

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

<https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11>

**SYMBOLS OF FAITH AND IDENTITY: SEMIOTIC ANALYSES OF
ISLAMIC SYMBOLISM IN THE FLAGS OF PAKISTAN AND SAUDI
ARABIA**



Dr. Rai Zahoor Ahmed^{*1}, Warda Zulfiqar²

*^{*1}Assistant Professor COMSATS University Islamabad, Lahore campus*

*²MS English Linguistics Scholar COMSATS University Islamabad,
Lahore Campus*

*^{*1}rai.zahoor@cuilahore.edu.pk, ²sp24-mel-015@cuilahore.edu.pk*

Abstract

The national flag, anthem and emblem are the three symbols through which an independent country proclaims its identity and sovereignty. The study has conducted a semiotic analysis of Islamic symbolism in the national flags of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, exploring how visual symbols express religious identities and cultural values of nations. This study employs Saussure's semiotic framework, the analysis examines the signifiers (physical object such as sounds, color, shape, and symbols) and signified (the meanings and values they represent) of each flag. Pakistani flag with its green field, white stripe, crescent and star represents its Islamic foundations, rights to minorities and progress of country. While Saudi Arabian flag with its green background, Shahada, and horizontal sword symbolizes the nation's deep connection to Islam, and its commitment to Islamic law and governance. The findings highlight how important symbols and designs are in shaping a country's identity. Flags become more than just piece of cloth, they tell a story, representing a nation's values, traditions, and dreams in a way that unites its people and communicates its essence to the world. Both flags represent nation's identity and Islamic faith through visual representation of symbols on flags. By exploring the cultural, religious, and political narratives woven into these flags, this research shows how their symbols go beyond simple design.

Keywords: Islamic symbolism, Flag Symbolism, Semiotic Analysis, Identity, Nationalism

Introduction

National flags are the fundamental objects for Semiotic research because flags serve as powerful visual symbols that represent country's history, culture, ideology and aspirations. Semiotics is a major area of interest within the field of linguistics. Recently, there has been renewed interest in analysis of symbols, images, icons and flags as sign to communicate the ideology, meaning and core values. Flags are not just a piece of fabric, it incorporates nation's collective consciousness. They are designed with certain elements as colors, shapes and symbols to signify and resonate with nation's political goals, history, core values and cultural heritage. Smith (2001) explains flags as markers of loyalty and identity and the simple, visually captivating designs enable them to be emotionally powerful and immediately recognized. In various public and private spaces, flags present and foster a sense of unified identity through their visual symbolism (Eriksen, 2007).

Visuals function as sign to perform an important role while conveying necessary and crucial meanings to communicate messages within a narrative of broad acceptance. (Shakeel et al., 2023) Flags are symbolically significant because they appear to take on the individual agency when wave in the wind and which leads cultural ideals, they represent to confer this autonomous agency. Every country has its unique sense of identity which is represented through their symbolic flags. As Saussure (1916) proposed, visuals functions as signs, making it easier to communicate or narrate something when they are directly observed. (Shakeel et al., 2023) From a Semiotic perspective, analysis of flags reveals layers of meanings and ideological significance of national symbols.

These visuals become signifiers in physical context and their intended meaning reflect their real significance. By analyzing symbols, colors, shape and patterns of flags (signifiers) and what meaning they carry (signified) we can understand nation's sense of belonging and ideology worldwide. Since making connections and spotting significant patterns between and across sign

producing phenomena is a core semiotic technique, national flags would seem amenable to a semiotic perspective. Limited literature is found on analyzing Pakistani and Saudi flag as ideological symbols, semiotic studies examine flags generally and individually. Comparative semiotic analysis of Saudi Arabia and Pakistani flag is less explored. This study aims to investigate the Islamic symbolism reflected in majorly known Muslim countries Pakistan and Saudi Arabia through the analysis of their flags drawing on Saussure's semiotic theory to deconstruct flag's visual elements and interpret their meanings within cultural and historical contexts. This study will also examine how national flags incorporate religious symbols, such as Crescent in Pakistani flag and or Shahada, sheds light on how Islamic symbols serve as instrument for promoting national identity and unifying ideological values in Muslim-majority nations.

2. History and Functions of Flag

Flags are adopted by nations in order to deliver certain mythology and symbolism, National flags were officially used in the late 18th century (Elgenius, 2005). Flags that are used in modern era have ancient origins, the earliest use of flags documented in China around 3000 BC, was the use of cloth flags for leaders, religions and tribes. The initial use was for military contexts, but flags were also appeared in religious ceremonies and in temples. With the passage of time, this use of flags expanded to westward, having influence on the Middle East and after that being adopted by Muslims and Roman Christian Empire (Smith, 1975; Elgenius, 2005, 2007; Hassner, 2000).

In Islam, the history of flags and banners (referred to as 'alam, raya, liwa', bayrak) traced back to the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), used by him during battles as the significant symbols of sovereignty. Prophet used at least two flags white and black. Then flags were used by his successors to distinguish between different tribes, Caliphs Abu Bakr and 'Umar, used white and red flags. The hoisting of flags in different places symbolized specific meanings, a distinct color flag was adopted by each Islamic dynasty for their symbolic association. The flags of first dynasty of Umayyads were white to honor and commemoration to Muhammad and Abu Bakr, their opponents, the second dynasty of Abbasids chosen black color flags as their symbol, in Egypt, the Fatimids adopted green as symbolic color because of their lineage to Bibi Fatima daughter of Muhammad (S.A.W) and because it is believed the Prophet often wore a green cloak, and the Kharijites and later the Ottoman Empire used red (Smith, 1975; al-Qaysi, 1975; al-Qalqashandi; 'Abd al-Hadi, 1986).

Flag is sacred thing in Islamic tradition and its sacredness is illustrated in the story of the Battle of Mu'ta (629 CE) against Christian-Byzantine forces. The companion of Prophet Ja'far al-Tayyar during the battle, protected the flag even after losing his both hands and until he was martyred holding it close to his chest. After that his deputy took hold the flag. This story inspired us and often used in modern times to lay down the importance of flag as a sacred symbol in Islam, predating Western influence.

Flag as a "summarizing symbol," highlight solidarity and group identity that often induces strong emotional responses. According to Sherry Ortner (1973), the role of flags in symbolizing what a system means to its participants. Flag is linked to tribal totem which distinguishes groups and strengthen internal bonds by Emile Durkheim (Durkheim, 1976). By mirroring religious practices, its ceremonial use includes saluting and flag-raising which creates a sacred bond with the homeland.

Flags represents power and authority and uses as status symbols. They convey dominance or legitimacy through their designs with historical examples in case of revolutionary flags in France

and the Soviet Union replacing previous regimes' symbols (Cerulo, 1995; Elgenius, 2005). They can be used to express opposition or protest by provoking strong and often violence response from authorities (Firth, 1973; Elgenius, 2005). Flags are important because of their accessibility and versatility, and affordable to make, and can adapt political changes effectively and quickly. Nation's unique identity and values are carefully represented on the design of their flag making it powerful symbols of authority, unity and protest (Smith, 1975).

3. Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of anything that can be taken as a sign (the Greek word semeion means 'sign'). Anything can be studied as sign as long as it remains as 'signifying' something by individual or group of people in the same culture that is, as referring to or standing for something other than itself (see Bal and Bryson, 1991). Saussure's semiotic theory provides a framework to analyze the intricate relationship between flag design elements and symbolic meanings they carry. Semiotics is the study of sign and sign using behavior. Saussure viewed language as sign- system and Saussure's difference between the signifier, is the physical appearance of sign such as image, sound and word, and the signified, which is the thought or idea behind the sign, is one such fundamental semiotic idea. The modern theory of semiotic analysis is based on the work of 20th century Swiss linguist and philosopher Saussure (Dewanti, n.d.). In case of words tree, we instantly visualize a tree with long roots and branches.



Sounds, images and gestures are also signs. I became interested in this after reading literature on semiotic analysis of billboards or advertisements. This intrigued my interest to study flags as semiotic objects. That is why I am analyzing the flags as signs. Different authors define semiotics in their own way as Peirce defined sign in several ways but one most widely cited definition is seeming to be relevant. This definition aligns with his pragmatic approach and emphasizes the importance of context (the ground) and the process of interpretation. But this concept highlights the significance of context (the ground) and the interpretation process, which is consistent with his pragmatic approach. "A sign, or a representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object (or referent). It stands for that

object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen.” (Thellefsen & Friedman, 2023)

Peirce's main focus was on the relationship between sign, and its object, or 'referent' for instance, between a portrait and person it represents (Nöth, 1990). He categorized three main types of signs, each defined by a specific way of relating to their object or referent (Peirce, 1931–1958). Roland Barthes in 1960 drawing on Saussure's work expanded it to examine signs and signification as dynamic parts of social and cultural systems. He also studies non-linguistic signs, including visual images, fashion, cities, music and popular icons of French culture like the Citroën car, Eiffel Tower, and Tour de France (Barthes, 1972, 1979). Several studies conducted on the semiotic analysis of visual, symbols, signs, images and advertisements are following. Kusumoriny's (2019), conducted a semiotic analysis of symbols and meanings of novel "Inferno" (2013) by Dan Brown. This research used a descriptive qualitative method by using Charles Sanders Peirce's (1991) semiotic theory model. The results of the study showed 30 signs related to Christianity. Another study conducted by Lestari (2021) focused on the mode of communication during Covid-19 pandemic used in street banners employing sign theory as the model. Findings indicate the importance of banners in conveying information and play a crucial role in mitigating the spread of corona virus.

In Zhena's study (2019), a semiotic analysis of banner ads was conducted, using the Berger and Luckman's framework by employing both syntactic and paradigmatic models. The analysis included both textual and visual components, focusing on the quality of design and interactive resources, using a methodology grounded in experiential literature. The study conducted by Dewanti employs Saussure's semiotic structuralism to analyze "Energen Green Beans" ad. It examined how ad uses signs to express the benefits of product. This was examined through the signifier and signified concepts of Saussure's semiotic framework. The findings of the study show that signs used in adds influence perceptions of consumers by associating mung beans with health. Sugianto (2021) performed a semiotic analysis of the July 21, 2008, cover of *The New Yorker*, revealing underlying anti-Islamic messages. The study focused on interpreting the symbolism and meanings that conveyed these sentiments in the magazine cover's depiction. Chris Arning (2013) examined the semiotics of the opening ceremonies of the Summer Olympics as performative texts, examining how they serve to promote internal cohesion and demonstrate soft power. It looks at how Olympic committees use double coding to strike a compromise between these goals. A comparative comparison of ceremonies from London in 2012 to Moscow in 1980 is part of the project.

4. Flags as Semiotic objects and Flags as Visual Symbols

Flags represent the collective identity, history, shared values and experiences of nation. As semiotics is the study of sign, symbols, elements and these signs can be words, visuals, images and symbols that are used to communicate a specific thought, idea and whatever someone wants to communicate. Flags serves as potent objects in the field of semiotics due to their unique historical, religious and cultural symbols that express a sense of belonging, identity and unity. Whatever differences and grudges people have about others but on the major events like Independence Day, defense day or in any crises, they unite due to common national flag. This sense of nationality is due to national flags. Different elements in flags shows diverse meanings that are embedded and incorporated in nation's culture, history and religion.

This section presents an analysis of the literature that specifically deals with the conceptualization of the flags as visual symbols and generating specific ideology and believes of particular nation by using different colors, shapes, and cultural and religious symbols. Smith (2001) explains flags as markers of loyalty and identity and the simple, visually captivating designs enable them to be emotionally powerful and immediately recognized. In various public and private spaces, flags present and foster a sense of unified identity through their visual symbolism (Eriksen, 2007). Shakeel et al (2023) analyzed the flags of 30 countries through the lens of semiotic theory by specially employing Berger and Luckman's (1966) model. According to this model there are three perspectives of meaning: precise meaning, designed meaning and intended meaning. Findings of the study highlights that through the uses of colors, patterns and choice of themes, each country convey its unique ideology through their flag choices. Anthems and flags of UK and US were analyzed through semiotic theory by Cahyaningsih (2016).

Leech's (1974) theory for meaning and Berger's (1984) concepts for sign aspects were utilized for this study. Results highlighted the resemblances in patriotic feelings and loyalty but dissimilarities in wording and disseminating message. American flags were analyzed by Hundley's (2012), this research was centered on the semiotic analysis of flags, providing an understanding of historical background of flags, its subsequent effects and the role it plays in identity representation. Choi's study (2023) examined South Koreans' perspectives on the Rising Flag of the Sun (RSF) using semiotic theory at the Olympics. Data collection was facilitated by TEXTOM, exploring sensitive reaction among Koreans due to its associations with the colonial period and Japanese militarism.

5. Nationalism and Banal Nationalism

Nationalism is the political and cultural ideology that lies on idea, people who share common values, language, religion, culture and ethnicity should constitute on independent nation. It promotes collective identity, unity and ideology and loyalty among the members of a nation. They share common core beliefs, values and traditions. Nationalism emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries historically when regions with common shared ideologies got independent from colonial rule. Nationalism can be appeared in different forms; civic nationalism employed on unified political ideologies and values and other form can be ethnic nationalism that focuses on the shared cultural and ethnic heritage. Anderson (1983) a main scholar on this topic, wrote in his book the concept of "imagined communities" by explaining the role of shared symbols, media and institutions. He defines nations as "imagined communities" "irrespective of the fact that people may never knew each other personally, but they see themselves as a part of cohesive group. Through symbols, narratives and rituals, nationalism empowers the sense of unity, nationhood and belonging which stimulate the shared and collective identity of nation. For this, flags play a prominent role as semiotic symbols that foster the sense of unity, identity and belonging. They strengthen national pride and act a cohesive tool among people serving as powerful visual symbols. According to Gellner (1983), nationalism arise when nations are constructed socially through the process of transition to industrial societies, modernization and cultural standardization. Banal nationalism is the term used by Michael Billig in his 1995 book *Banal Nationalism* refers to the daily representations and symbols of a nation that express national identity without overtly expressive and aggressive forms. It can be preserved through commonplace acts like national flags, local newspaper, language use and sports commentary. These elements reinforce the sense of identity, belonging and loyalty to the nation without conscious awareness of people. Therefore,

banal nationalism works silently in background and shaping identity of people. In common places like schools, sports events, buildings and on clothing, flags often appear which consistently reminds the national identity of people without conscious thinking. Nationalism plays a key role in shaping identity of people and serves as a glue to bind people on common values and aspirations and it also exclude people that are not the part of main group. There is a growing body of literature that recognize the importance of flags as semiotic signs and objects. As national flags are important to express the spirit of nationalism, this study seeks to address the following research objectives;

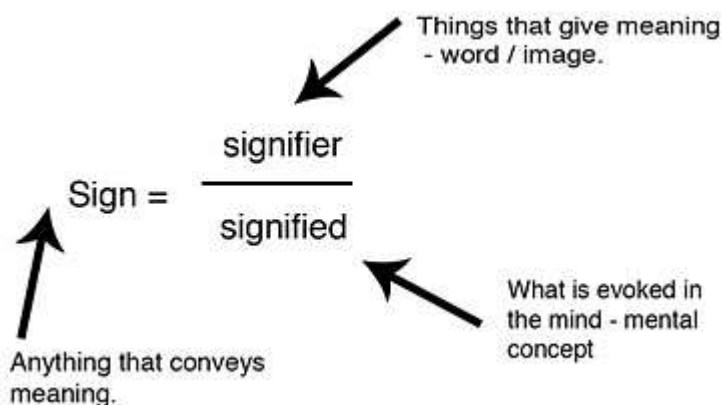
- To analyze the key Islamic symbols in the national flags of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and interpret their significance within an Islamic and cultural context.
- To explore how the visual elements of the Pakistani and Saudi flags (such as color, symbols, and text) convey religious, cultural, and ideological messages using Saussure's semiotic framework.
- To compare and contrast the use of Islamic symbolism in the flags of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, highlighting the similarities and differences in their semiotic representation of national and religious identity.

In order to address these research objectives, I proposed following research questions;

1. What are the key Islamic symbols featured in the national flags of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, and what do they signify?
2. How do the visual elements of the Pakistani and Saudi flags convey their religious, cultural, and ideological messages through Saussure's semiotic framework?
3. What are the similarities and differences in the use of Islamic symbolism between the flags of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia?

Approach

This study employs descriptive qualitative analysis of national flags using Saussure's semiotic framework. Analysis of two Muslim countries' flags through Saussure's theory of sign as the combination of signifier and signified highlights the flags symbolism and see flag as a semiotic object or entity.



Flags as data are taken from official Government websites of countries for the study. The main aim of this study is to explore the difference and similarities of Islamic symbols in both flags and what meanings they carry due to social, political and cultural factors.

6. Analysis of Flags

Using Saussure's dyadic model of semiotics, each flag is deconstructed into signifier and signified. Signifier refers to physical form, color, shape and text while signified refers to the meaning associated with that form.



Flag 1

Semiotics of this flag is divided into two components as discussed by Saussure; signifier and signified.

Signifier: Green field

Signified: Green field or green colored portion in this flag is signifier which symbolizes Islam, the dominant religion and base of Pakistan. It also signifies the core basic values and principles of Islam Muslims committed to follow(signified).

Signifier: White stripe

Signified: Vertical white stripe before the center of flag is signifier which represents the religious minorities and minority religions in Pakistan, symbolizing peace, and safeguarding their rights in Muslim country and Islamic state. (signified)

Signifiers: Crescent and star

Signified: Crescent and star near the center of flag are signifiers. They are traditional symbols of Islam as crescent signifies progress, hope and five-pointed star adjacent to crescent signifies enlightenment, knowledge and guidance. Star also signifies the five pillars of Islam. Together signifiers and signified, the sign of flag signifies Pakistan as Islamic state founded on the basic principles of Islam to be followed by Muslims, taking care of the minorities and aspiring for progress, inclusivity and harmony.



Flag 2

The semiotic analysis of Saudi Arabia flag as visual symbol or sign is following.

Signifier: Green background

Signified: The green color dominant in flag is signifier that is sacred color in Islam associated with the Ghumbad-e-Khizra and Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatimah and was selected by the Ruling Arabs in the 18th century during their campaign to unite the Arabian Peninsula. Green color signifies Islam is the religion of country. White color in flag signifies purity.

Signifier: Shahada

Signified: White Arabic inscription on the green field "اللَّهُ رَسُولُ مُحَمَّدٌ، اللَّهُ إِلَّا إِلَهَ لَا" (this statement translates as "There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah.") represents the acceptance of core beliefs and tenants of Islam and the Prophethood of Muhammad (S.A.W) and signifies the central role of Islam in Saudi Arabia.

Signifier: Sword

Signified: White horizontal sword beneath Shahada pointed to left signifies the strictness of nation in applying justice, authority and willingness to protect and defend the principles of Islam. It also symbolizes the rigorous enforcement of Islamic laws. The Saudi Arabian flag as a visual sign expresses country's religious, cultural and political identity. It represents the close relationship of governance and Islam. It unites people on the basis of religion into one nation and centrality of Islam in nation's ethos.

7. Results and Discussion

I found significant insights into the representation of Islamic symbolism of faith and identity through the semiotic analysis of flags of both countries. By using Saussure's semiotic framework, I examined the flags as semiotic objects and visual symbols that express nation's ideology, identity, faith and history. By doing analysis of each element of both flags, the findings highlight the embeddedness of Islamic symbols in the flags function as tools of religious ethos, national identity and sociopolitical values of both countries.

8. Common themes across both flags

8.1. Islamic faith and identity: Islamic symbolism in both flags

Flags of both countries reflect their strong religious beliefs as flags serve as symbol of identity and unity. Almost all Islamic countries' flags are in majorly four colors green, white, black and red. These colors are considered religious due to their historical connections to different dynasties of Islam. Islamic faith is clearly visible as Pakistan was came into being to practice the Islamic values, rules, religious practices independently. Flags of both countries contain Islamic symbols and color of both flags reflects association with Islam. Strong Islamic affect is found in both flags as green is the sacred color considered in Islam both flags are green in color, a major portion in case of Pakistani flag. After Holy Prophet (S.A.W) Muslim armies carried green colored flags. Green color represents the symbolic meaning of forte, endurance, and optimism. The symbols used in flags such as crescent and star in Pakistani flag symbolizes progress and enlightenment signifying the aspiration of Pakistan for advancement while adhering to Islamic values. Crescent in Islam is the new moon or Hilal-e-Istaqlal. The star also signifies the beginning of the lunar month of Muslims as the crescent represents the new moon. The usage of both crescent and star means heaven. After Turks captured Constantinople, it is assumed that the symbols were adopted in 1453. On the flag of Sultan Orhan's infantry, the symbol of crescent and star were used (1324-1360). Nations of Algeria, Maldives Islands, Tunisia and Turkey have used green with crescent and star (Rizvi et al., 2022). These are not just religious symbols but also foster nations to develop and progress under the principles of Islam.

In Saudi Arabia's flag, the Shahada "There is no god but Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." is the core pillar of Islam Towheed (oneness of Allah) and Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), without reciting and believing it no one can enter in Islamic religion. The presence of Shahada on Saudi Arabian flags thus explicitly links nations' commitment and identity to core tenants of Islam. The **sword** conveys a historical narrative of military strength and justice, aligning with the kingdom's emergence through unification and Islamic reform movements. In Islam, Sword the symbol of strictness of Islamic rules, and laws has also associations with Islam such as Zulfiqar was the sword of Hazrat Ali (R.A). It considered as the symbol of strength, justice.

Islamic symbolism is rich in both flags that serves as fundamental signifier of their faith and religious identity. The use of Islamic symbols such as greenfield, crescent, star, and Shahada directly connects both countries' flags to Islam. Therefore, religion played an important role in Saudi Arabia as it is a theocratic state, non- Muslim cannot be the citizen of country thus it plays significant part in moulding not only individual and collective identities but in consolidating his national values. This country does not support idea of religious pluralism (accepting multiple religions) but supported by Pakistan as also depicted in its flag with white stripe. In Saudi Arabia, the Quran serves as the country's constitution, and Islamic law (shari'a) is the basis for its legal system. Even the Basic Law of Government, created in 1992, emphasized the importance and dominance of these religious principles. Flags of both countries represent the identity and religious faith as dominated Islam through religious symbols and color. National unity based on Islamic principles illuminate the integration of religion into state ideologies in both flags.

9. Contrasts between the Flags

9.1. Inclusivity vs Exclusivity

Both countries' religion is Islam but in Saudi Arabia, the Shahada combines with Sword below signifies the countries' commitment to Sharia and Islamic governance. Saudi flag depicts the inclusiveness of Muslims without including the minorities and other religions emphasizing religious purity. It only follows Islamic laws to run a government and policies within country. In case of Pakistani flag, it also includes the minorities and white stripe on flag signifies the minorities living within the country and country is responsible for the protection of their rights and individual practices. Pakistan is a democratic Islamic country although the basics of Pakistan is on Islamic principles but its rules are flexible but Saudi government's strict adherence to Islamic law is visible on their flag with Shahada and sword. This difference is visible and reflects the political structure of each nation, Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy while other one is democratic state. Symbols on Pakistani flag emphasize progress and enlightenment while, while sword on Saudi Arabia's flag depicts authority and enforcement of laws and justice. The flag is a symbol that allows individuals to express their loyalty and allegiance to their group (nation), thereby strengthening the solidarity among its members and at the same time distinguishing it from other groups (nations) (Weitman 1973: 337–8; Cerulo 1995: 16; Elgenius 2005: 103; 2007: 23–4; 2010; Smith 1975: 37). Due to different context, flags of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia focus on Islamic symbolism which signifies the importance of Islam in their national identity as Muslim countries. These findings could suggest the importance of other factors such as political, cultural and historical traditions as well, while Islam is an important symbol of identity and faith for both countries.

10. Factors Affecting Similarities and Differences in the Flags

Based on a semiotic analysis, the similarities and differences between the flags of the two countries can be attributed to a range of religious, political, and cultural factors. These elements not only shape the visual symbolism embedded in the flags but also reflect the distinct ideological and historical narratives of each nation. The symbols and design elements on each flag serve as a strong unifying force, bringing people together through shared religious beliefs and national pride. At the same time, they also reflect the unique cultural heritage and political identity of each country.

10.1. Historical and political events

Through political and historical movements in history of both countries have strong impact on the flag design, color and symbols taken from other dynasties and empires. Such as revolutionary movements, war and struggles for independence often find their way on flags. Tricolor flag was adopted during Arab revolt. Political ideologies of political parties can affect the design, color, symbols and pattern of flag.

10.2. Socio-Political History of Pakistani Flag

Muslims of British India supported the Khilafat movement after World War 1 against British conquest. Shaukat Ali and Muhammad Ali led this movement to re-establish the Caliphate in British India and imperialism. This movement was also supported by Mahatma Gandhi as a part of his broad anti-British stance, leading to the *Swadeshi* movement, which promoted the boycott of British goods and emphasized self-reliance. Symbols of crescent and star were used in this

movement became associated with political identity of Muslims and due to this movement, they became political force to demand separate homeland for Muslims.

The symbols on the national flag of Pakistan evoke emotions of pride, love, liberty and continuousness (Rizvi et al., 2022). At the conference in Dhaka on **December 30, 1906**, during the formation of All India-Muslim league. The flag with a crescent and star on green background was displayed at this event in order to symbolize Muslim political community. This flag became the part of 40 years independence struggles. And after independence, it was adopted as the national flag of Pakistan by including symbolism into the new nation's identity. On August 11, 1947, the Pakistani Constituent Assembly adopted the flag. Mr. Amiruddin Kidwai designed it. Quaid-e-Azam is given more credit for its design as he recommended the insertion of white stripe. This flag is similar to All- India Muslim league flag apart from this change. It took green color from Mughal flag and star and crescent from Ottoman flag. And since its adoption, it remains unchanged. Pakistani flag although adopts its symbols but it signifies the Islamic values and religion of majority of people is Islam, it also symbolizes its commitment to Islam as well as inclusiveness of minority religions.

10.3. Socio-Political History of Saudi Arabia Flag

By changing political landscape of region, flag of Saudi Arabia also changed and evolved over time. During Umayyad Caliphate 66, the flag was plain white. Abbasid Caliphate followed by Umayyad had plain black flag between their powerful reign in Saudi Arabia between 750–1517.

In 1836, Emirate of Al-Rashīd (1836) took hold and had a flag with yellow crescent moon and eight-pointed star on plain red field similar to Ottoman Empire. The Emirate of Riyadh formed the third Saudi state from 1902 and flag having green field with white stripe and Arabic text. Hejaz (1916–1920) had a red flag and later adopted a tricolor of black, green, and white based on Arab revolt. Nejd (1921) flag was similar to modern flag with green field and white sword. The dagger was removed later on and white border was added. In 1932 Hejaz and Nejd merged to form Saudi Arabia. The flag was green with a white stripe and scimitar sword. Over time, the stripe was removed. In 1973, the modern flag was adopted with plain green field and Arabic motto and a sword. The Shahada was written from right and sword was placed pointed towards left.

10.3. Cultural and religious influences

Flags as cultural symbols and progressive thought represent the identity and values of a nation. Each country's flag varies from each other in specific or minor details but the basic or core perspective remains the same that it is the reflection of ideologies, sociocultural status and symbol of power. The color, size, shape and pattern contribute to the meaning of flag (Shakeel, M., Arslan, M. F., & Haroon, H. 2023). Elih Podeh (2011) explores the modern evolution of flags of Arab countries by focusing on the commonalities and differences in design, color and symbolism. He highlights the common use of colors (green, white, black, and red) and Islamic symbols (such as stars, crescents, and eagles) across Arab flags that represent common ideological, cultural, and historical ties (Podeh, 2011).

A nation's cultural traditions and customs shape the colors and designs of its flag in profound ways. The symbols and patterns often carry deep ties to its heritage, reflecting the values and stories that define its people. Religious symbols, for example, often appear in flag designs as a powerful way to represent a country's faith and identity. Religious symbols on flags express

nation's unique ideology and identity thus making the flag different from other flags. Saudi Arabia is birthplace of Islam and, the place of worship of Muslims, the Kaabah is there so this country is rich in religious strength and power signifying prominent symbols of Islam in flag.

Nationalism is expressed through national flags. National identity, faith, religion, history and values of a nation are depicted through flags. So, flags as semiotic objects and sign communicates core beliefs of nations. Spirit of patriotism and nationalism is aroused by flags and then we present flags at the buildings, schools, major events that comes under the banal nationalism which is also necessary to rememorize us the core tenants, values and duties of us as being the member and part of society and nation.

11. Conclusion

The flags of both countries' Pakistan and Saudi Arabia stand as powerful visual representations of identity embodying Islamic symbolism. This study depicts how each flag reflects it nation's cultural heritage, religious values and ethos though semiotic analysis by employing Saussure's semiotic framework. Pakistan's flag represents inclusivity and unity, blending the crescent and star's message of progress and enlightenment with the white stripe's recognition of religious minorities. Its design reflects Pakistan's vision of an Islamic state that values harmony and strives to protect diversity within its social and religious framework. In contrast, Saudi Arabia's flag highlights its religious focus, exclusivity of other religions and theocratic authority. The shahada and green background symbolize the country's role as the spiritual heart of Islam, while the sword reflects its dedication to justice and upholding Islamic law. These elements together define Saudi Arabia's identity as a protector of Islamic values and traditions. Both flags depict the identity and faith of nations through the symbols, color and design of flags as Islamic symbolism is deeply embedded in both flags. Through the symbolism and design, flags of both countries unify their citizen under shared religious identities. These findings underscore the importance of semiotic elements in shaping national identity and demonstrate how flags act as powerful tools for conveying the values and aspirations of a nation. These findings highlight how symbols and design elements play a crucial role in shaping a nation's identity. Flags serve as powerful expressions of a country's values, beliefs, and aspirations, effectively uniting its people and representing its vision to the world.

References

- Anderson, B. (2020). Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism. In *The new social theory reader* (pp. 282-288). Routledge.
- Aal-Qaysi Zuhayr Ahmad. (1975). 'al-Rayath al-Sha'biyya', al-Turath al-Sha'bi 6 (in Arabic).
- Al-Qalqashandi Ahmad bin 'Ali. (1412). Subh al-A'sha fi Sina'at al-Insha. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya (in Arabic version).
- Billig, Michael. 1995. *Banal Nationalism*. London: Sage.
- Bal, Mieke and Bryson, Norman (1991) 'Semiotics and art history', *The Art Bulletin*, 73(2), 174–208
- Barthes, Roland (1972) *Mythologies*. New York: The Noonday Press
- Barthes, Roland (1979) *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

- Cahyaningsih, N. P. D., Udayana, I. N., & Aryawibawa, I. N. (2016). Semiotic Study of Anthems and Flags of the United States and the United Kingdom.
- Chris Arning (2013) Soft power, ideology and symbolic manipulation in Summer Olympic Games opening ceremonies: a semiotic analysis, *Social Semiotics*, 23:4, 523-544, DOI: 10.1080/10350330.2013.799008
- Choi, J., & Park, K. (2023). The Rising Sun Flag at the Olympics: Determining South Koreans' Perspectives Using Semantic Network Analysis. *SAGE Open*, 13(2), 21582440231170722.
- Dewanti, D. (2023). *Semiotic Analysis of Ferdinand De Saussure's Structuralism on "Energen Green Bean" Advertisement* (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. 4487450). Social Science Research Network. Retrieved October 17, 2024, from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4487450
- Eriksen, T. H. (2007). *Nationalism and the symbolism of national identity*. Pluto Press.
- Elgenius, G. 2005. Expressions of nationhood: national symbols and ceremonies in contemporary Europe. Ph.D. dissertation, London School of Economics and Political Science.
- Elgenius, G. (2007). 'The origins of European national flags', in T. H. Eriksen and R. Jenkins (eds.), *Flag, Nation and Symbolism in Europe and America*. London: Routledge
- Gellner, E. (2008). *Nations and nationalism*. Cornell University Press.
- Hassner, R. 2000. 'God for harry! England and Saint George! The evolution of the sacred flag and the modern nation-state', *The Flag Bulletin* XXXIX: 191
- Kusumoriny, L. A., & Amalia, S. T. (2019). Semiotic Study of Symbols in Dan Brown's "Inferno" Novel. *Jurnal Ilmiah Humanika*, 2(1), 13-21.
- Lestari, F. D., Simarmata, R. O., Sitorus, N., & Sidabutar, U. (2021). Code and messages interpretation on COVID-19 street banner: Social semiotics. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, 5(S3), 1678-1691.
- Nöth, Winfried (1990) *Handbook of Semiotics*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Ortner, S. (1973). 'On key symbols', *American Anthropologist*. 75, 5: 1338-46
- Peirce, Charles Sanders (1931-1958) *Collected Papers*, Vols 1-6, C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss (eds); Vols 7-8, A. W. Burks (ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Podeh, E. (2011). The symbolism of the Arab flag in modern Arab states: Between commonality and uniqueness. *Nations and Nationalism*, 17(2), 419-442. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2010.00475.x>
- Rizvi, S. F. A., Tahir, R., & Asim, R. National Emblem and Flag of Pakitan in Colonial Context. *Semiotics | Definition, Theory, Examples, & Facts | Britannica*. (n.d.). Retrieved October 17, 2025, from <https://www.britannica.com/science/semiotics>
- Smith, W. 1975. *Flags Though the Ages and Across the World*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.
- Sugianto, A., Denarti, R., & Agung, I. (2021). Uncovering the anti-Islamic sentiment in The New Yorker cover issued on July 21, 2008: A semiotic analysis. *International Journal of English Linguistics, Literature, and Education (IJELLE)*, 3(1), 44-54.
- Shakeel, M., Arslan, M. F., & Haroon, H. (2023). *An Analysis of Flags as Cultural Icons: A Semiotic Study of 30 Countries*.
- Smith, M. (2001). *Flags through the ages and across the world*. McGraw-Hill

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

The Semiotics of Flags | *SpringerLink*. (n.d.). Retrieved October 16, 2024, from https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-32865-8_3

Thellefsen, M., & Friedman, A. (2023). Icons and metaphors in visual communication: The relevance of Peirce's theory of iconicity for the analysis of visual communication. *Public Journal of Semiotics*, 10(2), Article 2. <https://doi.org/10.37693/pjos.2023.10.24762>

Zhena, C. H. E. N., & Mingb, C. H. E. U. N. G. (2019). Consumption experience on Tmall: a social semiotic multimodal analysis of interactive banner ads. In *Conference Proceedings of the Academy for Design Innovation Management* (Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 878-892).