THE HIJAB (MUSLIM HEADSCARF) IN SCHOOLS OF IRAN: A REFLECTION ON THE RELATION BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPHERES

Ehsaneh Bagheri Noaparast [1]

[1] Groupe Sociétés, Religions, Laïcités (GSRL),
Ecole Pratique Des Hautes Etudes (EPHE), Sorbonne, Paris
ehsaneh.bagheri@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The present research studies the hijab in Iranian schools by considering the overall framework of public/private spheres and democracy/religion. Iran is one of the considerable cases in which the relation between public and private spheres or between democracy and religion has been under reconsideration. Religion and religious beliefs play an important role in social communications, which includes educational institutions as well. The general goal of this study is to investigate the social role of religion in Iran with emphasis on school, as a social institution and its particular aim is to study girls' wearing of the hijab in Iranian high schools. The hijab is considered as a dependent variable and two kinds of public and private schools are considered as independent variables. The sample consists of 160 sixteen and seventeen year old high school girls in the second and third year of high school in the 2005-2006 academic years. In order to collect the data a questionnaire was prepared and used by the researcher. The statistical methods such as frequency, mean, standard deviation and χ2 are used for analysis of the results. Comparison of the results obtained from public and private schools shows a significant difference. The private school students are freer in restrictions related to the hijab. In other words, they show more tendencies for incomplete sorts of the hijab or rejection of its complete form. But the results from both types of schools show that most of the students are disagreed with involvement of official laws in making the hijab obligatory. While most of them are against forced hijab, however, they support certain limitations (rather than unconditional freedom) in coverage. In total, while most of the students have tendencies towards wearing the hijab, both believers and non-believers of the hijab reject imposition or prohibition of the wearing of the hijab and consider it as a personal choice. In summary, it can be concluded that the hijab is neither seen as a phenomenon in the public sphere and in accordance with law, nor it is seen as a phenomenon related to the private sphere. In other words, the study of the phenomenon of the hijab in Iran shows that the boundary of public and private spheres is not decisive and clear in this case.

Keywords: *Hijab; Public Sphere; Private Sphere; Iran; Secularism; Laïcité*

Introduction

Nowadays, religion in public schools has become globally in centre of attention as an important issue that includes specifically religious education and dress. In a more abstract level, this issue is relevant to the affaires that are more fundamental in contemporary societies. Issues such as secularism and laïcité that have

had an important place in contemporary societies and have insisted on separation of religious and state affairs or private and public affairs, now in direction to this problem are again in centre of attention and somehow are challenged.

Iran is one of the most significant cases in which the relation between public and private spheres or democracy and religion is under consideration, because in this country, the government has taken a religious form and the boundary of public and private spheres has been reviewed in a way that has been regarded in contemporary societies.

The present research studies the hijab in Iranian high schools by focusing on the general framework of public/private spheres and democracy/religion.

The problematic of the study and its importance

Before entering into the discussion, it is necessary to explain the main concepts that are in the background of the present research. These concepts are secularism, laïcité, public sphere and private sphere.

Secularism refers to religion's limitation in official and cultural sections of the society. English speakers also use laïcité as a word synonymous with secularism, although certain scholars distinguish between these two concepts. In this distinction, laïcité often refers to limitation or elimination of political power of religious officials and institutions. On the other hand, secularism implies more on the limitation of the cultural role of religion. Hence, a country can be laic, but not secular, like Turkey in which Islam is not accepted as the official religion, but the social and the cultural role of Islam is remarkable in this country. Also, a country can be secular and not laic, like Denmark in which Lutheranism is the official religion, although the social and cultural impact of religion on civil society is limited in this country (Willaime 2005).

The distinction between public and private spheres, as legacy of the Enlightenment, refers to two categories of human life. Public sphere is related to social affairs such as politics and economics in which it is expected from human wisdom to manage these affairs. On the other hand, the private sphere refers to individual or collective decisions such as choosing a religion or religious practices. Restricting religion to the private sphere was the product of the Enlightenment in which two categories of public and private were separated from each other. Religion was allocated to the private domain, while social affairs were considered to belong to the public sphere. This division has influenced education, particularly religious education. It is interesting to note that recently a new phenomenon has appeared which is called "private public spheres" (Schmidt, Lampert, & Schwinge 2010; Schulz 2011). While this term seems contradictory, it is meant to describe communities of friends such as Facebook which are private and at the same time public.

During the past two decades, the role of religion in public schools has been taken into consideration, especially in Europe. This issue refers to religious education on the one hand, and to the expression of religion by dress code on the other.This includes religious symbolism (the use of the cross, Jewish kippah/yarmulke, Sikhs' turban and the Islamic hijab), public funding for sectarian schools and collective prayers (religious ceremonies and prayer in schools).

The mentioned arguments have been discussed in the 1980s and 1990s in most of the Western European countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Germany. Even in some Muslim countries such as Indonesia, Egypt and Turkey these matters have been discussed. As some scholars have declared, religious education is in a more general framework. This framework refers to the relation between democracy (especially the role of modern state in it) and religion or religious beliefs. Hence, the proponents and opponents of revealing of religious symbols in public schools declare their views based on the foundations of democracy such as secularism and republicanism.

Also, in a more general view, by distinction between public and private spheres of life, discussions on religious education have occurred, which is the legacy of the Enlightenment. For instance, by defending secularism's position, Hirst (1974) stated that in public schools run by the government, religious education cannot provide a particular belief in pupils in accordance to parents' desires. According to him, the only way of dealing with religion in schools is to transfer knowledge about religions as social facts and not providing the basis of belief to a specified religion in the pupil.

But as certain thinkers and scholars have pointed out, a clear distinction between public and private spheres has been weakened in recent decades. Willaime (ibid.) argued that from the past, sociologists have shown attention mostly to the confrontation between modernity and religion. But he believed that the relation between modernity and religion has become much more complex in order to understand their relation with a mere imagination of separation between them. He referred to Japan and the United States as two countries that have adopted modernity with religion. In Japan we are witnessing an extraordinary tendency toward

religious affairs, so that each year more than 80 million Japanese go to temples to celebrate Japanese New Year and practice religious rituals. Also, in the United States, 40% of people are believers and have faith. Willaime also noted that religion plays an important role in the organization of social and political movements. According to him, as the concept of secularism was associated with the decline of religion in the 1960s, return to religiosity has become the centre of attention from the 1990s.

Another example of thinkers is Habermas (2003) who argued that the private place considered for religion in modern societies is changing. By pointing to the role of church in effective disagreement with abortion, he stated that the church has shown an influential social role and its position cannot be limited to the private sphere.

Huntington (2004) also believed that although the Constitution of the United States refers clearly to secularism, the Declaration of Independence and many of the recent tendencies in America's culture and society show that religion has a significant role in political and social decisions.

Attention to the mentioned viewpoints shows that the boundary between private and public sphere undergoes severe fluctuation and flexibility. In accordance with the discussion of the present article, it is appropriate here to refer to the recent social debate in France concerning Muslim girls' hijab. Diversity of opinions raised among French officials and thinkers indicates that the boundary between public and private sphere has become blurred. This point will be explained next.

In France, the hijab in school, and in the United Kingdom, the state fund for Muslim schools was raised as an important debate (Liederman 2000). The main source of these debates is secularism and laïcité that has been accepted historically in these countries. In France, the principle of laïcité is considered as a fundamental principle in the French Republic and the word laïcité refers to religious neutrality in public sphere, particularly in education (Boussinesq, Brisacier, & Poulat 1994). In general, it has shaped the neutrality of the state in France, in which a distinction is made between the state on the one hand and religious affairs on the other hand (Joppke 2007, cited in Sinclair 2012). Laïcité was mentioned in the second article of the constitution law of 1958 and noted that France is an inseparable laic, democratic and social republic. Laïcité is shown in the main slogan of the French Revolution (liberty, equality and fraternity). This slogan, especially the last two, shows that there should be no distinction, which includes religious differences among people too. Transformation of laïcité in France refers to the harsh confrontation between "anti-clerics" and "republicans" on the one hand, and the Catholic Church and Catholics in the 1800s on the other. This conflict, which led to the victory of the latter, was considered as "contrast between two Frances".

In the United Kingdom, unlike France, a special relation exists between state and church, but this does not mean that Britain's church is a part of the government. In fact, there is no special or economic benefit for the church in comparison to other institutions (Davie 1994).

There is a common strategy in France and the United Kingdom in integrating minorities, but there is a difference between them in defining this aim. In the United Kingdom the main model is communitarianism, which allows the differences among communities within the nation. But in France, the model of integration is used. This means that diverse existing communities in society should become integrated with the French nation in accordance with the ideal model of nation-state (Weil & Crowley 1994).

On the whole, in both countries certain debates concerning the issue of the hijab and state funding of Islamic schools have taken place. As noted above, in France, this issue derives from laïcité that supports religious neutrality in the public sphere. Laïcité is one of the essential elements of the republic that was accepted legally by the law of 1905 in which the power of the Catholic Church and the government was separated from each other. Moreover, since 1882, according to the rules known as laic laws, a secular nature is generally accepted in French schools. The most important point is that the idea of "nation" of the French Republic considers the central place for education in the direction of integrity of the nation. This means that it is expected from secular education to create a unified nation with equal and similar citizens. In this process, it is expected that public schools play a vital role in assimilating and attracting specific groups in the French nation.

The issue of the hijab or the Islamic hijab became under consideration as the main topic of the discussions in October 1989, when Ernest Chénière, a director of a junior high school in Creil (located in the suburbs of Paris), did not allow three Moroccan girls to enter the school. His reason for this was that wearing the hijab violates the Republic's principle. It was after this event that the issue of the hijab became a hot debate among different groups.

On the one hand, by supporting strict importance and superiority of French republicanism over any kind of multiculturalism, certain explained that the hijab is banned according to the republic principle of laïcité and the need for consistency. For example, in 1994, François Bayrou, Minister of Education of the right-wing of

that time, issued a manifesto according to which visible religious symbols were banned in schools (Freedman 2004).

On the other hand, intellectuals such as Alain Touraine, who advocated the idea of open secularism, referred to "secular fanaticism" that certain girls are banned from entering the school because they had the hijab. Touraine stated that there is a kind of xenophobia in banning the hijab. His emphasis is on the issues of integration of newcomers into France that do not have fusion with French culture (Le Nouvel Observateur 1989).

It is mentioned in the Stasi Report that the banning of the hijab in school is an act of protection for those girls who are victims of family and neighbourhood pressure in the suburbs (The Stasi Commission Report 2003, cited in Selby 2011). Finally, the Stasi Commission appointed by President Chirac as responsible for the issue of secularism and France supported the priority of the idea of integration and assimilation over the right of being different. However, certain members in the government supported a sort of a broad interpretation in secularism. Nicolas Sarkozy, Minister for the Interior at that time, pointed out that the Act of 1905 declares "the Republic guarantees the free exercise of all religions without distinguishing one over others". Although he emphasized on banning of the hijab as a means of control, but at the same time, he declared, "having the hijab is a personal decision that belongs to the private sphere" (Coroller & Licht 2003).

Certain researchers such as Roman (1999) and Freedman (2004) have suggested that the main root of failing of integration among the people of France must be searched in social and economic inequalities among minorities, not in a phenomenon such as the hijab. By following Roman, Freedman (2004) stated that: "…the main challenge facing the Republican school system is not a few Muslim girls wearing headscarves, but rather that the education system seems to be massively failing children from poorer areas, most of them children of immigrant origin (Roman 1999). It might be argued that it is these economic and social inequalities in education that are the real barriers to integration in French schools." (p. 22).

It is interesting to point out that certain individuals like Liederman (2000) have assumed that a new alternative will appear for integrating minorities in the whole society that will be different from the French model of absorption and assimilation or the English model of communitarianism.

Iran is one of the significant cases in which the relation between public and private sphere or between democracy and religion is the centre of attention. In parallel with the "Islamic Republic" that the government uses, it can be inferred that in Iran, religion and democracy are compatible with each other, even if the idea of secularism is seen as a challenging part of democracy. Thus, it is expected that religion and religious beliefs play a major role in social interactions that include educational institutions.

By considering the overall framework of public/private sphere and democracy/religion, the present research tries to develop a study about the hijab in Iranian schools.

Aim of the Study

The general aim of this study is to investigate the social importance of religion in Iran with emphasis on school as a social institution. In other words, it is intended to investigate the roles that religion (Islam) plays in social life via the institution of school. This purpose is related to general points of the relation between public and private spheres of life, and the relation between religion and democracy in Iran.

A particular aim of this research is the study of girls' dress (the hijab) in Iranian schools. To achieve this goal, it is needed to get some information on students' tendencies about the hijab concept and its social roles. In fact, there are these tendencies that provide support or disagreement for the importance of religion. Therefore, it is necessary to identify the sorts of students' tendencies about the position of the hijab in school and social life.

Questions of the Study

This study aimed to address the following research questions:

- Are there any differences in the view of public and private school students concerning the hijab?

- What is the opinion of the public and private school students about peer influence on the hijab?

- What is the opinion of the public and private school students about the influence of the media on the hijab?

- What do students think about the determination of boundaries of the hijab by law?

- How much do these students like to live in a country that the hijab is banned or forced in its schools?

Hypotheses of the research

The hypotheses of the present research are:

- There is a relation between pupils' attitude about the hijab and schools being public or private.

- There is a relation between schools being public or private and the amount of pupils' discussions with their friends about the hijab.

- There is a relation between schools being public and private and the amount of media influence students' hijab.

- There is a relation between schools being public or private and the determination of boundaries of the hijab by law.

- There is a relation between schools being private or public and the option of living in a country that the hijab is banned or forced in its schools.

Methodology of the research

In order to collect the data, a questionnaire was developed consisting of 32 questions (15 open-ended questions and 17 closed-ended questions). It should be mentioned that only 15 questions of the questionnaire are used in this paper. Concerning the open-ended questions, general categories were extracted and they were classified in accordance with the answers. Concerning the close-ended questions, a five-point Likert scale was used.

In the present article, in order to study the hijab and its relation with various social factors, the hijab is considered as a dependent variable, while private and public schools are considered as independent variables.

Statistical population and sampling methods

Statistical population of the present study consisted of female high school students (public and private) in Tehran. The accessible population belongs to the areas 3 and 4 of Tehran's ministry of education in academic year of 2005-2006. The method used is cluster sampling and the sampling consists of 160 female students in the second and third grades. The private school belongs to the third district of Tehran and the public school belongs to the fourth. From the total of 160 students, 153 of them have completed the questionnaires, of which 73 students (47.8%) belong to the public school, and 80 (52.2%) belong to the private school. For analysing the results, reliable statistical methods are used. These methods include frequency, mean, standard deviation, and χ^2.

Analysis of the findings

The results of this study are as follows:

Table 1

Choice of wearing

			Public School	Private School
	Complete hijab	f	32	19
		%	46.4	23.8
What kind of dress will you choose to wear if you don't	**Without hijab**	f	8	29
		%	11.6	36.3

have any restrictions for choosing your dress and the hijab in the society?	Suitable to my personality, dignity of family and the society	f	10	15
		%	14.5	18.8
	Neither covered nor without hijab	f	9	8
		%	13	10
	Simple	f	5	2
		%	7.2	2.5
	Comfortable	F	5	7
		%	7.2	8.8
χ^2= 17.19		$p \leq 0.004$		Df = 5

As seen in Table 1, comparison of the results obtained from public and private schools shows a significant difference. The students of the private school are freer in restrictions related to the hijab. In other words, they show more tendency for incomplete sorts of the hijab or rejection of its complete form. Since the families of these students are more modern in their lifestyle, it can be concluded that the more the lifestyle is westernized, the more wearing of the hijab is decreased. Without considering the comparison between two types of schools, most pupils have a tendency to wearing of the hijab, but at the same time, supporters of the hijab and those who are its critics reject its institutionalization, and consider it as a personal decision.

Table 2

Discussion and conversation about the hijab with friends

			Yes	No	To some extent
Do you talk to your friends about the hijab?	Public School	f	38	19	15
		%	52.8	26.4	20.8
	Private School	f	44	26	11
		%	54.3	32.1	13.6
	χ^2= 1.61		$p \leq 0.44$		Df= 2

Table 2 shows the amount of pupils' discussion with their friends about the hijab. More than half of them have stated that they talk with their friends about it. In fact, the results show that the issue of the hijab is of great importance in peer group discussions and there is a little difference between the answers of public and private school students in this field. This topic is not discussable or to some extent discussable among less than half of the pupils in public and private schools. Thus, the results show that the hijab is a controversial topic among the students.

Table 3

Content of pupils' conversation with their peer group about the hijab

		Public School	Private School
Guiding of friends	f	1	2
	%	2.1	3.6
Sort of wearing	f	20	16
	%	41.7	29.1
Neutral	f	7	9
	%	14.6	16.4
Obligation and discrimination	f	10	17
	%	20.8	30.9
Defending the hijab	f	8	7
	%	16.7	12.7
The debate over hijab is useless.	f	2	4
	%	4.2	7.3
$\chi^2 = 3.11$	$p \leq 0.68$		Df= 5

The content of pupils' discussion shows that the type of the hijab (complete or intermediate) and its rejection of being obligatory are the most important issues in their discussion. Talking about the sort of the hijab is higher among students of the public school than in private school students, while talking about obligation and discrimination is higher among private school students. The results also show that only a small percentage of students believe that the debate over the hijab is useless. In other words, most of them find the debate about the hijab useful.

Table 4

Influence of the media (TV, Internet and satellite) on the hijab

			To some extent	Not at all	So much
Does the media (TV, Internet and satellite) have any influence on your hijab?	Public School	f	9	37	25
		%	12.7	52.1	35.2
	Private School	f	19	46	15
		%	23.8	57.5	18.8
	$\chi^2 = 6.53$		$p \leq 0.03$	Df= 2	

The results displayed in Table 4 show that, in this context, the influence of the media is on less than 50% of students, and more than 50% of them are not influenced by it. In comparison to the private school students, the amount of agreement of public school students with this issue is significantly higher. Also, private school students have pronounced more than public school students that the media does not influence them on their kind of hijab.

Table 5

Sort of influence of the media on pupils' hijab

		Public School	Private School
Foreign media and national media have contradiction with each other which will cause confusion	*f*	2	5
	%	5.1	12.2
It depends on the person and her family	*f*	7	5
	%	17.9	12.2
Having negative influences	*f*	1	3
	%	2.6	7.3
Following the fashion	*f*	8	11
	%	20.5	26.8
Sometimes in positive direction and sometimes in negative direction	*f*	2	4
	%	5.1	9.8
It does not have any influence	*f*	17	12
	%	43.6	29.3
	χ^2= 4.51	$p \leq 0.47$	Df= 5

In case of impact of the media on the hijab, as the results show, public school students more than private school students believe that the media does not affect them. Also, 23% of the students are influenced by the fashion and 21% of them believe that foreign media and national media have contradictory effects on the hijab, which makes people confused.

Table 6

Determination of boundaries of the hijab by law

			(Completely agreed) Agreed	Neutral	(Completely disagreed) Disagreed
What do you think about the determination of boundaries of the hijab by law?	**Public School**	ƒ	38	9	25
		%	52.8	12.5	34.7
	Private School	ƒ	16	11	54
		%	19.8	13.6	66.7
	χ^2= 19.34	$p \leq 0.000$		Df= 2	

As can be seen in Table 6, the answers show that there is a significant difference between the answers of the pupils of public and private schools in agreement or disagreement with determination of boundaries of the hijab by law. A high percentage of private school students, compared to public school students, are against interfering of the official law in enforcing the hijab. Nevertheless, those who agree with this have a high percentage in the public school. Thus, the results show that private school students believe more than public school students that the determination of the hijab issue is not an issue to be recognized by law.

Table 7

Amount of pupils' interest in going to a school in a country that the hijab is not obligatory

			Negative and very negative	Neutral	Positive and very positive
How much do you like to live in a country that the hijab is not obligatory in its schools?	**Public School**	ƒ	16	21	35
		%	22.2	29.2	48.6
	Private School	ƒ	7	16	58
		%	8.6	19.8	71.6
	χ^2= 9.38	$p \leq 0.009$	Df = 2		

Results of Table 7 show that a high percentage of pupils prefer to live in a country where the hijab is not mandatory. In other words, official obligatory on wearing the hijab is not accepted. The responses indicate that there is a significant difference between the responses of the students in public and private schools; this means that students of the private school more than public school students have a positive view of the school where the hijab is not compulsory and the percentage of pupils who have a negative view of it is higher than in the public school.

The findings show that the hijab should be considered as a personal decision, not as a systematic or compulsory support. It is because of this that pupils have a remarkable tendency not to live in a country where the hijab is mandatory.

Table 8

Amount of pupils' interest in living in a country that having the hijab is prohibited

			(Very much) and much	Neutral	(Not at all) and a little
How much do you like to live in a country that the hijab is prohibited in its schools?	**Public School**	f	14	14	44
		%	19.4	19.4	61.1
	Private School	f	26	25	30
		%	32.1	30.9	37
	$\chi^2 = 8.85$		$p \leq 0.01$		Df = 2

There is a significant difference between the answers of public and private school students regarding living in a country where the hijab is prohibited in schools. The results show that a higher percentage of the private school students desire to live in a country that has banned the hijab in schools percentage among pupils of the public school; in other words, the percentage of students in private school who tend to live in such a country is higher than public school students.

Table 9

Limitation in choosing dress in the society

			Yes	No	To some extent
Should there be any limits in choosing dress in the society?	**Public School**	f	17	32	19
		%	25	47.1	27.9
	Private School	f	15	47	15
		%	19.5	61	19.5
	$\chi^2 = 2.89$		$p \leq 0.23$		Df = 2

Results of Table 9 show that a high percentage of students disagreed with the existence of limits in choosing dress in society. Also, the answers of private school students shows a significant difference in comparison with the public school students. However, students who agree or somewhat agree with the point that there are restrictions on the choice of clothes in public represents a significant percentage in both types of schools. The point that exists in this context is that while most of the students are opposed against the obligation of the hijab, at the same time they support some limitations in coverage (rather than unconditional freedom).

Table 10

Accepted model for pupils in case of the hijab

			Public School	Private School
If you were one of the decision makers of the country, what kind of model would you present for the hijab?	**Run a tight form of the hijab**	*f*	11	5
		%	17.2	6.4
	Freedom to choose but in a reasonable way	*f*	37	37
		%	57.8	47.4
	Education and internalizing the hijab	*f*	2	2
		%	3.1	2.6
	Complete freedom	*f*	14	31
		%	21.9	39.7
	Clothing that does not draw attention	*f*	0	3
		%	0	3.8
	$\chi^2 = 10.39$	$p \leq 0.03$		Df = 4

As seen in Table 10, 52% of the students want freedom and choice with some limitations, 31% want complete and unrestricted freedom and 12% are in favor of official obligation. It is again considerable that about the limitations on coverage, 45% of the pupils are in favor of restrictions or partial restrictions, while 29% favored complete freedom in the type of dressing. Also, there is a significant difference between the responses of students in public and private schools.

Overall, while most students have tendencies toward wearing the hijab, both students who believe in wearing the hijab and those who do not believe in it, reject imposing or banning it and consider it as a personal choice.

On the whole, by hypothesizing that there is a difference between the views of female pupils of public and private schools concerning the hijab, this paper studies a sample of female pupils of Tehran. Findings of this research show that concerning the restrictions relating to the hijab, public school students thinking is more restricted. In other words, in comparison to private school students, they have more tendencies toward more covered wearing types.

On the other hand, the results of both types of the schools show that involvement of official laws in obligation of wearing the hijab is not accepted by most of the students in both types of schools. In fact, they are somehow disagreed with obligation of the hijab, but on the other hand, they are agreed with certain restrictions on coverage.

Therefore, it can be said that the majority of female pupils regard the hijab as a personal affair and opposed or prohibiting it on individuals is rejected from their point of view. In other words, the results of this study indicate that there is not a strict and definitive boundary between public and private spheres in field of the phenomenon of the hijab. This means that on the one hand, the hijab is not seen as a phenomenon in public sphere and on the other hand, it is not seen as a phenomenon related to the private sphere.

Conclusion

In relation to the theoretical basis of this research, it seems necessary to make the results and the discussion in a general theoretical framework regarding the compatibility of religion and democracy in Iran. Some thinkers believe that the concept of "Islamic republic" is a paradoxical concept, because the republican element is not compatible with Islam (Jahanbeglu 2004).

It is true that concepts such as republic, democracy and civil society are not necessarily religious concepts. They sometimes have had non-religious or even anti-religious voices. In most of the Western countries, there is a conflict between the concepts of the public sphere and the religious concepts, but it differs from place to place. We can refer here to the speech of French sociologist, Alexis de Tocqueville. In a comparison between France and America, he said that religion and freedom are in conflict with France, while the Americans have become able to combine these two concepts (Quoted in Huntington 2004, p. 85).

Huntington noted that the fathers of the American state are assigned a religious mission, like Lincoln, who considered the Americans as "God's chosen nation", having a special mission to do. In this direction, Huntington indicated that the founders have formulated the meaning of this mission (ibid., 104).

However, he asserted that the idea of "separation of church and state" does not appear in the U.S. Constitution. These concepts are more employed in Europe, while in America, the concept of "sects" and "civil authority" is used more, and one can find among these a fragile line. Therefore, from his point of view, in America, the separation of religion from the state is not the sign of conflict between republic and religion, but, on the contrary, it contributed to the fortification of religion. Huntington stated that the thinkers of the U.S. Constitution prohibit the formation of a national church, so that they can limit the power of the state and sustain and enrich religion (ibid., 84-85).

In addition, some contradictions were identified in the U.S. Constitution, but later they were resolved. For example, there is a sentence in the "Declaration of Independence", which one understands that until now it indicates the equality of all human beings and its influence is evident in the U.S. Constitution. But it is interesting to note that this phrase has been interpreted in the past by the highest authority of the Supreme Court as applying on white people. So the word "men" did not include black people or women. During much of the nineteenth century, the U.S. Constitution has been interpreted by the Supreme Court in order to justify and legalize slavery.

In 1856, the year that is considered by some researchers (Gilreach 2003) as the darkest part of the history of America's Constitution, the Supreme Court declared that blacks were not entitled to citizenship, and were deprived of liberty, freedom of expression and the right of education. The change took place in favour of blacks, and gave birth to Articles 13, 14, and 15 of the Constitution, which prohibits slavery, guarantees the rights of blacks, especially the right to vote. In 1874, a law was created, indicating that women do not have the right to vote, but in 1971, this law was changed (ibid.).

This proves that the Constitution can have multiple faces; thus, it contains the seeds of conflict, but also the solution in itself. Concerning some concepts such as "religious civil society" in the Middle East, some researchers (e.g., Hann & Dunn 1996) have argued that the supposed conflict between the concepts of civil society and religion are simply historical and one can expect that new systems propose a solution to the conflict. In such systems, two concepts of republic and religion will be proposed in a different way from the past that wanted to put them radically against each other. In order to provide such conceptual synthesis, there will be need for a cultural dynamism and ideally it could lead to a logical synthesis, far from any contradiction.

This is also the case in Iran. The concepts of democracy and Islam might seem to be contradictory or they might not. Different systems should be considered. To put these plans into action, one must be careful about concepts such as "religious democracy" that are based on new conceptual ideas that need to be established by conditions, social and universal situations.

Thus, it seems that both perspectives should be changed in Iran. One point of view belongs to pure secularists who believe that concepts such as "Islamic democracy" are still contradictory. This approach seeks containment of religion to the private sphere on the one hand, and considers the public sphere as absolutely secular on the other. The deep historical and cultural interaction between Islam and social affairs in Iran prohibits a strict secularism to be effective.

On the other hand, the second view advocates a pure traditional Islam. Sometimes this attitude rejoins the first one by stating that concepts such as "Islamic democracy" are contradictory, but the difference is that in this case, Islam is preferred to democracy.

Some other advocates of this point of view claim that concepts such as "Islamic democracy" are originally Islamic and free of contradiction. Instead, it should be remembered that such concepts have been developed in an Islamic atmosphere, in order to be able to adapt to the modern world. In other words, there will always be a need for checking the systems such as "Islamic democracy" in order to discover conflicting aspects and to provide logical interpretations.

Democracy and Islam can be compatible in a certain interpretation. According to this kind of interpretation, democracy is not associated with a hard secularism. In addition, the distinction between the blurred sides of public and private spheres and religion may have a role in the daily lives of citizens.

On the other hand, this interpretation requires an Islam that is not considered in a traditional way, in which it does not pay attention to new ways of living. In other words, Islam should be understood in a way that one can reform certain aspects.

In Iran, some have advocated a compromise between pure secularism and pure Islamism. For example, Friedman (*New York Times* foreign affairs columnist) (2002) noted that the new generation in Iran is moving towards an intermediate attitude. He declares that Iranians are now inclined to democracy instead of theocracy that existed before.

Friedman shows that the population of Iran is composed of three generations. The first generation consists of those who participated in the Islamic revolution. The second generation consists of those who experienced the war between Iran and Iraq. And the third generation consists of the children of the second generation, who are between 15 and 30 years old. The third generation represents about 18 million people. They have access to the Internet and satellite dishes, and have information about the West and the world. Their characteristic is to desire a good and comfortable life, and at the same time, they are religious. This does not mean that they are fundamentalists, but they have Islamic tendencies. Friedman maintains that in this situation, the religious authority has lost its power over the people and particularly over the third generation. If they use Islam to govern the lives of Iranians, the people will reject their tutelage.

Friedman declares that Iranian democrats have also discovered during the reign of the Shah that Iranians keep their Islamic identity and if pure secularism is forced on them, they will reject it. He concludes on the need for a middle way that combines religion and secularism, and from his point of view, if this happens, Iran will be the first Muslim country that has made such a balance between democracy and faith.

In relation to the general results of this study in the context of compatibility between democracy and Islam, we can refer to the following points. On one hand, it is seen that most of the students have religious tendencies, which in case of this research is a tendency toward wearing the hijab in schools and during social activities.

On the other hand, they do not accept any form of official intervention in religious affairs, just as they reject any sort of obligation in the case of wearing the hijab, whether secular or Islamic. This means that they are looking for references to secularism as well as traditional Islam.

Students also show strong tendencies toward themes of modern life such as gender equality in social activities (voting, sport, etc.), and reject discrimination related to wearing hijab, although they tend to wear it. This also shows that they tend simultaneously to democracy and Islam, and do not adhere to the wishes of the radical secularists, or the instructions of the Islamists.

References

Boussinesq, J., Brisacier, M., & Poulat, E. (1994). *La laïcité française : mémento juridique* [French Laïcité : Legalhandbook]. Paris: Seuil.

Coroller, C., & Licht, D. (2003, February 21). On ne modifiera pas la loi de 1905 [We won't change the 1905 Law]. *Libération*.

Davie, G. (1994). *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without belonging*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Freedman, J. (2004). Secularism as a barrier to integration? The French dilemma. *International Migration*, 42(3), 5-27.

Friedman, L. (2002, June 16). Iran's third wave. *New York Times*.

Gilreach, S. D. (2003). The technicolor constitution: Popular constitutionalism, ethical norms, and legal pedagogy. *Texas Journal on Civil Liberties & Civil Rights*, 9, 1.

Habermas, J. (2003). *Secularism and religion*. A lecture held in Tehran University, Tehran, Iran.

Hann, C., & Dunn, E. (1996). *Civil Society: Challenging Western models*. London: Routledge.

Hirst, P. H. (1974). *Moral education in a secular society*. London: University of London Press.

Huntington, S. P. (2004). *Who are we? : America ́s great debate*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.

Jahanbeglu, R. (2004, August 13). Intellectualism: The search for truth [In Persian]. *Kheradnameh of Hamshahri Newspaper*.

Liederman, L. M. (2000). Pluralism in education: The display of Islamic affiliation in French and British schools.*Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, *11*(1), 105-117.

Pour une laïcité ouverte [For an open laïcité]. (1989, November 16). *Le Nouvel Observateur.*

Roman, J. (1999). La laïcité française à l'épreuve de la diversité [French laïcité proof againstdiversity]. In P. Dewitte (Ed.), *Immigration et intégration : l'état des savoirs* (pp. 377-384). Paris: La Découverte.

Schmidt, J., Lampert, C., & Schwinge, C. (2010). Nutzungspraktikenim Social Web – Impulse für die medienpädagogische Diskussion. In B. Herzig, D. Meister, H. Moser, H. Niesyto (Hrsg.), Jahrbuch Medienpädagogik 8 – Medienkompetenz und Web 2.0. Wiesbaden: VS VerlagfürSozialwissenschaften, S. 255-270.

Schulz, W. (2011). New public spheres and how to incorporate them into information law. Paper prepared for the 1st Berlin Symposium on Internet and Society October 26-28 2011. Alexander von Humboldt Institute fur Internet und Gesellschaft.

Selby, J. (2011). French secularism as a 'guarantor' of women's rights? Muslim women and gender politics in a Parisian banlieue, *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 12 (4), 441-462.

Sinclair, S. (2012). National identity and the politics of the 'headscarf debate' in Germany, *Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 13 (1), 19-39.

Weil, P., & Crowley, J. (1994). Integration in theory and practice: A comparison of France and Britain. *West European Politics*, 17 (2), 110-126.

Willaime, J. P. (2005). *Sociologie des Religions* [Sociology of religions] (3rd ed.). Paris: PUF.