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The Voluntary Adoption of Islamic Stigma Symbols

NILÜFER GÖLE

MY aim in this paper is to privilege the realm of the personal and the emotional subcontinent of Islamic collective identity formation and the ways in which Islamic identity occurs through verbal communication and is transcribed in bodily practices and management of public space. I use the concept of stigma to the extent that it articulates the private corporeal realm to the public domain of perception, social interaction, and communication. Of course, reflection on definitions of private and public spheres from the vantage point of an Islamic self inevitably leads to a critical reading of the hegemonic narratives of secular modernity and liberal definitions of self.

Islamic stigma appears as a puzzling notion; one is more accustomed to speak of the stigmatization of persons or social groups. Indeed, one can speak more easily, for example, about the stigmatization of Muslim girl students who claim the right to wear a headscarf and who have faced exclusion from schools and universities during the last two decades because of the actions of secularist politicians in France, a country undergoing Muslim immigration, and also in Turkey, a Muslim-majority country. But one can also speak of stigmatization of secular women by compulsory veiling in a hegemonic Islamic public sphere, such as Iran since the 1979 revolution. Today the term stigma is applied more to the feelings of humiliation provoked by social exclusion and social oppression; it is applied more to the disgrace itself rather than the bodily evidence of it. This is why it is easier to speak of the ways in which Muslims are stigmatized or the ways in which

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Islam is used to stigmatize other people. In this respect, as Erving Goffman reminds us, the notion of stigma lost its original Greek sense that originated from the signs that were cut or burned into the body to advertise that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor, a blemished person to be avoided in public places (Goffman, 1963: 1). Stigma was meant to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something terrible about the moral status of the signifier. What I have in mind in using the notion of Islamic stigma is to bring forth the bodily aspect of it and thereby understand the ways in which social difference and public exclusion are carried out by bodily signs and practices. Telling a story about Islamic stigma informs simultaneously about the realm of the private individual as well as the realm of the public.

Stigma refers to an individual sign, to social information the individual transmits about himself that disqualifies him and creates an obstacle to being fully accepted by society. A stigma therefore designates an attribute that profoundly discredits the individual. But a stigma is also subject to public perception. We need, as Goffman (1963: 3) argues, to understand a language of communication of relationships and not just attributes. Because it is not the attribute as a thing in itself, such as a headscarf or a beard, that can be judged as creditable or discreditable—it is the normative cultural values and social relations of class and power that determine our perceptions. Hence, the Islamic headscarf supplies information about the bearer, but is also subject to public perception. It communicates the individual and collective motivations of those who adopt it as much as the perceptions of those who reject it. The symbol of the headscarf makes sense as a language of relationships between those who assert their orientation toward values of Islam and those social classes that owe their status to normative values of modernity, such as equality and liberty. It reveals a realm of relationality and conflict between those who are bestowed with values of modernity and those who are not in conformity.

I am referring to an active appropriation of a stigma symbol and hence a shift from a symbol of submissiveness to one of

assertiveness. Second, the adoption of an Islamic symbol is not solely a personal choice but a collective one, in the sense that it follows a collective logic of a social protest movement, namely Islamism. In borrowing the title of Goffman's book, I will argue that Islamism can be approached as a collective and political form of "management of spoiled identity." Islamism as a collective social movement enables Muslim actors to adopt voluntarily the religious attributes that are considered potentially discrediting from the point of view of the normative framework of a modern culture. Islamist movements turn the "undesired differentness" of being a Muslim into a voluntary adoption of a stigma symbol that is overtly claimed and offensively communicated in public—and that in turn it might become itself a source of stigma for others who do not want to conform to an Islamic order, as in the case of contemporary Iran.

In proposing to use the notion of stigma, what matters here is the simultaneous reference both to private and public realms; stigma as a bodily sign is personified and embodied, but at the same time it conveys a meaning in the public. Islamist politics makes religion visible as a personal sign, as an embodied practice in public space: bodily signs such as veiling for women and a beard for men, bodily practices such as praying or habits of eating, but also modes of address and discursive practices are carried into public realm. Islamism carries the realm of *habitus* into the realm of the political. In this respect Islamism, along with feminism, can be considered the most significant contemporary social movement that attempts to blur and redesign the borders between the private and the public spheres.

Religious Agency

The question of agency in Islam must be addressed; the relation between religiosity and agency is problematic and not to be taken for granted. To those who spoke from the vantage point of modernist idiom and institutions both in European but also

within Muslim countries, be it political elites, academicians, intellectuals, or public figures, the Muslim figure was perceived as a prepolitical subject destined to disappear.¹ At best it appears as a residue of a not yet completed modernization with no recognition for agency in modern politics. The Muslim was expected to undergo a historical mutation into the secular citizen of the nation bestowed with Western values. The intellectual conceptions and historical horizon of progress have denied agency to religion in general, but even more so to Islam. Today Islamism in its broadest sense expresses a mode of political agency. Certainly the nature of agency and the degree of opposition are radically different, ranging from Islamic revolution in Iran to women's headscarf issues in European contexts of migration to the democratic victory of the Justice and Development (AK) party in Turkey in November 2003 general elections and worldwide terrorist acts. What is common—contrary to modernist narratives and politics that have assumed the death of religion—is the shaping of Islamic agency by an assertion of religious difference, rather than its denial. Instead of giving up religiosity, considered as a source of backwardness, new religious actors turn their “Muslimness” (similar to “blackness”) into an overt protest called Islamism. The Islamist movement, distinct from Islam, which conveys a sense of the *longue duree* history of religion, is the contemporary political manifestation and interpretation of religion by Muslim agency.

From the perspective of cultural criticism, Islamism shares similarities with other contemporary social movements that have introduced new categories of identity into politics, such as sex, race, nature, and religion. A criticism of the universal and assimilative values of the Enlightenment project can be traced in Islamism as well, but it is a criticism from outside the Western framework of critical movements. In contrast to progressive and pluralistic social movements, the fundamentalist movement refers to transcendental sources of truth and authority, takes a past-oriented societal model as an ideal, and has a holistic claim

of change, encompassing all areas of life that range from state power, science, and faith to lifestyles. Instead of a future-oriented utopia, Islamist movements call for the rediscovery of memory, a golden age, an uncontaminated model of premodern society. It is a search for purity that leads easily to totalitarian or terrorist twists.

One of the most important features of this movement—along with the question of agency—is the question of identity definition. The religiosity that Islamists recover is not something that was there, a social reservoir waiting to be used; Islam is no longer transmitted by their social, family, and local settings that they reappropriate and revisit in order to elaborate a new religious self in modern contexts. Islamism is the work of those Muslims who exist under conditions of social mobility and uprootedness; those actors who have left their families and small towns to come to cities or to cross national boundaries, becoming migrants in Western countries in search of work, education, and better living conditions. Sociologists know that these displacements create fertile ground for social alienation and frustration, and for delinquency and terrorist actions. But social mobility is also a condition for modern definitions of individual choice and agency. Concomitant with their move into modern life spaces, religion and tradition cease to be prearranged identities. Islam does not appear as a norm that is taken for granted, transmitted from one generation to another and socially embedded. Islam that has been a binding force among those who belonged to a locality, to a particular confession and to a nation-state today becomes a referent for an imaginary bond between those Muslims who are socially uprooted (for the difference between a binding capital and a social bond, cf. Putnam, 2000). Charles Taylor describes social disembeddedness as a condition for a different kind of social imaginary: “horizontal forms of social imaginary in which people grasp themselves and great number of others as existing and acting simultaneously” (Taylor, 2002: 83). In the modern age, religious experience becomes part of “expressive

individualism”—that is, it becomes important to find one’s own way as against a model imposed from outside society, the previous generation, or religious authority (Taylor, 2002). One of the detrimental consequences of this process is the “democratization” of religious knowledge in the sense that the religious elites, the ulema, lose authority in the interpretation of religious texts, which are used and misused by Islamic militants in the aim of instrumentalizing their politics.

Yet, although there is a strong individualist component to the religious experience in modern times, this does not necessarily mean that the content will be individuating; on the contrary, many will join, as Taylor reminds us, powerful religious communities (Taylor, 2002: 112), or become engaged in radical movements, as in the case of Islamist politics.

Islamism shares therefore some of the aspects with modern forms of religious experience because it represents socially disembedded forms of religiosity and as a consequence it becomes a matter of personal choice. Rather than extending given religious structures, authorities, and national and confessional allegiances, the experience of Islam today works as a horizontal social imaginary bonding many different Muslim actors, in different contexts, who act together simultaneously. Islamism refers to the modern production, elaboration, and diffusion of this horizontal social imaginary despite the historical distinctions between spiritual Sufi and canonized Sharia Islam; Shia and Sunni Islam; conservative Saudi Arabia and revolutionary Iran. This does not mean that historical, confessional, and national differences do not matter. They do. They provide the different stages upon which a shared imaginary is transcribed in different settings, with different players, opening up a diversity of interpretations and political dynamics.

To sum up, contemporary Islamism brings forth religion as a category of political agency; religion itself becomes a matter of personal choice among those groups that are socially disembedded and at the same time expresses a personal experience of reli-

gion within a collective engagement. I will discuss this by examining in further detail the identity-formation process.

Muslim identity is transformed from a “natural” category into which one is born—a “tradition” handed down from generation to generation—into a “social” category. Islamism is the name given to this radical procedure, to this shift from Muslim to Islamist. It is radical to the extent that it refutes the “given” definitions of Islam, which is held to be too subservient and calls for collective agency and assertion in the face of modern power. As a result, Muslim identity is not only revised and selectively constructed as a collective “we,” endowing itself with oppositional agency, it also becomes a matter of choice. The tiny border between Muslim and Islamist is hence drawn. One can be born Muslim, but one becomes an Islamist by personal choice and political engagement. Islamism provides a horizontal form of bondage and social imaginary among Muslims who are socially disembedded. Because Islam is no longer transmitted by their social, family, and local settings, these Muslims reappropriate, revisit, and reimagine collectively a new religious self in modern contexts. Such a transformation from Muslim to Islamist is the work of a collective countercultural movement. As the work of Alain Touraine has shown, social movements are not only struggles for the redistribution of goods and justice; they also have a larger impact on the core values of the society, transforming the historicity of a society as they elaborate new definitions of a cultural model (Touraine, 1981 [1978]). In this respect, the formation of a new Islamist identity is not a process that transforms solely Muslim groups, but foremost challenges the established norms, cultural models, and secular modern perceptions of self and the other.

A shift from Muslim to Islamist becomes apparent in the ways that zealous actors make forms of religiosity offensively visible in the public sphere. The voluntary adoption of stigma symbols and the exacerbation of religious signs and practices distinguish Islamism from the familiar ways of expressing Muslim identity.

Voluntary Adoption of a Stigma Symbol

The Islamic headscarf is the most visible and controversial adoption of a stigma symbol. Veiling appears as a bodily sign, although it is not congenital and permanent like skin color.² Nor is it as individual or as impermanent as other symbols that are voluntarily employed, such as the piercing carried out by members of the youth culture today. The resistance young schoolgirls have shown to removing their veils in French schools or in Turkish universities illustrates the embodied nature of the sign—as something that is part of their being, both in the personal and collective sense. In protest of the ban on the headscarf in universities—as is the case in Turkey—they adopt subversive strategies of parody and wear wigs and hats at the entrance of university campuses. Apparently taking off the veil is more difficult than putting on a wig.

Veiling is a religious symbol inscribed on the body; it is carried personally but also conveys social information to others. It informs the public of the radical transformation from the concealment of Muslimness and its cultural attributes to the collective and public disclosure of Islam. In wearing a veil (and, for men, growing a beard), individuals become overtly identifiable as Muslims and publicly assertive. They convey equally the meaning that they are more zealous and meticulous in their religious observance than those who confine their religiosity to the private sphere.

The Islamic headscarf is often treated as derivative of a larger political fundamentalist movement in which women are supposed to be secondary, passive, and manipulated agents. Furthermore, since the symbol of veiling reminds other of and conveys the subservient, silent, and docile image of a Muslim woman, a woman's agency was easily negated. Although the participation of women in contemporary Islamism is one of the most distinctive features of the movement, and veiling the most visible symbol of its public irruption, the question of woman's agency was not the central preoccupation. Instead, it was one of the blind spots in studies on

Islamist politics. More recently, at least in the academic world, the idea that veiling is a simple imposition of community norms, or the result of pressure from men, family members, or Islamic militants, has been widely questioned. Scholars are left with the puzzling issue of its voluntary adoption, and the personal assertiveness of a majority of young Islamist girls. (Indeed it is a puzzling issue, because they have become assertive by adopting a symbol of gender subservience and stigmatization.)

Veiling, which is taken as a sign that debases women's identity, indicating that they are inferior to men and are passive and secluded in interior domestic spaces, has been readopted by those Muslim women who are no longer confined to a traditional role and to a certain space. They are instead women who are crossing the frontiers of interior space and have access to higher education, urban life, and public agency. Veiling is both a personal and collective expression of Islamic religiosity. It is personally carried as a bodily sign, but also imagined as a source of collective empowerment and horizontal bondage among those who distinguish themselves as Muslims, and more precisely as Islamists. Women turn veiling, an attribute of potential public discredit, into a subaltern advantage.

The new veiling carries a *mémoire*; it reminds us of a historical sense in which Islamic values and religious definitions of self had become depleted with the emergence of modern values of gender equality and self-emancipation. It is with the rise of Western secular values that veiling turned into an attribute that offered the potential to discredit the person who wears it. But we should be reminded that the rise of this value system is not isolated and limited to the West; modern secular values were definitely initiated by the Western experience, but they circulated into other cultural spaces, transmitted by intellectual and political elites and took new forms in other national experiences either by the process of colonization or by voluntary modernization. They then became part of the collective social imaginary of a larger public. Consequently, the headscarf is perceived as a symbol of backwardness,

ignorance, and subservience not only in a Western context, but also by many of the publics in Muslim countries engaging with the values of secularism and gender liberty. There is a strong tradition of secular women in Muslim countries. In some contexts, such as Turkey, secular women are at the forefront of the struggle against Islamist movements in general and the veiling issue in particular. One should recall that Muslim women gained entrée into modern life because of the reforms that introduced secular modernization in the 1920s, which called for emancipation from religion and was symbolized by taking off the veil. In Turkey, but also in Egypt and Iran, the unveiling and the participation of women in public life meant for the modernizers a national engagement in "Western civilization." As a result, the issue of veiling has been pivotal to the creation of the nation-states in the Middle East. Modernity did not introduce solely the abstract category of citizenship and rights but also had an effect on ways of life, clothing, and self-presentation. Thus, secular women were products of a historical, emotional, and corporeal fracture with Muslim identity; a fracture with the past that made it possible for them to have access to gender equality and public emancipation. The reading of contemporary veiling therefore requires an understanding of this language of relationships with secularized Muslim women and the project of modernity as it is grounded in Muslim contexts. It is not the oppositional axis of supposed entities of Islam and the West, but an indigenous fracture that is at the core of the dilemma.

I will argue that the decisive realm of social inequality that Islamist politics is built upon is neither the realm of economic deprivation nor that of political authoritarianism, but the cultural model of modernity that created a hegemonic framework, namely a higher form of life, to be emulated and embodied personally and in everyday life. It goes without saying that the cultural premises of modernity are not independent of the institutional and economic aspects of modernity. However, the subjective perceptions of Islamic stigma and its deeper structural historical

roots can best be grasped in relation to the definition of the modern self and its equation with the civilized Western.

Modern definitions of self in Muslim contexts are not independent of the new prestige symbols that have emerged that are closer to and share a familiarity with the attributes of Western modernity. Photographs of unveiled women and women in athletic competitions, along with photographs of men and women living European lifestyles, depicted the new modernist representations of a “prestigious” life (Graham-Brown, 1988). New urban spaces, tea salons, opera houses, and private clubs as well as new manners, such as a husband and wife walking hand in hand, or men and women shaking hands, dancing at balls, and dining together depicted a European style of male-female socialization and celebrated the ideal attributes and rituals of a “modern and civilized” way of life. Women as public servants (in the nation-building mission), as teachers (an educative role), participating in beauty contests and sports festivals (emancipated physically), performing on the stage (not fettered by religious prohibitions), going to restaurants, driving cars (occupying urban spaces)—all these new roles calling for public visibility were endorsed by the feminine elites and encouraged by “paternalizing males” (Arat, 1989).

Domestic life and ideals were also influenced by Western values, with a new emphasis on the conjugal couple and a new interest in health and hygiene (Behar and Duben, 1991). New periodicals, advertisements, and novels participated in the representation and circulation of new ways of being in private and public and brought domestic life under the public gaze. Women as modern homemakers and consumers of new hygienic products, along with their role in the upbringing of children, embodied the pedagogical civilizing mission in matters of modern living. The house and the domestic interior followed the Westernized aspirations for the nuclear family and found their expression in the “comfortable, simple and plain cubic” architecture (Le Corbusier’s ideas inspired an entire generation of Turkish architects

in the 1930s) (Bozdogan, 1997). The modernist project aimed to constitute a new way of being and living, transmitted and embodied primarily by women and their changing intimacies with men

both in the private and public spheres. In short, for a “new life” and its prestige symbols, which were defined in secular and Western terms from the 1920s onward, one had to leave one’s Muslim *habitus* in the past.

In the 1980s, Islamism addressed a critique of the cultural program of modernity and its targets in order to change the same realm, namely the definitions pertaining to self, body, and daily life. By means of political Islam, Muslim actors have adopted collectively discredited attributes of religion and have turned them into voluntary signs of self-definition and self-empowerment in public. Muslimness is turned from concealment in private to its disclosure in public. By means of collective agency, they seek to turn a discrediting attribute into a voluntary stigma, an undesired difference of Muslimness into a subaltern advantage of Islamism.

Religion plays a major role in turning a stigma into a source of empowerment, in reversing the feelings of shame into dignity and self-esteem. This is possible because religion provides an autonomous and an alternative space for Muslim self-definition; it provides a framework for the orientation of identity—framework in the sense it is used by Charles Taylor in his book on the *Sources of the Self*—that means it incorporates a set of crucial qualitative distinctions, giving a sense of good and higher forms of life (Taylor, 1998: 19). Islam is therefore used as a source of orientation and distinction considered to be a higher form of life. It helps with the “management of spoiled identity” in providing a sense of good and higher forms of life and turning the stigmatization into dignity. Contemporary Muslims establish an individualized link with Islamic religion, which provides an ethical guidance for conduct in their daily life. Religion offers a personal basis to construct themselves as moral citizens.

And veiling as a sign that is seen as debasing women’s identity—as inferior to men, passive and secluded in the interior family

space—is voluntarily adopted by women as a stigma sign, but struggling to become a new prestige symbol. In short, the meanings of the veil are undergoing a radical transformation by women who have had access to secular education and agency and claim their difference in spaces of modernity. The headscarf, symbol of backwardness, ignorance, and subservience for Muslim women in modern contexts, fights back to become, once again, as it has thought to be in the Islamic past, a symbol of distinction and prestige for urban Muslim women.

Turkey and Iran are two contexts in which we can observe, from opposite poles, the reversal of stigma symbols into prestige symbols. In Turkey it is the popularity of fashion shows for Islamic dress that illustrates well the search for social distinction and social recognition on the behalf of the recently formed pious middle classes. The coming to power of a moderate Islamist party in Turkey—the AK party on November 5, 2002— can be interpreted as part of the same dynamics of search for social recognition. The fashionable ways of Islamic dress and veiling adopted by new Islamic elites provide an example to be followed by more popular Muslim social classes. The Islamic veiling thought originally to cover and, during the first decade of revolutionary Islam (from 1979 onward), to express class differences, social misery and popular protest against the political elites, today follows a new pattern: it has begun to lose its homogenizing feature, its uniform, and embraces esthetic values and suggests a symbol of distinction and prestige for pious women. If in the case of Turkey it is by means of democratic politics, market forces, and fashion that stigma symbols are turning into symbols of prestige, in the case of Iran it has been by means of an Islamist revolution that the veiling has turned from a protest symbol to a power symbol. Today compulsory veiling still stands as the symbol of the regime and underpins the hegemony of Islamic public sphere. But, women in the last 20 years have challenged the “correct” veiling and have adopted, as one woman in Teheran put it, “with homeopathic doses,” new strategies for “unveiling”: partially showing their hair, using makeup, shortening the length of their coats so that

they are knee-high and wearing trousers beneath. In Iran, the improvisation of fashion styles and the desire by women for a “normal” lifestyle have engendered a need for an autonomous space, namely a secular space of life. Fashion, as a way of inhabiting body, space, and time, shapes ideas and representations about the self that unsettles the puritan religious and communitarian interpretations of the moral self conveyed through Islamic dress. Fashion transgresses the national norms of an Islamic state as it circulates in streets, among different cultures, and thereby mixes and blurs Western and Islamic binary distinctions (Balesescu, 2003)

Difference and Public Proximity

The new actors in Islam are an outcome of double “cultural capital”;³ on the one hand they expose religious values and signs, but on the other hand they are an outcome of secular and Western-style education. They are a product of a double cultural capital, which enables them to circulate among different publics with ease. In contrast with the first generation of Islamists, who were defined by their militant activism, the second generation of professionals enter into a public world of communication, namely media, but also associative life and political competition. This public stage requires a common grammar of interaction and language that is acquired in schools and also in new public performances. Those who have gained both religious and secular knowledge, who manage to speak from two different cultural backgrounds and can shift between two cultural codes, come to the forefront of public life. Muslims manifest their use of double cultural capital in their public performances. By means of fashion, language, and discursive practices, Muslim youth, women, intellectuals, and professionals mix two cultural codes and accustom it to their needs and the public they inhabit. In Germany, young Muslim girls of Turkish origin who have adopted Islamic veiling with a touch of fashion speak about their distinction as well as empowerment in German public spaces (in schools, for

example). For neo-Muslim girls, as Sigrid Nökel has shown, dress is one of the means to allow the working and presentation of an autonomous self. Neo-Muslim girls have thus altered the image of the uneducated, male-bound, male-dominated women of the first generation (Nökel in Göle and Amman, forthcoming). They adopt voluntarily the stigma symbol of Islam, the veiling through which they express their authentic self, but they also use modern techniques of autonomous self-presentation, such as fashion but also German language and education, in their public appearance. Affirmation of religious authenticity and presentation of an autonomous self certainly create unresolved inner tensions but also provoke conflicts and negotiations with different publics that range from German public schools to Muslim local spaces where the perceptions of these neo-Muslim girls differ but also disturb.

The case of a woman deputy wearing a headscarf in the Turkish parliament is also representative of this newly individualized Muslim profile. A 31-year-old Muslim woman, elected as an Istanbul deputy from a pro-Islamic party (Fazilet Partisi) during the elections of April 1999, was going to become the first “covered” women in the republican history of Turkey. But she was forced out of the seat by republican deputies and secular public opinion (Göle, 2002). The trajectory of the Muslim woman deputy follows a social dynamic similar to that of Islamic female students who have sought the right to attend schools and university classes wearing headscarves since the beginning of the 1980s (Göle, 1996). Access to higher education, the daily experience of urban city life, and the use of political idiom and action expose new female Islamic actors to modernity; this exposure is problematic for both secular actors and religious ones. The female deputy had access to higher education, became a computer engineer, trained at the University of Texas (the headscarf was banned in Turkish universities), lived in the United States, had two children, divorced her Jordanian-American husband, returned to Turkey and became a member of a pro-Islamic party. She had access therefore to powerful symbols of modernity and was simultaneously engaged in Islamic politics. Living in the United States (not

in Saudi Arabia), speaking English fluently, using new technologies, fashioning a public image (light-colored headscarf and frameless eyeglasses)—these are all distinct cultural symbols in a non-Western context of modernity. And Islamists are not insensitive to acquiring such cultural capital. In fact, although they are in an oppositional political struggle with the modern secularists, they often mirror them and search for public representatives who speak foreign languages and belong to the professional and intellectual elite. The female deputy's trajectory also distinguishes her from other Muslim women and brings her socially closer to the Western-oriented, secular elites of Turkey.

The figure of the stranger, in a Simmelian approach, represents the ambivalent relation of proximity and distance, identity and difference, through which a group reproduces social life and structures hierarchically social space (Tabboni, 1997: 239-40). Instead of giving up the attributes of "undesired difference," Muslim actors voluntarily adopt stigma symbols; expose their embodied difference (through dress codes, modes of address, eating habits) and claim public visibility (in schools, universities, workplaces, parliament). They disturb because they represent ambivalence, being both "Muslim" and "modern" without wanting to give up one for the other. One can almost twist the argument and say that they are neither Muslim nor modern. The ambiguity of signs disturbs both the traditional Muslim and the secular modernist social groups.

This is more than a question of abstract identity. It takes place in the public sphere and involves a face-to-face relationship, which means that difference is marked on the body; it is an embodied difference, a stigma, one that is visible to others. Islamic visibility (and not solely identity) creates such a disturbance because it is both inscribed in bodies and spaces, reminding a religious regime of self and of a gendered grammar for private and public frontiers.

Public spheres undergo changes. We cannot speak therefore of the public sphere as a pre-established, immutable arena. The

inclusion of new social groups requires a redefinition of that sphere's frontiers and normative values. Newcomers reveal the limits of the public sphere as it is constituted and imagined by society and its legislators at a given time. The "headscarf debate" in France for instance, provoked a larger public debate on the school system as well as on French secularism, namely *laïcité*, which is considered to be a French exception. The historical heritage of *laïcité* and the principle of neutrality in the public school system are remembered by the protagonists who argued for banning all religious signs. However, the government's decision to establish a French Council for the Muslim Religion has already produced a change in relations between the French state and Islam.⁴ An Islamic religious organization means public recognition of the Islamic presence in France and therefore political acknowledgement of Islam as something independent of the problem of immigration. It also means that a space has been created for religion in public; a space furthermore cleared by means of a state initiative. The secular conceptions and frontiers of the French public sphere are a subject of public controversy and are undergoing a radical change with respect to the problems of integrating Muslim immigrants.

The Islamic presence in public challenges the strict separations between private religion and public secularism. The religion is carried into public life, a process through which the profane and sacred realms are intermingled. The regulation of public space becomes controversial: schools, universities, workplaces, and parliament become sites in which secularism and pluralism are discussed. It is through performative micropractices, through daily gestures and the claims of Islamic actors, that a space becomes a "public" space occupied by different social groups, invested with different normative frameworks and consequently negotiated as to its definitions. Public gardens, cemeteries, and beaches undergo a similar change when Islamists invest them with and claim for them religious rules in conformity with the Islamic religion.

To conclude, one can argue for more inclusionary politics with regard to the claims of the public visibility of Islam. After all,

democracy is the art of bringing into participation the excluded, unprivileged social groups in society by means of political avenues and social opportunities. Furthermore, the politics of containment of the Islamic public presence, even though the reasons might be justifiable from some of the feminist secularist or nationalist points of view, leads to the imposition of rigid boundaries that in turn undermine the democratic principles of equal access and openness of the Western public spheres. Yet the answer in terms of inclusion-exclusion is not that simple. Because what is at stake is the conflict over the definitions of the public sphere.

Islamic practices in public draw new gendered boundaries between the intimate and the public space. Islamic politics is an attempt to bring about the moral control of the public sphere. And the modern feature of openness—the original meaning of public sphere in German, *öffentlichkeit*, or more precisely anonymous sociability, “stranger sociability”—is not a value embraced by the Islamic public. The Islamic public sphere values intimacy (Ammann, forthcoming) over openness, and it tries to draw new boundaries that define intimacy and socialization, especially between the two sexes. Stranger sociability is considered to be the greatest challenge to Muslims in modern public life because it undermines the communitarian control of desire and promiscuity between the sexes. By veiling and segregating the sexes, Islamist politics maintains the boundaries between licit and illicit, intimates and strangers.

Hence, Islam is about boundary maintenance, drawing spaces of intimacy in the public. Islamist actors carve out a space of their own, regulated and codified in conformity with the Islamic way of life. So the question is, do contexts of social interaction or “mixed contacts”—that is, proximity in the physical sense of sharing same spaces, be it university classes, workplaces, urban life, parliament—require also referring and living according to a common set of normative rules? Didactic democracy in civilizing and disciplining its citizens was one of the main features of Western publicness. In today’s context of cultural pluralism and performative democracy, a more dialogical relation might be a gateway

for defining a new civility in the public, drawing both from religious and liberal criticisms. A notion of civility—in counterdistinction to the clashes of civilization that are defined at the macrolevel—brings forth the importance of microlevel practices: daily gestures, face-to-face interaction, and shared experience. After all a form of civility requires both a regime of discipline between the private self and the public presentation as well as grammar for social interaction with strangers.

Notes

¹Similarly, the peasant in India was not considered a political subject. Subaltern studies reintroduced the study of the peasant as citizen in contemporary political modernity. See Chakrabarty (2002a).

²I use the headscarf and veiling interchangeably to refer to Islamic dress. The headscarf falls short of conveying the reference to Islam and is limited to hair covering. Veiling reminds others of the Islamic values of modesty and refers as well to body covering. However, it does not take into consideration the multiplicity of interpretations of modern forms of Islamic dress.

³In Bourdieu's analysis (1989), there are different forms of capital, conferring strength, power, and profit on their holder. Among these social powers, he distinguishes "economic capital" (convertible into money), "cultural capital" (conferred by educational credentials and institutions), "social capital", (social connections and group membership), and "symbolic capital" (legitimated capital as a source of prestige).

⁴Minister of Interior Nicolas Sarkozy succeeded in persuading rival Muslim organizations to create a new French Council for the Muslim Religion whose members were first elected on April 13, 2003. The organization of the Jewish consistory that was set up under Napoleon in 1806 is given as an example of the French state regulating its relations with other main religions. The council represents the first unified body authorized to speak on behalf of the 5-million-strong Muslim community. The aim is to develop a homegrown and liberal Islam.

⁵I borrow from Dipesh Chakrabarty (2002b) the distinction between didactic and performative democracy.

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