowledge, a site of superstition and ignorance, embodied by the women of the household. Importantly, urban women reformers, who were organizing and demanding education and social and political rights, were not unanimous on the issue of unveiling. Many explicitly argued against unveiling, while others began to make cautious remarks in favor of unveiling.

In Iran, for instance, women continued to articulate these differing views into the 1920s and early 1930s, before the state took charge of women's modernity. It is from this time, that is, after the official ban on the veil in 1936, that not only did state violence enter into the picture, but, more critically, a deep rupture opened up between those women who had advocated unveiling and those who had sought to combine their quest for modernity with a reconfiguration of Islam and were now unmistakably marked as traditional and anti-modern—an identification that has only in the recent decade been reshaped. 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.

Iranian politics of modernity, for instance, since the mid-nineteenth century, had been marked by the emergence of a spectrum of nationalist and Islamist discourses. Within that spectrum, one notion of Iranian modernity took Europe as its model, increasingly combining its modernist thrust with the recovery of pre-Islamic Iranianism. Other trends sought to combine their nationalism and the urge to catch up with Europe, not with a pre-Islamic recovery, but with Islam, by projecting Shi'ism as the Iranianization of Islam in its early centuries.¹⁸

In the course of the twentieth century, however, especially since the 1930s, the modernist trends that had striven to combine nationalism and the quest for modernity with notions of Islam were virtually (d)ejected from the modernist camp as the latter became increasingly identified with either the Pahlavi state or with the nationalist, socialist, and communist Left. Islam became consolidated with terms such as tradition and regression, marked as an impediment to modernity. This paradigmatic shift was pivotally mapped out through a gender shift in the figure of cultural alterity and excess from the over-Europeanized male dandy to the "Westoxicated" woman. The culture wars correspondingly shifted from men's beard and beardlessness to women's veiling and unveiling. Throughout this history, issues related to women's rights have been centrally implicated in these demarcations of nationalism, modernity, Islam, and secularism.¹⁹

That women's rights activists and organizations were critically involved in the production of these reconfigurations meant that feminism became a privileged category marking the secularism of modernity. Although the shape of these reconfigurations differs from country to country in the Middle East, the current transnational migration of histories and signifiers has largely carried this twentieth-century memory from such countries as Iran and Turkey into the contemporary signification of the veil as unsecular and unmodern. In turn, current readings of the veil in Europe have migrated back to a country such as Turkey and been used in judicial decisions confirming the unacceptability of veiled women in such state institutions as state universities, courts, and the parliament.

THE VEIL'S MULTIPLE VALENCE IN EUROPE

Although I have so far largely concentrated on the Middle Eastern experience of these transformations, I would like to conclude with comments pertaining to the European experience and perspectives. Here too, the veil has a history far more complex and multilayered than its current signification with oppression or Islamic fundamentalism. Mohja Kahf has traced the genealogy of representations of Muslim women in European writings, arguing that "The Muslim woman in medieval literature typically appears as a queen or noblewoman wielding power of harm or succor over the hero, reflecting in this the earthly might of Islamic civilization. . . . The

rhetorical move of many medieval literary texts involving a Muslim woman is to subdue her, not to liberate her. . . . There is no veil and no seclusion in her medieval representations."²⁰ It is only in the seventeenth century that the veil and the seraglio enter into European representation, and by the mid-nineteenth century "the subjugated Muslim woman" became a central trope of European writings about the Muslim Middle East. Yet even here, there were important distinctions. Billie Melman has amply documented and persuasively argued that initially, at least in the writings of European women about Muslim Middle Eastern women, the veil was seen as the possibility of freedom of movement for urban women.²¹ In the writings of Lady Montagu while in Turkey, she reflected that Turkish women had more liberty than she did, because the "perpetual masquerade" of their veiled street appearance allowed them to pursue the very same kind of liaisons that English women pursue but with more security from men's prying.²²

We witness a significant change in the later nineteenth-century writings by European women when a shift in understanding of freedom itself, as Melman argues, from "liberty" to "autonomy," that is, from "freedom for" to "freedom from," emerges. Although initially this meant that in the eyes of some early-nineteenth-century European women, the veil came to signify a Muslim woman's freedom from sexual exploitation, for others, in particular for European feminists of the emerging equal rights framework, the veil became consolidated as a marker of oppression. Indeed, Melman documents that some of the most "racist and culturally narcissist" writings about Muslim women were written by feminists such as Harriet Martineau and Amelia Edwards.

It is this mid-nineteenth-century reconceptualization of the veil as oppression that was combined with another thrust, that of the colonial desire to see through and take over the domains of Muslim men's sovereignty. In this context, the veil also became a sign of the closure of a Muslim man's home to the European. In the transformation of the Algerian woman by the French, focusing on the removal of the veil became a central strategy in the project of colonizing Algeria, that is, in penetrating and taking over Muslim culture. In Kahf's words, "The recurrent drama of incipient colonization, that of a heroic male conquest of a feminized Orien-

tal land, is played out in literature upon the inert body of the Muslim woman." The "basic plot-line is the battle between the Romantic hero and a Muslim man over possession of the Muslim woman, often figured as a contest of who can penetrate the harem wall and/or her veil and be master of the gaze over her body."²³

The most stunning recent memory of that colonial drive was the spectacle of Algerian women dropping their veils on a public platform in May 1958 as part of the campaign to keep Algeria French. For an Algerian woman, in this single act, the meaning of being French was crafted. That colonial legacy is being replayed today in France. Once again, a Muslim woman can claim Frenchness only if she is willing to drop her veil in public.

From the nineteenth-century civilizational moment, the veil became the focus of European colonial, missionary, and feminist projects. While I do not mean to collapse these projects into a singular entity, the historical legacy of fixing the meaning of a Muslim woman's veil as the sign of her gender oppression has remained with us to this very day. It is a legacy that feminists cannot ignore.

I invoke this history in its broadest and necessarily simplistic sense to make a point about the present: that the meaning of a Muslim woman's veil is both multiple and historically contingent, that this meaning has been subject to challenges and negotiations to which Muslim women themselves have been, and have become even more so today, a major party. As much as for some Muslim women the veil has become an oppressive requirement, for others its observance is what makes it possible to be part of modern public sociability. For still other Muslim women, veiling has been used as a sign of resistance to domination, as in colonial Algeria, or under the Pahlavis in Iran, or in those contemporary modern states where the veil is banned, at least in some domains. Their point of view cannot be infantilized as if they are mere objects of the contestation between men of state and men of religion, their headscarves but a transparent and ahistorical sign of a threat to secularism. Both in majority-Muslim countries and in European countries, in very different ways, Muslim women have challenged and recast the meaning of this sign.

It is *their* remaking of the meaning of the veil that is received as challenging the secularism of French society. Muslim women who stay in their

"cloistered homes" hardly pose a visible challenge to French, or Turkish, secularism. It is, rather, those Muslim women who insist on making their presence seen in public, in educational and professional sites and public spaces, who present a spectacle of strangeness, like Rico in eighteenth-century Paris. It is this presence upon which demands are made to shed its sign of alterity in order to be accepted as French. Through the recent legislation, the French state, in effect, has chosen to insist that a Muslim woman's veil singularly means an undermining of Frenchness and its secular character, and that it singularly means Muslim woman's oppression. What I hope to bring out, through this historical detour, is the contingency of this construction, both in its Middle Eastern context and on European soil. This meaning has been produced at the intersection, as this sign traverses across temporal and geographic zones. Bringing back the many historically contingent constructions and meanings of veiling and unveiling may offer us alternative usable pasts as languages for present contestations.

NOTES

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1. Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, trans. C.J. Betts (Harmondsworth, U.K.: Penguin Books, 1973).
2. The word "veil" itself has become an impossible yet indispensable word to use. Its meaning, even in its barest sense of what kind of outfit it describes, varies drastically in different historical contexts. In Iran, for instance, what today is considered "veiling" (covering the body, leaving the face exposed) would have been considered "unveiling" (showing the face) in the early-twentieth century. In the context of the French controversy, I use it as a general term to refer to the covering of a woman's hair, usually with a scarf, that expresses a religious-cultural practice and identification.
3. See Yesim Arat, "One Ban and Many Headscarves: Islamist Women and Democracy

- in Turkey," *HAGAR: International Social Science Review* 2, no. 1 (2001): 47-60; and Burçak Keskin-Kozat, "Entangled in Secular Nationalism, Feminism, and Islamism: The Life of Konca Kuris," *Cultural Dynamics* 15, no. 2 (2003): 183-211.
4. See Maryam Namazie's numerous articles espousing this viewpoint at www.Iranian.com.
 5. The contestation over who speaks for Islam in France is itself a struggle over the relationship between Islamic identification and national citizenship.
 6. Wendy Brown, "Who Has Culture and Whom Culture Has" (paper presented at the cultural citizenship conference, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, 20-21 Feb. 2004). The paper constitutes part of a forthcoming book, "Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire."
 7. Katherine Pratt Ewing, "Living in the Diaspora: Between Turkey and Germany," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, nos. 2-3 (2003): 405-31. Most recently, much of the coverage of denial of visa to a prominent Muslim scholar, Tariq Ramadan, was informed by this notion of deceit: that he was a grandson of Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the 1930s, seemed to convey more truth about him than anything he has written or done, or the fact that he was born and brought up in Switzerland.
 8. Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali, "Veiled Politics: Rethinking the Debate on Hijab," *ISIM Newsletter* 13 (December 2003): 202-36. For an argument for moving the debate out of the choice paradigm especially for those opposed to the ban, see Ajay Singh Chaudhary, "'The Simulacra of Morality': Islamic Veiling, Religious Politics, and the Limits of liberalism," *Dialectical Anthropology* 29 (2005): 349-72. See also Saba Mahmood, "Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2001): 202-36, for a different view of the choice paradigm, one that fails to take into account the understanding of veiled women themselves and the place of public piety in modern subjectification, wherein the practice of veiling in public spaces is part of, indeed central to, the constitution of modern national subjecthood.
 9. Joan W. Scott, "Symptomatic Politics: Banning Islamic Head Scarves in French Public Schools," unpublished manuscript, 26.
 10. These early accounts include Mirza Abu al-Hasan Khan Shirazi, *Hayrat'namah*, ed. Hasan Mursil'vand (Tehran: Rasa, 1986); Mirza Abu'l Hasan Khan Shirazi, *A Persian At the Court of King George, 1809-1810*, trans. Margaret Morris Cloake (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1988); Mirza Abu Talib Khan Lakhinaw'i Isfahani, *Masir-i Talibi* (Tehran: Sazman-i intisharat va amuzish-i inqilab-i Islami, 1984); Muhammad Saffar, *Disorienting Encounters: Travels of a Moroccan Scholar in France, 1845-1846: The voyage of Muhammad as-Saffar*, ed. and trans. Susan Gilson Miller (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Mirza Salih Shirazi, *Guzarish-i safar*, ed. Humayun Shahidi (Tehran: Rah-i naw, 1983); Mirza Fattah Khan Garmrudi, *Safarnamah-i Mirza Fattah Khan Garmrudi bih 'Urupa*, ed. Fath al-Din Fattahi (Tehran: Chapkhanah-i Bank-i Bazargani-i Iran, 1969); Rizaquli Mirza, *Safarnamah*, ed. Asghar Farmanfarma'i Qajar (Tehran: Asatir, 1982). For a critical study of how this travel literature informed historiography of Iranian modernity,

- see Naghmeh Sohrabi, *Signs Taken for Wonder: Qajar Travel Literature to Europe* (Ph. D. diss., Harvard University, 2005).
11. Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, *Refashioning Iran: Orientalism, Occidentalism, and Historiography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).
 12. "Scott, "Symptomatic Politics," 7.
 13. For a more extensive historical expansion of this proposition in the case of Iran, see my book, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
 14. 'Abbas 'Ali Kayvan Qazvini, *Hajj'namah-i Kayvan* (includes *Kalamat-i Kayvan* and *Kayvan'namah*), ed. Rashid Yasimi (Tehran: Matba'ah-i Busfur, 1930), 214.
 15. For a summary of this argument in the case of Iran, see Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Mapping Transformations of Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Modern Iran," *Social Analysis* 49 (Summer 2005): 54-77.
 16. This was articulated most strongly by Fatima Mernissi in *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Society* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975).
 17. I give an example of this double work in "Rules of Desire: The Interminable Question of Hijab," <http://iranian.com/Najmabadi/2005/August/Hijab/index.html>.
 18. The literature on politics of Iranian modernity is enormous. I have found the following particularly insightful and helpful to my thinking: Fariba Adelkhah, *Being Modern in Iran*, trans. Jonathan Derrick (London: Hurst, 1999); Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West: The Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1996); Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985); and the many writings of Mohamad Tavakoli-Targhi, esp. *Emergence of Two Revolutionary Discourses in Modern Iran* (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1988), and *Refashioning Iran*.
 19. See Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
 20. Mohja Kahf, *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 4-5.
 21. Billie Melman, *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion, and Work* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).
 22. Paraphrased from Kahf, *Western Representations*, 120.
 23. *Ibid.*, 8.

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