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THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE DISCOURSE ON SECULARISM/THE CIVIL STATE IN ARAB ACADEMIC WRITINGS POST ARAB SPRING

ABSTRACT
Since the start of the Arab Spring, no topic has been more polarizing to elites than secularism, the civil state, and political Islam. In this article, I will analyze the academic literature written by researchers and sometimes political activists in journals published in the Arab world on this topic. I will conduct a quantitative (bibliometric) and qualitative analysis of this literature (149 articles), in order to try to answer the following questions: To which extent is there interest in these topics in academic journals? How did these writers address the topic of secularism or the civil state? How do leftist/secular/liberal trends on the one hand and Islamic trends on the other interact with the issue of secularism? What type of journals are these?

Introduction

The Arab world has never been more turbulent than in the last decade: massive popular revolutions and protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Jordan, Syria, Bahrain, Yemen, Morocco, Palestine in the first wave, Sudan, and Algeria. Lebanon and Iraq, in the second wave, in addition to civil society movements in some Gulf countries. All of these revolutions demanded freedom, social justice, dignity, equality, and an end to tyranny, sectarianism, colonialism and national state violence. Researchers and analysts have rushed to focus on the political "failure" of these revolutions and how geopolitics played a decisive role in the failure and in creating counter-revolutions, using the military at times, and some political forces at other times. Beyond these political analyses of these revolutions, we are faced with internal and local dynamics that made these revolutions important "epistemological" moments, as the debate moved from narrow intellectual salons to a societal debate on extremely important

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issues, such as secularism, Islam, political Islam, and the renewal of religious discourse. etc. There was no issue more polarizing to the elites than secularism/the 'civil state', and political Islam.

In this article, I will analyze the academic literature written by researchers and sometimes political activists in journals published in the Arab world on this topic. I will conduct a quantitative (bibliometric) and qualitative analysis of this literature, seeking to answer the following questions: To what extent are there interests in these topics in academic journals? How did these writers address the topic of secularism or the civil state? How do leftist/secular/liberal trends on the one hand and Islamic trends on the other interact with the issue of secularism? How does this vary by type of journal?

This article will first conduct a content analysis of 149 articles and then classify the treatment of this topic by highlighting four trends: a contextual secular trend, a hard secular trend drawn from the French model, an Islamic trend that interacts with the concepts of secularism/ the civil state, and finally a hard Islamic trend that refuses to deal with these two concepts and thus with the entitlements of the Arab Spring. I will zoom in on the problems that resulted from a secular elite adopting the French model. I end this article with my own approach to secularism, which will be in the form of a dialogue with the previous content analysis of the leftist/secular/liberal trend, as well as the concept of the civil state adopted by some neo-Islamists.

Context

I grew up and still live in the Middle East: a region afflicted with longstanding brutalizing authoritarian and colonial regimes where torture, political kidnapping, assassination, and dispossession are too common. My childhood and adolescence were spent in Syria where this polarization of elite formations impacted me intellectually and politically. I felt the extent of the fractures of elite fighting, at best ignoring each other, without speaking to each other. I grew up in a religious and conservative family in the Yarmouk refugee camp near Damascus and was exposed to the leftist ideology of one of the Palestinian factions. One of the anecdotes I do remember that Even in the Arab world, a Palestinian religious friend who belongs to a leftist Palestinian faction told me that his leader one day told him how much he was suspicious of seeing him praying and being a good leftist. Was there a paradox in this?

In that context and inspired by my old Maoism which advocates for the constitution of a broad national front to face imminent threats (authoritarianism and colonialism), I felt the importance of alliance (or at least cross-fertilization) of different intellectual and political groups. Yet the reality has been a deep gap between leftist elites (and most likely academics in the social sciences and humanities) on the one hand, and the religious elite on the other. With the Arab Spring, these splits manifested in the real world, which made some leftists take refuge in the army to salvage them from the popular rise of Islamic movements, making it a bloody break-up, like in Egypt for instance.

I am not denying the role of the counterrevolutions waged by external powers (whether among some Arab or Western countries) but the internal dynamic is really important as the gap between the two elites is genuine and often felt from both sides as incommensurable.

The sociological indicators of this chilling polarization manifested in some of my previous studies (Hanafi 2024). For example, there are no discussions between religious and leftist intellectuals in daily journals, and any discussion we do see between them on television usually only features heated spectacles and polemics, such as in the program *al-Itjihah al-Mu'akis* (The Opposing Side) on al-Jazeera TV. These polemics do not form a space for rational (not even reasonable) discourse, but rather a sort of "Pavlovian" reaction against each other. These sharp polarizations become rich material for the public to deepen their *takfiri* thought in all its binary religious or secular forms: national/traitor, resistance/infiltration, etc.

This sociology of rupture also manifests in the restricted nature of the participants in 23 seminars or lectures held at the American University of Beirut between the years 2011 to 2015. Between the dozens of participants, only two invitees were of an Islamic leaning, compared to tens of leftist interlocutors. There were many papers on Islamic movements, but all with the same antagonistic shade that speaks of how these movements "stole the revolution" and the "insincerity of their demands for democracy".

Examples of this exclusion are repeated in several Arab countries. The religious have become used to defining women's religiosity by whether or not they wear the hijab, which they made the foremost symbol of chastity and purity; whereas for many non-religious people, it represents women's subjugation. This extreme polarization resulted in one side enforcing it with power in Iran, and the other banning it in France.[1] However, fortunately, the Islamic Ennahda party in Tunisia would break this reductive division between hijab-wearing and non-hijab-wearing, as it appointed women who did not wear hijab as candidates for parliament and to head the Tunis Municipality, delivering the message that it is not only a party for hijab-wearing women only, but rather all women.

However, this self-confinement from other opinions is not limited to the secularist versus religious, as some liberals are also self-confined in their concepts of liberty and pluralism. The Alwaleed Center for American Studies and Research (CASAR) at the American University of Beirut can also be critiqued. For a long period (before 2014) a reductive representation of the United States was used for the Arab public that was closer to enforced demonization. It rarely presented the debates between different orientations that sweep across these states. It was therefore impossible for both the Center itself as well as social science elites in the United States to predict, for instance, Trump's electoral victory.

In this context that the debate over secularism/the civil state has carried out.

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1   Not only in France but also in Turkey (before Erdoğan Era) and even in 1980s' Syria in the time of Hafez al-Assad.

Bibliometric Analysis

I adopted the Arabic database (E-Marfa), which is considered one of the leading databases for the content of academic journals published in the Arab world.[2] We searched for the use of three keywords in the titles of articles: "secularism" or "civil state" or "secularization" from 2011 (the start of the Arab revolutions) until the end of 2022. After cleaning the data, that is, deleting the articles that talk about the civil state as the opposite of the military state, we reached 149 articles that dealt with the topic of the relationship of religion with the state and politics, and only 21 of them used the expression "civil state" in the title. (See Table 1) Needless to say, the presence of approximately 14 articles per year (149 articles within 11 years) is considered a significant indicator of the importance of the discourse on secularism/the civil state, and not only among those of the leftist/liberal/secular tendency, but also among researchers close to Islamic trends who often publish in journals issued by Sharia colleges or Islamic centers. What is new is the great interest in this topic due to the recent trend, as a third of articles (37%) have been published in these Islamic journals. (See Table 2) These journals were published not only by researchers but also by some political activists (for example, Rashid Ghannouchi, Laith Shubilat). But this does not mean that these journals have dealt with the topics of the secular/ the civil state/secularization only to theorize them, but also to criticize some Western conceptualization, particularly the French style secularism (*laïcité*), but also to criticize the discourse of Arab hard secularists.

There is a variation in the volume of academic knowledge production regarding these topics from one year to another, but it can be noted that there is a peak in the year 2016, followed by 2017 and then 2018, years when journals issued by Islamic colleges and centers produced more articles, than other journals in the social sciences and humanities. (See chart 1) For example, in the Journal *Al-Istaghrab* (Occidentalization), which is an intellectual periodical concerned with studying the West and understanding it cognitively and critically, issued by the Islamic Center for Strategic Studies in Beirut (close to the circles of the Late Shai cleric Sayyed Hussein Fadlallah). The first issue was published in 2015. Alone, it published 28 articles in 7 years, some of them originals and others translated from French, English and Farsi.

Table 1: Distribution of articles whose titles contain the terms "secularism" or "civil state"

		N	%
	Secularism	128	85.9
	Civil State	21	14.1
	Total	149	100.0

2   E-Marefa is a set of complete digital Arab databases that is concerned in developing the digital academic Arab content and its indicators. It provides more than (7,000,000) records covering all disciplines and majors. See: https://emarefa.net.

Table 2: Distribution of articles among journals issued by publishing social sciences and human sciences institutions (SSH) or religious/Islamic institutions.

		N	%
	SSH	89	62.2
	Islamic	54	37.8
	Total	143	100.0
	Unclear	6	
Total		149	

Chart 1: Distribution of articles by year and journal trend.
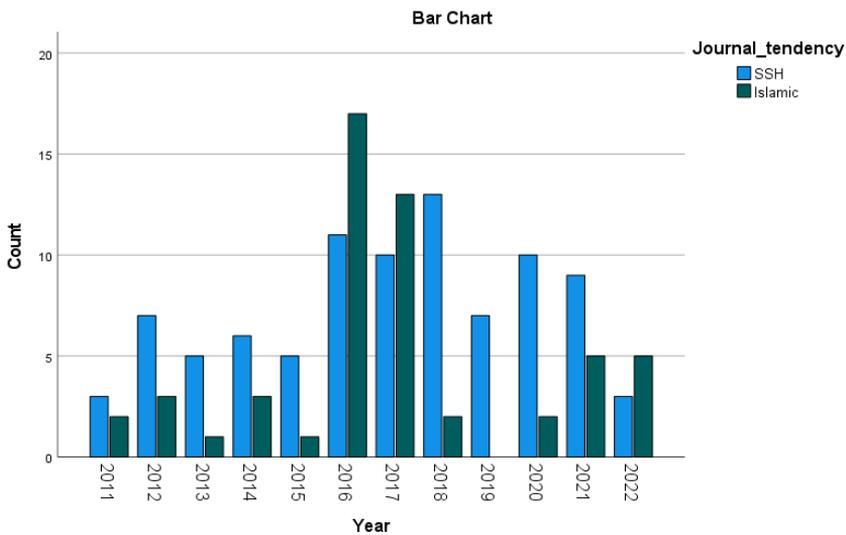
Content Analysis of the Articles

After reading all the summaries of the aforementioned articles and reading the content of half of the articles, I noticed that some leftist/secular/liberal trends went into task of contextualizing concepts of secularism/the civil state/secularization for the revolutionary Arab debates. Some of them still defend, sometimes fiercely, a hard/dogmatic French-style secularism. As for researchers close to the Islamic trend, they interacted with the Arab Spring and the experience of Islamists coming to power, as is the case in Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco, to deal seriously with the importance of the existence of a civil state, and only a few of them use the word secularism or secularization. As for others, they considered that any thinking about a secular/civil state is Western thinking that contradicts the specificities of Arab-Islamic society. I will now discuss these four trends in detail.

Contextual Secularism

This trend contemplated a secular/civil state that is commensurate with the situation of Arab society, the importance of religiosity and its diversity, and the spread of religious movements there. Various authors argue for the possibility of being a secular not as opposed to religion, or a secularism that does not constitute a civil religion and a totalitarian doctrine against other religious doctrines. Therefore, they understood how some Islamic movements adopted the concept of the civil state. For example, the Algerian philosopher al-Zawawi Baghoura's article showed the development of the thought of Islamic movements in their use of the concept of the civil state, as it seemed to him that there were four elements to this concept. The first refers to the national state, second, resorting to democracy as a management mechanism or shared values, chief among them citizenship and human rights, third, the civil state achieves a degree of secularization, not secularism, and finally its concept is considered the minimum level of political consensus and at the same time represents an appropriate response to the set of challenges that society faces as it is divided notably by religiosity, sect, tribal, and geography (Al-Zawawi 2017).

In the same vein, Tariq Ziad Abu Hazim (2017) emphasizes that "separating religion from politics is for religion in the civil state to remain an essential factor in building morals and fortifying society morally and educationally. At the same time, this state rejects the use of religion to achieve political goals. This contradicts the principle of pluralism on which the civil state is based" (2017: 200). Even if this author rejects the use of religion for political goals, he leaves it ambiguous, but I believe that he wants to separate the advocacy aspect (*da'wa*) of Islamic movements from the partisan aspect and political practice of these movements, in a way that religion can enter into politics only as a matter of morality.

The importance of this trend is its consideration of what goes beyond the universal outlines of secularism, to a multiple flexible pattern of doing it, and therefore they tried to resolve the clash between religion and the state (Darwish 2021) (Bishara 2015) or differentiated between them (more than separating them) and to be built from within Arab thought and for there to be a societal dialogue around it.

Despite the importance of conceptualization, less than a third of the leftist/liberal/secular trend are adopting it.

Hard Secularism

There are more than two-thirds of the leftist/liberal/secular movements that adhere to hard secularism, especially from North Africa. This hard secular trend is characterized by three features:

First, considering that secularism is a complete separation between religion and politics and absolute neutrality of the national state towards its citizens. Thus, secularism is transformed from a means of achieving liberalism under

the democratic state into a value in itself, regardless of its consequences for a society that considers religion one of the primary sources of moral justifications that the individual or group takes.

Second, it is considered that any form of religious activity in the public sphere is a violation of the values of secularism and thus the concept of religion is adopted as an individual belief to be practiced privately only.

Third, any political activity (other than *da'wa*) of Islamic movements is considered anti-secular. Thus, the term "political Islam" is used as an explicit violation of secularism.

As I will show in the discussion of trends, these three features are very similar to the new French secularism. For example, Salim Barakat states that "Political Islam" rejects secularism considering it "to be a process of negating the Arab and Islamic identities" (2018: 54) as he cites what Adel Daher wrote. It is worth noting that of the 22 sources relied upon, not a single source deals with how the term a civil state was construed by Islamists, despite being published seven years after the start of the Arab Spring.

This trend emphasizes the saliency of having a constitution without any reference to religion. Barakat gives an example of this in Indonesia, which usually has a population of 220 million Muslims out of 240 million, and whose constitution does not stipulate the Islamic religion, let alone mention Sharia.

As for Kamal Abdel Latif's article "After the Arab Revolutions: Religious Reform and Secularism," he argues that Moroccan society is engaged in further expanding the secularization of society in Morocco. He points out the complexity of the Moroccan case as the King is the Supreme religious leader by virtue of his historical functions of unity and stability but he denies any changing of position among Islamists. Abdel Latif writes: "We do not assume that the factions of political Islam in our society accept the same principles" (ibid.: 227).

Ambivalent Civil State

The most important result of the content analysis of these articles is to see the extent to which researchers and activists close to Islamic trends have engaged in some positive reflections regarding the civil or secular state. There is a conceptual work on how to distinguish between religion and politics and religion and the state. The circles of discussion advocating the civil state are expanding, including not only Islamic feminism but some mainstream feminism.[3] For instance, Saeed Abdel Razzaq Al-Amiri argues that the modern civil state in Islamic thought is a necessity in order to hold authority accountable and realize the rotation of power (2011: 145).

For those who follow this trend, there is no problem in the constitution indicating the relationship between religion and the state. Al-Amiri criticizes the secularists who refuse to have an item in the constitutions about religion stressing that:

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3   See, for instance: Ali (2018).

It is present in some of the constitutions of the countries of the Western world: The Greek Constitution stipulates in Article 1 that the official doctrine of the Greek nation and the doctrine of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and in Article 47 of the Greek Constitution, everyone who ascends the throne of Greece must be a follower of the Eastern Orthodox Church. As for the Spanish Constitution, it stipulates in Article 7 that the head of state must be a subject of the Catholic Church, and Article 6 stipulates that the official state must protect the embrace and practice of the rituals of the Catholic doctrine as it is the official doctrine of the state. In his opinion, there are very few countries that completely separate religion from the state, namely France, Mexico and Turkey (2011: 34).

We note the absence of sharp Manichean dualisms (us/them, east/west, universal/contextual, etc.) among researchers in this direction. In Badr bin Salem bin Hamdan Al-Abri 's article in the Journal *Al-Tafahum* (issued by the Omani Ministry of Endowments), the scholar asserts that democracy is the system that is considered to humanize the concept of Shura. At the end of his research, he called for getting rid of the traditional trend and psyche that obsess with the crisis of terminology and he called for starting from what is common between what is Arab and the West, between Islamic and secular in order to achieve a balanced conceptualization, beyond from the cycle of accusations and exclusion.[4]

Ahmed Bouachrine Al-Ansari, in his 2014 study on "The Concept of the Civil State in Western and Islamic Thought, A Comparative Study of Some of the Foundational Texts," considers that there are four components of the civil state in Islamic political thought, which are: voluntary contracting; politics require innovation (ijtihad); the rule of law stemming from the spirit of Sharia and its high purposes as approved by the will of the nation; and the establishment of justice. The author emphasized that Western and Islamic thought have much in common in their concept of the civil state that stems from the general popular will. In his opinion, Islamic political thought also recognized "the state's dependence on the supreme Islamic authority for its overall purposes, and this does not mean the absence of its civility. Whereas Western political thought linked the state's civility to its supreme secular authority, despite the fact that the Christian character predominates in its content."

Others have shown how some Shiite religious authorities dealt with the issue of the civil state. In his article, Al-Alawi Al-Murshidi, in the Journal of the College of Jurisprudence of the University of Kufa (Iraq), about "The Civil State according to Al-Sayyid Al-Sistani" (2012), he explained that Imami political jurisprudence revolves primarily around the authority of the text, in addition to reflection and interpretation of the traditional corpus on the issue of governance in Islam. It was also distinguished by the presence of serious contributions in adapting the authority of the text, on the one hand, and the participation of the nation in choosing the government, on the other hand. For

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4   Yet, his article was considered by the journal as an acceptable if controversial point of view.

Al-Murshidi, Sheikh al-Sistani meets with Sheikh al-Na'ini and Sheikh Muhammad Mahdi Shams al-Din frequently regarding the form of government, believing that the government emerges from the majority of the people through the ballot boxes, respects the Islamic religion and adheres to its values as it is the religion of the majority of the people.

Some scholars have shown that the legislative basis of the Islamic civil state is not the application of Sharia, which is formed from the jurisprudence of jurists (*faqih-s*), but rather the absence of contradiction or conflict between the statutory provisions and general rules in the sacred texts with the constants of Sharia, and anything other than that is subject to considerations of interest and not to traditional jurisprudential texts. In this regard, some authors discussed the experiences of Islamic movements in this field, such as the Moroccan Unification and Reform Movement (URM) (close to the Muslim Brotherhood). Abdul Rahman Ibn Azouz (2021) in his study traces the path of transformation in the discourse of current Islamic movements and the transition of some of their factions from advocacy work to political work, where the idea of establishing an Islamic state was abandoned in favor of establishing a democratic state, and from opposition to existing regimes to the exercise of power, and from the discourse of rupture to the discourse of participation in finding solutions and working to modify some rulings on social, economic, or cultural issues. For him, the pioneers of URM approved of the model of a modern civil state. He cited at length writers such as Ahmad Al-Raysuni, and Muhammad Jabroun, who affirmed that sovereignty in the modern state is based on the rule of the people without restrictions or conditions. Another article by Hisham Khabbashe (Khabbach 2015) also showed what is constant and changeable in the positions of Moroccan Islamists regarding the civil state through two models: Justice and Charity Movement (*Al Adl wal Ihsan*) and Justice and Development Party (the political wing of URM). The fieldwork, based on interviews with 100 activists and supporters of both movements, reveals some differences and similarities between the positions of these two groups on the civil state, and the extent of the willingness of members of both movements to change their positions on the state. For Khabbashe both movements concur in their rejection of a ruler being non-Muslim and in their affirmation of the importance of political participation in the context of an Islamic governance, i.e., shura (consultation). Notable differences are identified, however, with the Justice and Development Party deemed more receptive to partial secularism and to the election of government officials. The change in attitudes for the sample as a whole reveals a rise in the number of positive attitudes towards secularism and a decline in those concerned with its twin, democracy. The author shows the importance of public debate and what he called situations of cognitive embarrassment (i.e., presenting controversial ideas and opposing positions to Islamic tradition) in changing the attitude of both movements. My critique of this study is that it overstates one of the indicators of the civil state, which is the issue of confirming the religion of the ruler, without considering its weight in the secularization process. Although I personally prefer not to specify the

religion of the ruler, as Rashid Ghannouchi did in one of his interviews with Al Jazeera TV in 2013, I do not consider this to be an important indicator of a violation of the concept of the civil state, especially in countries like Morocco, where Muslims constitute a percentage exceeding 96 percent.[5]

Some other articles show that what is happening today is that Islamic parties and movements gave priority to national issues at the expense of the ummatic ones (the Islamic nation) (Hanafi 2020). Here we can understand why the statements of Islamic parties and movements in Algeria and Palestine differed from those of Morocco regarding normalization with Israel. This is a process that we have observed for several years through political practice, social positions, and fatwas. For example, we can mention the position of Sheikh Ahmed al-Raysuni, the former Secretary-General of URM, who is tolerant of non-Muslims preaching their religion in countries with an Islamic majority if they allow Muslims to do the same in their countries. This is a position that uses the framing of nation-states as a geographical space in which rulings operate.

Many articles have dealt with the issue of personal freedoms in the public sphere, and the debate about them became heated during the years of the Arab Spring. We find that there is a clear discourse by many neo-Islamists about the necessity of respecting such freedoms, even though some leftists are not convinced of the "sincerity" of this discourse. But it is worth noting that most of the Islamists did not talk about freedom of conscience, that is, the possibility of an individual having a comprehensive, non-religious belief, whether agnosticism or atheism (Kchaou 2016), and yet we witness little progress in this front. For example, Sheikh Ahmad al-Raysuni abolished the punishment for apostasy (Hanafi 2024).

Islamic Trend Against Secularism

As for the last trend, I have noticed it among some researchers close to the Islamic trend who still strongly reject any form of secularism or civil state. Among these scholars are Khalid bin Abdul Aziz bin Muhammad Al-Saif who wrote in a Saudi Journal, as well as Muhammad Fawzi Mahmoud Al-Shafi'i and Imad Al-Din Abdullah Taha Al-Shanti. They are two university professors from the Department of Islamic Doctrine, Faculty of Fundamentals of Religion, Islamic University of Gaza. Their research deals with the concept of doctrinal consequences as a complex term, and the meaning of the civil state according to the theorists of this term, in the West and among Arab secularists, and then the Islamists' view of it, and an explanation of the doctrinal consequences resulting from this term. They concluded that "those who call for the establishment of a civil state from non-Islamists do not differ from the secular Western concept, as they agree to establish a non-religious state. It is noticeable and worth mentioning that the concept of a religious state acquires its meaning

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5   On this point, see: Laborde (2017).

and content from the Middle Ages, from tyranny, injustice, and oppression of the church in the name of truth" (Al-Shafi'i et al.: 56).[6]

Other researchers have very ambiguous and loose positions so it is not possible to come up with any definitive idea as to whether the civil state has a minimum level of respect for individual freedoms in the public sphere, and whether the reference to Islamic law has some limitations.[7]

Discussion

After presenting these four trends that I observed in the academic writings on issues of secularization, secularism, and the civil state, it must be said that these trends are also found in social media and the broad societal debate between laypersons.[8] Despite the multiplicity of these trends and their openness to each other, I feel that there is still a sharp polarization between the secular and the religious public, especially supporters of Islamic movements, especially between a hard secular trend and an Islamic trend that refuses to see the necessity of a civil state (Hanafi 2023). Media and academic outlets are very divided, as it is rare to see arguments and counterarguments in the same outlet.[9] Any discussions we do see between them on television usually only feature heated spectacles and polemics, such as in the program *al-Itjihah al-Mu'aqis* (The Opposing Side) by Faisal al-Qasim on al-Jazeera. These polemics do not form a space for reasonable discourse but rather a sort of "Pavlovian" militarization against each other. These sharp polarizations become rich material for the public to deepen their takfiri thought in all its binary religious or secular forms: national-traitor, resistance-infiltration. This sociology of rupture also manifests in the restricted nature of the participants in 23 seminars or lectures held at the American University of Beirut between the years 2011 and 2015. Between the dozens of participants, only two invitees were of an Islamic leaning, compared to dozens of leftist interlocutors. There were many academic and media writings on Islamic movements, but many of them with the same antagonistic shade that speaks of how these movements "stole the revolution," the "insincerity of their demands for democracy," and that "Sayyid Qutb remains their secret theoretical inspiration," that they are "agents for America and Saudi Arabia," and so on. We would have to wait until 2016 to listen to personalities such as Heba Raouf Ezzat and Abdelfattah Moro participate in the university's conferences. More generally, I would say the debate of secular/religious divide now is less polarized.

I will focus here on two points related to this polarization: the first is the persistence of adopting French-style secularism among the Arab Left, and the second is the extent of the stability of the idea of public freedoms.

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6   See also: al-Tijani (2015).
7   See, for example: Al-Shalash (2015).
8   For an example of this polarization, see: Balhaj (2014).
9   For an the analysis of this episode, see: Saghir (2013).

Persistence of "French" Secularism

Secularism is extremely important for the success of any liberal project. I define it, echoing Cecile Laborde (2017) and Rajeev Bhargava (2019) minimally as a conception of justice as follows: a safe and principled distance between religion and state and minimal neutrality of state. Secularism as such is a mechanism to ensure reaching a political liberal project and not a value by itself.

I will give an example of the interpretation of some Arab Leftist scholars to secularism, reducing it to a one-model-fits-all universalist concept that is often close to the French model. The recent exclusionary policies in France have led many to question French new secularism and the problems inherent in its imposition on societies both within and outside of the country. French secularism is not really what it was at the beginning of the twentieth century as it was shown in the seminal work of Azmi Bishara (Bishara 2015) But let's dispel any ambiguity: its main component, the one that guarantees both individual freedom and freedom of conscience and equality of rights and duties in the private and public spheres (Barakat 2018) is of course still perfectly (yet softly) universal. And there can be no question here of opposing or even merely criticizing this secular State, whose characteristic, while respecting the citizenship of all, believers or non-believers, is to dissociate political and religious institutions. Nor is there any question of criticizing those laws establishing citizenship which, in the nation-state, benefits more than just believers, ensuring its minimal state neutrality despite the existence of competing conceptions of the good. As a result of the generalization of this process of secularization, this model of the secular state has become dominant throughout the world (Zuber 2019), including many Muslim countries. This is the case even in countries ruled or co-ruled by Islamic political parties, such as Turkey, Malaysia, Tunisia (before the coup of July 2021) or Morocco under the "Commander of the Faithful".

Some Arab hard secularists consider secularism not simply an instrument of governance, but an objective in itself. In their view, secularism is no longer a means of implementing the values of political liberalism, i.e., the values of freedom, equality and pluralism, within the framework of a democratic state. They see secularism as an intrinsic bearer of universal values, whatever the consequences, for society.

The notion of pluralism here should cover not the concept of justice that should be shared by all citizens, but the ability to think about diversity and therefore the plurality of concepts of the "good" and, therefore, a good life for different groups in society and for the individuals comprising them. In its "new" sense, however, secularism takes into account the historical conditions and cultural environment of only one segment of society (albeit a majority).

For example, while the presence of a cross in public school classrooms is considered contrary to secularism, a cross in the public square of a country characterized by its Christian architectural heritage cannot be considered as such. When the liberal conceptions of justice and the "good" compete, society

resorts to debate in the public sphere using public reason or moral justifications derived from culture, tradition and the influence of globalization. The affirmation of secularity poses no problem as long as the reasoning does not go beyond a sphere that is audible and acceptable to all or most citizens. It is difficult to distinguish in these reasonings between what is merely a composite vestige of religious teaching and cultural practice and other sources or moral references.[10]

Secularism, therefore, plays the role of a means (and not an end in itself) of the grammar that makes it possible to control the pace of this debate and respect the concept of citizenship while accepting, for example (in the area of religious or ethnic cults, rituals and fests) exceptions for the benefit of minorities, as long as these exceptions do not harm society as a whole.

We should therefore emphasize here the difference, too often overlooked, between two very different dynamics: that where a society with a low level of religiosity pushing the State to further secularize it, and other dynamics in the Arab and Muslim societies that resist a politically "illiberal" separatist secularism that seeks to reduce religion to the simple rituals of birth and death. Numerous prescriptions relating to "respect for secularism" should therefore take account of the diverse terms of these two societal debates.

Let's take the example of Lebanese society, which is very different from French society. Regarding the most common attitude towards the institution of marriage, what should be done if society clearly expresses a preference for maintaining the various confessional courts alongside the civil court? This was shown by a survey (conducted by me in 2021-2022 among 412 male and female students at Lebanese universities, based on a non-representative sample). More than two-thirds of those surveyed were against the abolition of confessional courts, as urged by many civil society associations. If these citizens prefer to make marriage sacred, does this mean that religious courts have the right to adopt legislation that could be in direct contradiction with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? There is no reason to think so. Based on the results of other opinion surveys conducted on a representative sample in four Arab countries[11] (Hanafi forthcoming), the answer is clearly negative by a large majority. This means that such an attitude toward keeping these courts should not maintain the status quo and accommodate all the genuinely universal components of the concept of secularism. In the Lebanese example of the marriage issue, the State must therefore ensure that citizens have the right to choose between a religious court and a civil court. At the same time, it remains essential for the State to have the right to oppose certain judgments by religious courts if they contradict the concept of justice adopted consensually

10   Even in the UK, most universities agree that religion can be an important source of moral values, even among non-religious people, according to a survey conducted by Scott-Baumann et al. (2020).
11   The Center for Strategic Studies, at the University of Jordan, completed the "Religion in Public Life" survey in 2019 in four Arab countries (Jordan, Lebanon, Egypt, Tunisia), by conducting face-to-face interviews with 5,400 male and female respondents on a representative sample of societies.

by society. For example, the State must be able to punish all domestic violence and ensure that there is a minimum sentence to be handed down by religious courts and that any citizen has the right to appeal to a civil court if s/he feels that the religious court is undermining the principles of justice. It is interesting to note that the marriages of some Lebanese (whether having mixed religious marriages or not) are conducted outside Lebanon, mostly in Cyprus to escape the confessional courts but for long, as their family affairs (e.g., inheritance, divorce) will be subjected to the confessional court of the father. Finally let us say that the exclusionary secularism *à la française* has been, alas, replicated in some European countries while other countries resist. Where French lawmakers are banning what is part of the conception of the good, their counterparts in Great Britain (not to mention the USA, Canada and Australia, where the famous "Burkini" originated) see no contradiction in a Muslim policewoman wearing a hijab or a Sikh policeman wearing a turban.

Ambiguous Public Morality

As I mentioned earlier, many articles have dealt with the subject of personal freedoms in the public sphere (public morality), where we see progress among the neo-Islamists and ambivalence among classical ones. Although accepting these freedoms is linked to another idea that has become prevalent among many Islamists, which is the distinction between the political action of citizens and the advocacy action of believers, I noticed through social media a momentary decline in the issue of public morality as a result of the euphoria of the victory of Taliban in Afghanistan. But if this decline continues, this will have many consequences for the continuation of sharp polarizations in Arab and Muslim societies, and this will only generate more conflict between the elites, which will "justify" military intervention with all their authoritarian imagination and their geopolitical alliances, whether it is America, Iran, United Arab Emirates or others. And for those who echo their "triumphal euphoria" on closed WhatsApp groups and Facebook with "comfortable" discourse, where exchanges flourish between those who want to be more radical and conservative socially and politically, can they think about the consistency of their discourse? That is, with one discourse for friends, citizens and pluralistic societies. In clearer words, those who defend the right of the Afghani Islamic Emirate to impose a dress for women cannot criticize France – for example – for banning veiled women from accessing school and public office jobs. How can one defend the imposition of a certain form of modesty in women's clothing without benefiting from the products of social sciences, which clearly showed that the least Muslim city in which women wear the veil is Tehran, more than half a century after the veil was imposed on the street there? In this city, most women embody what Asef Bayat (Bayat 2010) called "the quiet encroachment of the ordinary", curtailing the prestige of the authoritarian state by wearing the veil as if it were a shawl covering a small part of the hair. What we observed in Tehran a decade ago (see (Kazemipur 2022), we observe today in the city of Riyadh.

Conclusion: Towards a Multi-Secularity Paradigm

As the trend of hard secularism shows in analyzing the content of Arabic articles, the social sciences have been greatly influenced by the secularization paradigm, so religion is often understood by many hard secular scholars as a separate social sphere. In the footsteps of François Gauthier (2020), one should refuse to see society as differentiated into separate compartments, one of them being religion. The spheres of religion, culture, politics, economy, and the social are traversed by common logic that allows a given society to be encompassed in its totality, in accordance with the theorizations of Marcel Mauss and Karl Polanyi. As a result of an absolutist and exclusive distinction/ separation between religion and "the secular," these are seculars often have understood secularism as a single model (mainly the French model) that should be identically reproduced.

Their positivist paradigm considers religion as a system diametrically opposed to rationality, a minor sub-phenomenon or superstructure that will be superseded by the development of the industrial economic structure and the scientific culture associated with it as if religion were necessary to be shelved sooner or later as antiquity. According to this paradigm, secularism is defined as a process of privatization of religion, now confined to the private sphere. The irreducible contradiction between the sacred and the secular, as well as the presence of a clerical class, have thus been projected from the Christian context onto the Islamic one (Asad 2003, Hermassi 2012). All this has led these hard secularists to lose touch with the substance of religion and personal religious experience. As a result, they have proven unable to recognize the coexistence of the sacred and the secular in the era of multiple modernities, within the paradigm of pluralism (Berger 2014) and the ethos of pluralization (Connolly 1995), or within a more realistic understanding of the process of separation of religion and state (Cipriani 2017) that invalidates many scholars' assumptions about the inevitable decline of religion in modernity. The secular in its relationship to the religious can take different modalities. Many countries in the global south but particularly in Asia can be described as 'traffic' between the religious and secular spheres. For Prasenjit Duara (2014: 123), "traffic belongs to the family of circulation within a society and refers to the redistribution of qualities and attributes associated with religion in earlier periods in the process of creating the secular. We recognize Max Weber's concept of the penetration of the Protestant ethic into capitalist practice and Carl Schmitt's concept of confessional principles shaping the nation as prime instances of traffic". For Duara, secularization, as it was understood in the dominant Western paradigm, becomes alienation from cosmos/spirit and transcendent sources. If we take the traffic metaphor, we can even debunk Muslim exceptionalism by showing the secular being infiltrated into *Muslims* (rather than focusing on *Islam*) as Abdolmohammad Kazemipur (2022) revealed its presence in contemporary Iran.

In the Arab world, the problem also manifests itself in different stakes. While conservatives in this region refuse to accept that changing patterns of

religiosity are induced by transformation inherent to local contexts and not by the "Western invasion" of the Muslim world, hard secularists think these new patterns of religiosity as induced by Muslim foreign powers (e.g., Gulfian Salafis or International Bureau of Muslim Brotherhood). This simplistic binary reasoning has also affected hard secularists who identify the West with materialism and rationalism, as opposed to an Arab world characterized by simple indigenous knowledge based on revelation.

Dispelling these misunderstandings is essential if we are to establish a soft/multicultural secularism that is not so divisive. This is necessary and indispensable, to each society: a multi-secularity that cannot be set up as an end in itself, sacralized and blind to the conditions under which it is implemented in each national or communal context.

Another point to be raised is that in case of disagreement between different perceptions of rights, the state should be registered as the ultimate arbiter, a point that is consistent with Cecile Laborde (2017). The qualification is that the state must truly respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, for sovereignty is not absolute. When "state sovereignty, economic interests and power monopolies were privatized and were not accountable to any form of public scrutiny" (Mbembe 2001) it is very difficult to keep the state as the ultimate court of appeal.

Secularism is merely a mechanism - albeit to a great extent - capable of effectively affirming the values of the dialogical liberal political project. By this, I mean that the major battle is not about how to deal with Islam or Arab traditions but how people in their everyday life manage complex moral reasonings – what I call partial secularization from below (Hanafi forthcoming). This concurs with the work of Rasheed al-Haj Saleh (2023) who argues that there are two (culturalist) camps in contemporary Arab ethical thought through the lens of the relationship between ethics and politics: "The first considers ethics as an ideal fixed in time that transcends society and politics", thus religious reform precedes political reform or secularism proceeds liberal democracy. The second camp "assumes that 'ordinary people' are responsible for the alleged decline in morality" (ibid.: 7), i.e. high religiosity precedes liberal democracy. Both camps are indeed wrong.

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Sari Hanafi

Transformacija diskursa o sekularizmu/građanskoj državi u arapskim akademskim spisima nakon arapskog proleća

Apstrakt:

Od početka Arapskog proleća, nijedna tema nije bila više polarizovana za elite od sekularizma, građanske države i političkog islama. U ovom radu analiziraću akademsku literaturu koja se bavila ovim temema a čiji su autori akademski radnici, a ponekad i politički aktivisti u časopisima koji se izdaju u arapskom svetu. Uradiću kvantitativnu (bibliometrijsku) i kvalitativnu analizu ove literature (149 članaka), kako bih pokušao da odgovorim na sledeća pitanja: U kojoj meri postoji interesovanje za ove teme u akademskim časopisima? Kako su se ovi pisci bavili temom sekularizma ili građanske države? Kako levičarski/sekularni/liberalni trendovi s jedne strane i islamski trendovi s druge strane utiču na pitanje sekularizma? Koje su to vrste časopisa?

Ključne reči: arapsko proleće, sekularizam, arapski svet, sekularizam u francuskom stilu, islamizam.