

## Visual Theology: The Semiotic Language of Color in Islamic National Flags

Dr. Sarvenaz Safavi, Assist. Prof. Near East University (Yakin Dogu Universitesi), Cyprus

Email: sarvenaz.safavi@neu.edu.tr

### Abstract

*This study looks at how Islamic national flags use color as a political and theological tool in addition to symbolic embellishment. The article explores how contemporary nation-states use Islamic chromatic memory, especially the Pan-Islamic colors of green, white, black, and red to legitimize political authority, create national identity, and negotiate the relationship between religious symbolism and secular governance rather than listing what colors traditionally stand for. The study examines the flags of ten countries with a majority of Muslims using semiotic theory and visual theology to show how color functions as a double-coded system that simultaneously communicates religious continuity and contemporary sovereignty. The results illustrate the relationship between faith, power, and visual culture by showing how Islamic chromatic symbolism is dynamically and strategically reinterpreted within nationalist and state-building endeavors.*

**Keywords:** Semiotics of color; Islamic symbolism; National identity; Flag symbolism

**Introduction**

In visual theology, color operates as a theological metaphor, embodying divine presence, morality, and metaphysical truth. The fusion of theology and semiotics enables a more holistic understanding of how faith and aesthetics converge in national emblems. This article thus contributes to the growing interdisciplinary dialogue between visual studies, theology, and cultural semiotics. One of the most potent visual communication tools is color, which may express identities, feelings, and opinions without the use of words. Color serves as a sign system, a visual language that communities use to convey common values and meanings, according to semiotic theory. Color has a very strong symbolic meaning in the context of Islamic countries. The colors seen on national flags represent centuries of religious tradition, historical conflict, and cultural cohesion; they are more than just ornamental.

Islamic nations' flags present a distinctive fusion of national identity and religion. Deep ties to Islamic theology, history, and ideology are reflected in their colors and symbols, particularly the crescent and star. The use of the Pan-Arab colors; red, black, white, and green, indicates a common semiotic heritage that cuts across linguistic and political divides. The color green has historically been associated with Islam and is frequently connected to the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'anic vision of heaven. Red is frequently invoked in Islamic and nationalist discourse as a sign of sacrifice, while white conjures up images of purity and tranquilly. Traditionally associated with the Abbasid Caliphate, black has been associated with strength, endurance, and occasionally opposition. While these colors are often read today through an Islamic lens, their modern political consolidation can be traced to the 1916 Arab Revolt, where they functioned primarily as markers of Arab nationalism. Their later adoption by Islamic and Muslim-majority states reflects a process of historical layering, in which nationalist symbolism gradually acquired religious resonance

through collective memory and reuse. This study intends to reveal how Islamic nations use flag design to create and convey their national and spiritual identities by looking at these colors as indicators. The study shows through semiotic analysis that these colors represent a continuous narrative of belief, unity, and historical memory in addition to marking political sovereignty. In the end, the semiotics of color in Islamic flags shows how, in the contemporary Muslim world, visual symbolism serves as a link between national identity and religious devotion.

Although the majority of current research on Islamic color symbolism has been on determining the cultural or religious significance of certain colors, far less attention has been given to the ways in which these meanings are actively mobilized in contemporary political contexts. National flags are tools of authority that convert ancestral religious memory into visual legitimacy; they are not objective representations of belief. Therefore, this study goes beyond descriptive symbolism to investigate how contemporary nation-states adopt, reframe, and institutionalize Islamic chromatic traditions. This article's main research issue is: How do contemporary Islamic governments use Islamic chromatic memory to establish national identity and legitimize political authority? The article reframes color as a dynamic semiotic resource at the nexus of nationalism, religion, and power by answering this question. This study treats color symbolism as historically contingent and politically mediated, not as a direct or uniform expression of scriptural doctrine.

### **Literature Review**

Recent studies on religious semiotics, such as those by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), expand the discussion of visual grammar, offering tools to interpret how religious nations articulate identity through design. In Islamic contexts, color becomes a sacred language, each hue embodying divine or prophetic meaning that transcends national boundaries. According to this study, visual theology does not necessitate explicit scriptural citation or clerical

authorship, nor is it seen as a formal or deliberate act of doctrinal education by religious authority. Instead, visual theology is the dissemination of theological meanings through visual forms that have been preserved in collective cultural memory and historically molded by religious traditions. Regardless of whether their use is overtly religious, politically motivated, or culturally ingrained, colors, symbols, and compositional aspects have theological purposes when they evoke inherited religious frameworks.

Crucially, visual theology is independent of consistent public opinion or deliberate religious aim on the part of governmental actors. Rather, it functions through layers of religious significance collected through ritual practice, cultural repetition, and historical use, which semiotic theory refers to as sedimented meaning. Even in secular or nationalist contexts, these visual components can convey theological relevance when they are integrated into national emblems.

The existence of Islamic chromatic symbolism in nations like Turkey, Egypt, and Indonesia that have secular constitutions or overtly nationalist ideologies does not diminish the idea of visual theology; on the contrary, it highlights its analytical power. In these situations, theological color codes are resources of cultural legitimacy that are carefully seized to ground contemporary political initiatives in more profound historical and moral narratives rather than being manifestations of formal religious administration. As a result, visual theology serves more as a symbolic bridge than as a doctrinal assertion, enabling secular regimes to access religious memory without giving up ideological authority.

Language, communication, and cultural studies researchers have long been interested in the study of color as a semiotic system. Ferdinand de Saussure (1916) and Charles Sanders Peirce (1931) both described semiotics as a framework for comprehending how signs—whether chromatic, visual, or verbal—create meaning in cultural situations. According to this approach, colors serve

as signifiers, communicating concepts that have been shaped by collective experience. Roland Barthes (1964) asserts that color functions as a "mythic sign," able to distil emotional, historical, and ideological content into a single picture. Design and cultural theory have also investigated the psychological and symbolic aspects of color. Eva Heller (2009) and Johannes Itten (1961) stress that color associations are both culturally conditioned and widely shared, reflecting common human emotions while being strongly impacted by social and religious traditions. Clifford Geertz (1973) and Victor Turner (1967) both emphasize how symbolic systems, like as color, function as meaning-carrying vehicles in ritual and identity construction.

According to Islamic literature, colors play a crucial role in the formation of cultural and religious identity. According to Annemarie Schimmel (1992), green is not just aesthetically pleasing but also spiritual in Islamic art and mysticism. Scholars such as Schimmel describe green as carrying strong associations with divine mercy within Islamic mystical and artistic traditions. Similarly, Islamic visual culture is a representation of metaphysical unity, according to Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1987), where colors has been associated with elements of the divine order. Islamic symbols, such as color and geometric shapes, reinforce the transcendental focus of Islamic aesthetics by communicating through abstraction rather than direct reproduction, according to Oleg Grabar (1983).

The role that colors have in the semiotics of state identity has also been examined by scholars of nationalism and political symbols. National symbols, including flags, are described by Anthony D. Smith (1991) and Benedict Anderson (1983) as "imagined" instruments of unity that turn intangible ideas of belonging into outwardly evident symbols. Yasir Suleiman (2003) and Fawwaz Traboulsi (2007) study the rise of Pan-Arab colors (green, white, red, and black) as symbols of political distinction and solidarity among Muslim-majority countries in the Arab and Islamic world. These colors, which were first established during the 1916 Arab Revolt, have subsequently

developed into symbols of societal memory and ideological legacy. Tim Marshall (2016) argues in *Worth Dying For: The Power and Politics of Flags*, a semiotic study of flags, that national flag colors choices serve as condensed political texts that use basic design to represent identity, ideology, and historical struggle. These colors frequently convey both religious and national meanings in Islamic countries, resulting in what Umberto Eco (1976) refers to as a "double-coded" sign—one that expresses faith and sovereignty at the same time.

Despite these efforts, there is still a dearth of research that focusses on the relationship between Islamic symbolism, color semiotics, and national identity. Instead of treating flag design as a structured semiotic system with roots in theology and cultural continuity, the majority of studies treat it as a form of artistic or political expression. In order to understand how chromatic choices has been associated with religion, authority, and belonging in the Islamic world, this research integrates insights from color theory, religious studies, and cultural semiotics to place the analysis of Islamic flags within a larger semiotic framework.

## **Methodology**

With an emphasis on the role of color in political and religious discourse, this study employs a qualitative. This study interprets how colors function semantically within documented historical, theological, and political frameworks. The analysis looks at how chromatic signs function as instruments of legitimacy, communal memory, and ideological communication within contemporary Islamic nation-states rather than interpreting flag colors as static symbols with set meanings. Therefore, the methodological approach focusses on how colors are strategically used within state iconography to manage the link between religious tradition and governmental authority, rather than just what colors mean.

This study does not aim to quantify public reception experimentally, nor does it assume that the use of Islamic color symbolism has been associated with intentional theological messaging by state officials. Rather, the approach focusses on how the historical, biblical, and cultural linkages of visual aspects maintain their theological intelligibility within public symbolism. In order to allow religious meaning to endure amid nationalist and secular visual regimes, visual theology is consequently studied as a semiotic situation rather than a deliberate policy.

This study does not claim to measure popular reception through surveys or ethnographic observation, nor does it assume that all citizens interpret national flags uniformly. Instead, it examines how states institutionalize meaning through official symbolism and how such meanings remain intelligible within broader Islamic cultural memory. The analysis therefore focuses on *symbolic availability* rather than audience unanimity.

In order to investigate the symbolic significance of color in the national flags of a few chosen Islamic nations, this study uses a qualitative research design based on modern semiotic analysis. Flag colors serve as visual cues that convey complex connotations pertaining to national identity, faith, and cultural history. The study explores how contemporary semiotic viewpoints—specifically those of Marcel Danesi, Umberto Eco, and Roland Barthes—assist in understanding the intricate relationship between politics, religion, and visual symbolism in Islamic flags.

The analysis draws on modern semiotic theories:

Roland Barthes (1964, 1977): Because of his idea of myth, colors and symbols can be understood as conveying cultural and ideological meaning in addition to their literal use.

Umberto Eco (1976, 1986): His theories on cultural semiosis and double-coded signs are applied to examine how flags concurrently convey political and religious meanings.

Marcel Danesi (2004, 2013): He offers instruments for analyzing how colors function in collective and public memory through his work on visual semiotics and the social life of symbols. By examining how symbols operate in actual social contexts, this modern paradigm goes beyond linguistic interpretations to highlight the cultural and ideological aspects of color. A purposeful sampling of these ten country flags chosen due it reflects the geographic and cultural variety of the Islamic world. Also, historical relevance in forming national color traditions or Pan-Islamic symbolism, regional variety, and overt Islamic symbolism. The research relies on secondary sources, including official government publications and flag descriptions. Also, academic literature on Islamic symbolism, visual culture, and color semiotics. However, Scholarly analyses of iconography, including the crescent, star, and Pan-Arab colors also considered in this article.

A semiotic content analysis was conducted in three stages in this article. First, descriptive Stage that Identifying colors, symbols, and patterns in each flag. Second, denotative Stage that examining literal elements such as hue, arrangement, and symbolic icons. And finally, connotative Stage that Interpreting cultural, religious, and historical meanings using modern semiotic theories, particularly focusing on Barthes' myths, Eco's dual coding, and Danesi's social symbolism. The analysis also explores intertextuality, noting shared meanings across Islamic nations and variations reflecting local historical and political contexts. The collected data focus on three key elements for each flag which are colors, symbols, and historical and cultural context.

This study uses a variety of techniques to support its analytical assertions and steer clear of totalizing interpretations because semiotic interpretation inevitably involves some subjectivity. Interpretations of color and iconography were methodically cross-referenced with historical records, official state discourse, and established scholarly agreement on Islamic symbolism and national iconography rather than depending solely on symbolic readings.

Primary validation was accomplished by comparing official flag adoption histories, constitutional allusions to national emblems, and, when accessible, state-authored interpretations of the flag's significance. To ascertain how governments themselves express the symbolic meaning of chromatic and iconographic aspects, government publications, instructional materials, and diplomatic representations of national flags were examined.

Furthermore, interpretations were cross-checked with secondary political and historical sources, such as studies of nationalist movements, diplomatic history, and research on Pan-Islamic symbols. This triangulation guarantees that theological interpretations are based on historically established connections between political power, religion, and race rather than being imposed arbitrarily. Instead of claiming definitive or widely shared meanings, the analysis recognizes plurality when there is academic debate or contextual diversity. To avoid universalizing interpretations, this study situates each chromatic association within its specific historical and geographic context. The analysis recognizes that the same color may carry different meanings across regions and periods, and that religious interpretations often emerge through retrospective association rather than original intent. Claims about theological meaning are therefore contextual, historically grounded, and limited to documented patterns rather than treated as fixed truths.

### **Flags, Political Rupture, and the Temporality of Visual Theology**

National flags are not static symbols but historically contingent visual texts that evolve in response to political rupture, regime change, and ideological transformation. Changes in color, iconography, or compositional emphasis often coincide with moments of crisis—revolutions, decolonization, regime collapse, or state re-foundation—revealing how visual symbolism participates in processes of national mythmaking. From a semiotic perspective, such moments expose the instability of meaning and the active role of color in re-narrating political legitimacy and collective identity.

In Islamic-majority contexts, these transformations frequently involve the reconfiguration of inherited religious color codes. Colors associated with Islam may be amplified, suppressed, or recontextualized depending on whether a political project seeks religious legitimation, nationalist consolidation, or secular differentiation. Visual theology thus operates diachronically: theological resonance is not fixed but recalibrated in response to historical events

### **Semiotic Analysis of 10 Islamic Countries' Flags**

This analysis's semiotic interpretations center on how color serves as a legitimizing tool, allowing governments to visually reconcile holy iconography with contemporary sovereignty and incorporate religious memory into nationalist narratives.

#### **.1. Saudi Arabia**

- Colors: Green background, white calligraphy and sword
- Symbols: Shahada (Islamic declaration of faith), sword
- Semiotic Interpretation:
  - Green: this color has historically been associated with Islam and paradise; indexical of the Prophet Muhammad; symbolic of Islamic identity.
  - White Calligraphy: Purity, peace, divine word.
  - Sword: Within Islamic semiotic tradition, sword is commonly interpreted as justice, defense, strength (indexical of protection of faith).
- Eco's dual coding: Religious message (Shahada) and political authority (state enforcement).

- Barthes' myth: The flag has been associated with Islam as a living, governing force in society.

## 2. Iran

- Colors: color has historically been associated with Green, white, red horizontal stripes; central emblem (Allah symbol)
- Symbols: Central emblem combining stylized word "Allah" and in state discourse and historical usage, this symbol functions as elements has been associated with five pillars of Islam
- Semiotic Interpretation:
  - Green: Islam, growth, renewal
  - White: Peace, honesty
  - Red: Commonly interpreted in revolutionary and Shi'i contexts as connoting bravery and martyrdom
  - Central emblem: Religious ideology fused with political identity
- Danesi: Colors and emblem operate as communal symbols linking citizens to both faith and revolution.

The 1979 Iranian Revolution represents another moment in which political crisis reshaped chromatic meaning. While the green, white, and red tricolor was retained, the replacement of the imperial emblem with a stylized Allah symbol reoriented the flag's symbolic center toward explicit theological authority. This selective modification illustrates how color continuity can coexist with

ideological rupture, allowing revolutionary regimes to appropriate national memory while reinscribing it with new religious meaning.

### **3. Pakistan**

- Colors: Dark green field, white vertical stripe; crescent and five-pointed star
- Symbols: Crescent and star
- Semiotic Interpretation:
  - Green: Green has long been associated with Islam and Qur'anic imagery of paradise within Islamic visual and theological traditions.
  - White stripe: white color has historically been associated with religious minorities, peace
  - Crescent: Frequently read in modern Islamic symbolism as a sign of progress and guidance
  - Star: Light, knowledge
- Eco's dual coding: Visual balance between Islam and inclusivity; symbolic of modern nationhood and faith.

### **4. Turkey**

- Colors: Red background, white crescent and star
- Symbols: Crescent and star
- Semiotic Interpretation:

- Red: Although the crescent and star possess Islamic historical associations, their retention within the Turkish flag followed a deliberate secularization of state symbolism under Atatürk. The flag thus illustrates how Islamic visual elements can persist as cultural heritage even when formal religious authority is institutionally rejected.
- Crescent: Islam, guidance
- Star: Enlightenment, unity,
- Barthes: Mythologizes Ottoman-Islamic heritage as enduring national identity.
- Danesi: Shared visual symbol linking citizens to religion and history.

In this context, the persistence of Islamic visual symbols within a formally secular national framework illustrates how visual theology operates independently of constitutional ideology, allowing religious memory to coexist with, and subtly legitimize, secular nationalism.

The symbolic logic of the Turkish flag must also be understood historically, particularly in relation to the reforms of the early Republic under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. While the crescent and star were retained from the Ottoman period, their theological connotations were deliberately muted within a broader project of secular nationalism. This moment of ideological rupture illustrates how political crisis and state re-foundation can recalibrate visual theology, transforming religious symbols into markers of cultural heritage rather than instruments of religious legitimacy.

## 5. Indonesia

- Colors: Red and white horizontal stripes
- Semiotic Interpretation:

- Red: In state discourse and historical usage, this color functions as courage, struggle
- White: Purity
- Indonesia's red-and-white flag originates in pre-Islamic Austronesian traditions and early Javanese polities. Within a modern Muslim-majority context, these colors have acquired ethical and moral associations that coexist with, rather than replace, their pre-Islamic origins.
- Eco's dual coding: National identity fused with moral values; red and white signify both historical heritage and contemporary ideals.

Here, the ongoing employment of Islamic visual symbols in a constitutionally secular national context shows how visual theology operates independently of constitutional ideology, allowing religious memory to coexist and subtly legitimize secular nationalism.

## 6. Malaysia

- Colors: Blue canton, red and white stripes, yellow crescent and star
- Symbols: Crescent and 14-pointed star
- Semiotic Interpretation:
  - Blue: Unity
  - Red and white stripes: Courage and purity
  - Yellow: Monarchy, sovereignty
  - Crescent: The crescent and star have come to operate as widely recognizable markers of Islamic identity, particularly in modern state symbolism.

- Danesi: Colors and symbols encode religion, monarchy, and national federation simultaneously.

## 7. Egypt

- Colors: Red, white, black horizontal stripes; golden eagle emblem
- Symbols: Eagle of Saladin
- Semiotic Interpretation:
  - Red: Revolution, struggle
  - White: Peace
  - Black: End of oppression, resilience
  - Golden eagle: Power, sovereignty
- Eco: Dual coding of Islamic heritage (cultural) and modern nationalism (political). The flag illustrates how nationalist symbolism can selectively accommodate elements of Islamic historical memory without formal religious governances

Subsequent political upheavals in Egypt, particularly after 1952 and again after 2011, demonstrate how the same chromatic palette can be reinterpreted across regimes, reinforcing the role of color as a flexible semiotic resource within competing national myths.

Here, the continued use of Islamic visual symbols in a legally secular national framework demonstrates how visual theology functions apart from constitutional ideology, enabling religious memory to coexist with secular nationalism and implicitly legitimize it. Egypt's flag illustrates

how nationalist symbolism can selectively accommodate elements of Islamic historical memory without adopting explicit religious governance.

## **8. Algeria**

- Colors: Green and white vertical stripes; red crescent and star
- Symbols: Crescent and star
- Semiotic Interpretation:
  - Green: Islam, prosperity
  - White: Peace, purity
  - Red: Blood of martyrs
  - Crescent and star: Islamic identity
- Barthes: Colors mythologize independence struggle and Islamic faith as inseparable.

## **9. Morocco**

- Colors: Red field, green pentagram (Seal of Solomon)
- Symbols: Green pentagram
- Semiotic Interpretation:
  - Red: Strength, bravery, historical valor
  - Green pentagram: The green pentagram, historically known as the Seal of Solomon, predates Islam and has been incorporated into Moroccan state symbolism as a

marker of dynastic continuity and spiritual authority. Its contemporary Islamic resonance reflects a process of reinterpretation rather than original religious intent

- Danesi: The pentagram visually codes spiritual connection with governance and national identity.
- Eco: Religious and political messages intertwined in a single emblem.

#### 10. Afghanistan (Pre-2021 Flag)

- Colors: Black, red, green vertical stripes; white emblem with mosque and inscription
- Symbols: Mosque, Shahada, national emblem
- Semiotic Interpretation:
  - Black: Past struggles, historical identity
  - Red: Blood, resistance, revolution
  - Green: Islam, hope
  - Emblem: Religious and political legitimacy
- Barthes and Eco: Colors and emblem combine national history, Islam, and political authority in a double-coded semiotic system.

The political crisis of 2021 marked a decisive rupture in Afghanistan's visual symbolism. The replacement of the tricolor national flag with a monochrome white banner bearing the Shahada did not merely signal regime change; it fundamentally altered the flag's semiotic logic. Whereas the earlier flag combined national history, ethnic plurality, and Islamic symbolism through color multiplicity, the post-2021 flag collapse's political identity into a singular religious signifier. This

chromatic reduction illustrates how moments of crisis intensify visual theology, transforming color from a mediating symbol into an assertion of exclusive religious authority. The Afghan case thus demonstrates how color actively participates in national mythmaking by redefining legitimacy during periods of political upheaval.

### **Cross-Flag Semiotic Observations**

Across many Islamic-majority contexts, these colors contribute to the visualization of religious memory, though their meanings are shaped by local histories, nationalist projects, and secular reinterpretations. The frequent recurrence of green and white demonstrates how visual language reinforces scriptural ideals of purity, peace, and divine favor. Moreover, color harmony across nations suggests a shared religious epistemology—a collective memory visualized through design.

1. Shared Islamic Codes: Green and white appear in most flags, symbolizing Islam, paradise, and peace.
2. Red as a symbol of struggle: Red often encodes sacrifice, martyrdom, and historical resistance.
3. Crescent and Star: A pervasive iconographic sign linking faith, guidance, and national identity.
4. Dual coding: Following Eco, flags simultaneously communicate religious values and political sovereignty.
5. Cultural variation: Non-Arab countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan) adapt Pan-Islamic color codes while integrating local historical meaning.

Across these cases, moments of political crisis reveal how national flags function as sites of symbolic renegotiation. Changes in color emphasis, iconography, or compositional simplicity reflect shifting claims to authority and authenticity. Rather than serving as stable conveyors of meaning, colors participate actively in national mythmaking by enabling states and movements to rewrite collective memory in visual form.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the semiotic language of color in Islamic flags reflects a sophisticated visual theology where chromatic symbolism becomes a vessel of divine meaning. The consistency of green, red, white, and black across diverse nations is not merely aesthetic but theological, articulating faith through design. This study therefore underscores how Islamic nations communicate metaphysical truths and historical memory through the language of color. Future research may further explore comparative analyses with non-Islamic religious nations to extend the discourse of visual theology. The findings of this study do not suggest a universal or timeless Islamic color code. Instead, they demonstrate how religious meaning emerges through historical layering, political appropriation, and cultural reinterpretation. The persistence of Islamic chromatic symbolism alongside pre-Islamic traditions, nationalist revolutions, and secular state projects underscores the adaptability of visual theology rather than its rigidity. By tracing how flags change over time and respond to moments of political rupture, this study demonstrates that color is not merely symbolic but performative, actively shaping narratives of legitimacy, crisis, and national rebirth. Color and symbolism are potent conveyers of national and religious identity, as shown by the semiotic examination of the flags of eleven Islamic nations. In all of these countries, colors like red, black, white, and green serve as common semiotic codes that convey historical memory, Islamic faith, and societal values. Black implies resiliency and historical continuity; red signifies

battle, sacrifice, and courage; white signifies serenity and purity; and green frequently depicts Islam and paradise.

These connotations are further reinforced by symbols such as the crescent and star, swords, mosques, and calligraphy, resulting in what Umberto Eco refers to as double-coded signs—religious and political signals coexisting inside a single visual system. While local adaptations—like the Seal of Solomon in Morocco or the inclusion of monarchic symbols in Malaysia—highlight the context-specific reinterpretation of widely shared Islamic codes, the use of similar colors across geographically and culturally diverse countries reflects a Pan-Islamic visual language. This study demonstrates that national flags in the Islamic world are visual texts that convey ideology, faith, and collective identity, and they are much more than ornamental symbols. The study demonstrates how visual components encode intricate cultural narratives, connecting people to their spiritual and historical past, by utilizing contemporary semiotic frameworks from Barthes, Eco, and Danesi. In the end, the flags of Islamic countries serve as an excellent example of how politics, religion, and culture interact, showing how color and symbolism still influence how people in the modern Muslim world perceive themselves and their place in the world. This study shows that theological meaning in national symbolism can be analytically shown rather than presumed by rooting semiotic interpretation in historical record, state discourse, and scholarly triangulation. This study shows that visual theology frequently appears most prominently in situations of ideological conflict rather than presuming a straightforward alignment between religion and state ideology. Islamic chromatic memory is reused in secular or nationalist states, demonstrating how theological meaning endures through visual culture even in the face of official governmental mechanisms that reject religious authority. This conflict is a distinguishing characteristic of contemporary political symbolism in the Islamic world rather than a contradiction.

While this study focuses on Islamic visual theology as expressed through national flags, its analytical framework invites broader comparative inquiry. Future research could examine how chromatic symbolism functions within other religious traditions, such as the use of liturgical colors in Christian national symbolism or saffron in Hindu nationalist iconography, to assess how theological color operates across different civilizational contexts. Additionally, empirical investigation into public reception—through surveys, interviews, or ethnographic observation—would offer valuable insight into how citizens interpret and negotiate the theological and nationalist meanings embedded in state symbols. Such extensions would deepen understanding of visual theology as a comparative and socially embedded phenomenon, situating the present study within a wider interdisciplinary conversation on religion, nationalism, and visual culture.

## References

- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. Verso.
- Barthes, R. (1964). *Elements of semiology*. Hill and Wang.
- Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, music, text*. Hill and Wang.
- Danesi, M. (2004). *Messages, signs, and meanings: A basic textbook in semiotics and communication*. Canadian Scholars Press.
- Danesi, M. (2013). *The semiotics of emoji: The rise of visual language in the age of the Internet*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Eco, U. (1976). *A theory of semiotics*. Indiana University Press.
- Eco, U. (1986). *Semiotics and the philosophy of language*. Indiana University Press.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. Basic Books.
- Grabar, O. (1983). *The formation of Islamic art* (2nd ed.). Yale University Press.
- Heller, E. (2009). *Psychology of color: How colors affect us*. Taschen.
- Itten, J. (1961). *The art of color*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Marshall, T. (2016). *Worth dying for: The power and politics of flags*. Scribner.
- Nasr, S. H. (1987). *Islamic art and spirituality*. Golgonooza Press.

Peirce, C. S. (1931). *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Vols. 1–6). Harvard University Press.

Saussure, F. de. (1916). *Course in general linguistics*. McGraw-Hill.

Schimmel, A. (1992). *The mystery of numbers*. Oxford University Press.

Smith, A. D. (1991). *National identity*. University of Nevada Press.

Suleiman, Y. (2003). *The Arabic language and national identity: A study in ideology*. Edinburgh University Press.

Traboulsi, F. (2007). *A history of modern Lebanon*. Pluto Press.

Turner, V. (1967). *The forest of symbols: Aspects of Ndembu ritual*. Cornell University Press.

Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

Bahrain Moments. (2025, January 10). *These countries have the world's biggest Muslim populations in 2025*. Bahrain Moments. <https://www.bahrainmoments.com/these-countries-have-the-world%E2%80%99s-biggest-muslim-populations-in-2025-775171.html>

Gulf Insider. (2025, February 3). *Countries with the largest Muslim populations*. Gulf Insider. <https://www.gulf-insider.com/countries-with-the-largest-muslim-populations/>